



Why Women Should be Readers of Good Books

One of the wonderful things about being a teacher is school holidays. I always look forward to holiday time and write myself a long list of jobs that I want to get done, people I want to visit, and books I want to read.

In the latter category I generally set myself some kind of educational-type reading, and some kind of theological reading. I have to confess that I'm not always particularly motivated to do either – I guess that's why I deliberately write it on a list.

So, why should I, a woman, bother to push myself to read theological books? After all, isn't my husband the head of our home and therefore the one who has the responsibility to be theologically educated? Shouldn't my job be to swot up cook books and gardening manuals? Over the years I have become increasingly convinced of many reasons why cook books and gardening manuals are not where my sole reading interest should lie.

Why

For starters, married women soon work out that they are going to be their husbands' chief counsellors and consolers. If the husband happens to be a leader in his local church, the counsel given him by his wife becomes an important part of his work. She can make or break his Christian service. The wife who has gained in wisdom by reading godly literature is far more likely to give good counsel than the wife who has fed herself on a steady diet of women's magazines and television soaps.

Secondly, women are often the people on hand when children and teenagers are facing difficulties. I well remember speaking to my mother on many occasions about difficulties I was having getting on with other girls. I also remember her wise and godly counsel. She was a lady who was at a busy stage of life, caring for her three teenage children, having a husband on session, and also having her elderly mother living in our home. Despite this, she saw her theological education as a necessary part of her day. She set aside the half hour immediately after she had made the bed and used it to sit on the floor and read. During those daily half hour snippets she got through many good books, books that helped her have the wisdom she needed to cope with the many pressures she was facing.

Thirdly, women need theology for themselves. While living in Boston, I had the privilege of getting to know a woman who headed the women's ministries in the church we attended. I was drawn to her when I heard her address a group. She had a calm and gentle warmth which was completely disarming, yet she also bore the signs of illness. Her skin was a grayish colour and she walked with a painful gait. Her hands were deformed and gnarled, yet she exuded a quiet inner beauty. After hearing her speak I emailed her to see if we could meet at some stage and she immediately emailed back to invite me to see her. It turns out that Chris suffered from a debilitating disease which had painful arthritis as one of its side effects. At the end of our meeting I learned that her mother had died two days earlier and she was in the midst of funeral preparations for her – yet here she was, spending time with a complete stranger from New Zealand. What gave her the strength to carry on with women's ministries in the face of such obstacles?

It became obvious that Chris was a woman of deep faith, faith born out of a lifetime of Bible study and theological reading. Having stayed at home to homeschool her two children, Chris then decided she needed to know more about God. With her husband's blessing she enrolled at a local

seminary and completed a doctorate in women's ministries. Two of her great loves were New Testament Greek and the Canons of Dort. Her deep knowledge of the Scriptures and trust in God enabled her to joyfully serve Him in the midst of suffering. I went away from that interview with Chris greatly challenged as to my own knowledge and trust.

What and how

Well, you might argue, that's okay for some, but I don't know where to start. Join the club: I have that problem too. Let me suggest a few things to get you going.

Decide on a genre that appeals to you and ask someone who does a lot of reading to recommend theological books in that genre. Biography is a good place to start if you're not used to reading heavy material. I have read wonderful biographies of Christians such as – George Whitefield, Hudson Taylor, and Jonathan Edwards. The lives of these saints are a great encouragement to persevere in the face of difficulties.

Once you've read a little in your preferred genre, move on to something more challenging. To get yourself convinced that you need to do this, I suggest you read *When Life and Beliefs Collide* by Carolyn Custis James. It's a book written by a woman to encourage women to read good theological literature, and is not a difficult read. At the end of the book she gives a list of suggested further reading. You could use this as a springboard to get you into some other books.

To help you discipline yourself to read more challenging books, build in some accountability. Find out if there are other Christian women around you who would also like to read theological material. Decide which books you would like to read and then get together to discuss the things you benefitted from, or found challenging to understand. I have been a member of this type of group in the past and found it most beneficial for keeping me on track with my reading. If you have trouble finding other women to be accountable to and are married, you could ask your husband to spend time talking to you about what you have read. That way you can both benefit by the new insights you gain as you read.

As for my holiday reading – John Piper's *Desiring God* is what I'm tackling. Why did I choose it? because I heard him speak in the States and was interested to know more about his ideas. How am I staying accountable? Rob's keeping an eye on me and will be wanting to talk to me about what I've read. Perhaps, once I've got through it, I can publish it as a book review for Faith in Focus. Now, there's another good reason to read...

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