

## The Marvelous Wonder of Good Reading

As I write these words I sense a spirit of compassion overwhelming me. It is a passion for everyone who reads these words to keep reading in your life. This passion was also voiced in the final words recorded in Scripture of Paul when he wrote in II Timothy 4:13: "...give attendance to reading...." We are suffering from, if I may coin a word, "bereft-of-good-reading-itis." We live in a world of computers and much of the reading that takes place is through the glass window of the monitor. In our bookstores, much of the reading does little to elevate the chief purpose of man as defined in the Westminster Confession - to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Thank God for great bookstores that do glorify God. And even in secular bookstores there is some reading you may obtain that will enhance your spiritual walk, if you will have the sense of a cow; even the cow knows to eat the grass and spit out the spurs! Jesus said, "*And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness...*" (Luke 16:9). When was the last time you read a good book?

Usually at the beginning of summer I encourage our kids to read. I thought I might get a jump on things and encourage young and old to read. It's time for a mental "spring cleaning." Don't let your brain atrophy. The brain is a muscle: build the bulk in your youth and let the thoughts that you take with you through your life define the muscle. Today I want to remind those of you who are readers to keep up the good work. Those of you who have not begun the great journey, begin today.

### 1. Reading is valuable.

The Apostle Paul's dying request was for Timothy to bring him "*the books*" (II Timothy 4:16). Walt Disney said, "There is more treasure in books than in all the pirate's loot on Treasure Island ." Reading will bring you into great mental, emotional and spiritual wealth. I've never talked to a well-read person that was not interesting. If a person reads they have a rich resource from which to draw. James Russell Lowell reminds us, "Books are the bees which carry the quickening pollen from one to another mind." Victor Hugo said, "'To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark."

### 2. Reading transcends space.

Theodor Geisal wrote, "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." One of my favorite books that Mr. Geisal wrote was entitled, "Oh the Places You Will Go." And indeed through his children's books he took me, my wife and later our kids to a lot of fun adventures and to many different places from Whoville to Mulberry Street . This was written as all of his books were under the pen name, "Dr. Seuss."

Readers can read go from the Alps in Switzerland , to the plains of Kenya , to the Tower of London and the shores of Tahiti . One reason you will find people who are incapacitated from travel often to be very content is because they read. Because of reading I have been on horseback riding through the Grand Canyon looking at the colors explained to me. I have been to the depths of the ocean with explorers seeing God's wonders in the deep. Why, you might not have been aware, but I might as well tell you, I was on the trip with Michael Collins, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin when Mr. Armstrong took that one small step for man and one giant leap for mankind. I did it through a detailed book entitled "First on The Moon" purchased at the museum in Wapakenta, Ohio , the quaint but beautiful hometown of Neil Armstrong. I transcended space from a small town in Ohio to the surface of the moon, all through reading. It has been said the subconscious mind does not know the difference

between fantasy and reality. This is why it is dangerous to allow your fantasy to go unharnessed in the area of cheap pulp fiction that would take you to the land of immorality. But how fun it is to allow your fantasy to take you to places where you dream noble deeds and become a better you than you have ever been. W. H. Auden said of George MacDonald (contemporary with Dickens, mentor of C.S. Lewis), "To me, George MacDonald's most extraordinary and precious gift is his ability in all his stories to create an atmosphere of goodness about which there is nothing phony or moralistic." I would disagree with one word Auden used and that is "moralistic." MacDonald was very moralistic in his writings in the sense that the definition of moralistic means: a person who teaches or promotes morality. It is most interesting that MacDonald was not (in the world's definition) a successful pastor. In all honesty, he definitely had some problems in some of his theology. But here is an interesting point which we could address at a later time on the gifts God gives us: MacDonald seemed to have the gift of exhortation. So when he wrote, his characters will often preach to you as you read! MacDonald is more than able to take you to the Highlands of Scotland and in a dreamland setting tell you some great things about God and doing right. In this venue of books MacDonald succeeded as few authors have ever before or since. The best writers call him the father of the modern fairy tale.

### **3. Reading transcends time.**

Alan Bloom said, "The failure to read good books both enfeebles the vision and strengthens our most fatal tendency the belief that the here and now is all there is." Is there a person you wished you had of met and conversed with from another time? Would you like to meet George Washington, Dolly Madison, Patrick Henry, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, Theodore Roosevelt, Florence Nightingale, George Washington Carver, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Dwight L. Moody, or George Whitefield? They are all waiting for you in books. Edward Bulwer-Lytton said, "There is no past, so long as books shall live!"

The best of all books, the Bible, allows us to be transported from the height of Mount Sinai where the great Law of God was given, to Mount Carmel where Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal, to Mount Calvary outside of Jerusalem where Christ purchased our redemption. Jeremiah said, "*Ye that have escaped the sword, go away, stand not still: remember the LORD afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind*" (Jeremiah 51:50). The prophet is telling the people of God, who are removed from their home five hundred miles away, to let Jerusalem come into their mind. When you pick up your Bible, you can be in a virtual time machine allowing ancient Jerusalem to come into your mind through reading.

### **4. Reading is liberating.**

"Once you learn to read, you will be forever free." Frederick Douglass, a man who was reared in slavery in his early youth in Maryland before the Civil War, wrote these words. When Douglass was about 12, Sophia Auld (sister-in-law of his "owners"), broke the law by teaching him some letters of the alphabet. Thereafter, Douglass succeeded in learning to read from white children in the neighborhood in which he lived, and by observing the writings of the men with whom he worked. When Mr. Auld discovered this, he strongly disapproved, saying "...if a slave learns tad he would become dissatisfied with his condition and desire freedom." Although these were cruel words, they were true words. Douglas not only found freedom for himself, but also fought the rest of his life to give freedom to other people.

Today I may be talking to someone who is in bondage to bad habits, depression, or in circumstances beyond their control. Be of good cheer; when you invite good reading into your life, you are setting yourself up for freedom! When my faith has been low, I can read from the life of George Mueller and be challenged to believe God for the miraculous. When I feel trapped in mediocrity, I can pick up a book about great leadership and soon, a “loser” complex is exchanged for the heart of a champion. Even if I sense I do not own what I am reading about, by law of association, even nearness