

Tom's 2020 Summer Reading List

It is customary for reading lists by pastors to include books written by Christian authors that encourage, explain and embolden believers in their faith. I find that describing "Christian books" this way can limit our thinking to the ways God uses all types of literature to gain our attention, enable us to reflect on our lives and see God's presence in the world. Besides, Christians should be well-read, smart as a tack and broadly knowledgeable. If we want to witness to our vital faith in God, we cannot be experienced as dull conversation partners. Nobody ever asked to hear more about Jesus from a person who could not engage them on other important topics. This year in my reading list I broaden my scope a bit. I offer you a bit of what I am reading, or have recently read, that I hope you will find as enjoyable as I did.

Book on the Christian life:

Eternity Is Now in Session: A Radical Rediscovery of What Jesus Really Taught about Salvation, Eternity, and Getting to the Good Place

John Ortberg

It helps living and dying to consider the nature of salvation that Jesus preached and promised. John Ortberg can capture more meaning and clarity in one sentence than most writers. He was trained by Dallas Willard, whose books I have found extremely helpful. This is a good book if you want to think about the meaning and purpose of the Christian life and consider the connection between salvation and this life, as well as eternal life.

Fiction:

My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She's Sorry

Fredrik Backman

I think Christians are wise to read good fiction, which helps us understand that everybody has a story, and that story includes our regrets and accomplishments, our sin and our righteousness. This book is upbeat and is not simplistic. The hero of this story is a very bright eight-year old girl who has quite a grandmother. Her adventure, learning about every adult around her, was one I did not want to put down.

History:

The Splendid and the Vile

Erik Larson

Reading about Winston Churchill as Prime Minister from 1939-1941, when England fought against Nazi Germany and its goal of global domination, was a welcome look at great leadership in the hardest of times. You will find themes of faith, perseverance and hope in the journals of those who surrounded Churchill, which Larson used to craft this book. If you read this book, go online and listen to some of Churchill's speeches. It will bring color to the references made in the book.

Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom

Catherine Clinton

If you have not read about the main conductor on the Underground Railroad, this is your opportunity. Harriett Tubman is one of the most remarkable women and bravest Christians you will meet. She is also from the Eastern Shore, and you can go see the Harriet Tubman Trail and museum easily. Tubman's work for justice before and after the Civil War make her one of the great American heroes.

Poetry:

House of Light

Mary Oliver

When Mary Oliver died last year, we lost a great poet. My favorite Oliver poem is her most popular, *The Summer Day*. While it is found in House of Light, you could read any of her collected works or find her poems online. I read poetry because it makes me think of things I would not normally consider and in ways to which I am unaccustomed. I sleep better when I read it at night. Good poets understand the beauty of words and help us see things we would never have noticed without them. Oliver's question in *The Summer Day*, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?", is one I have returned to again and again since I first encountered it. You have to read some poems to get questions like that.