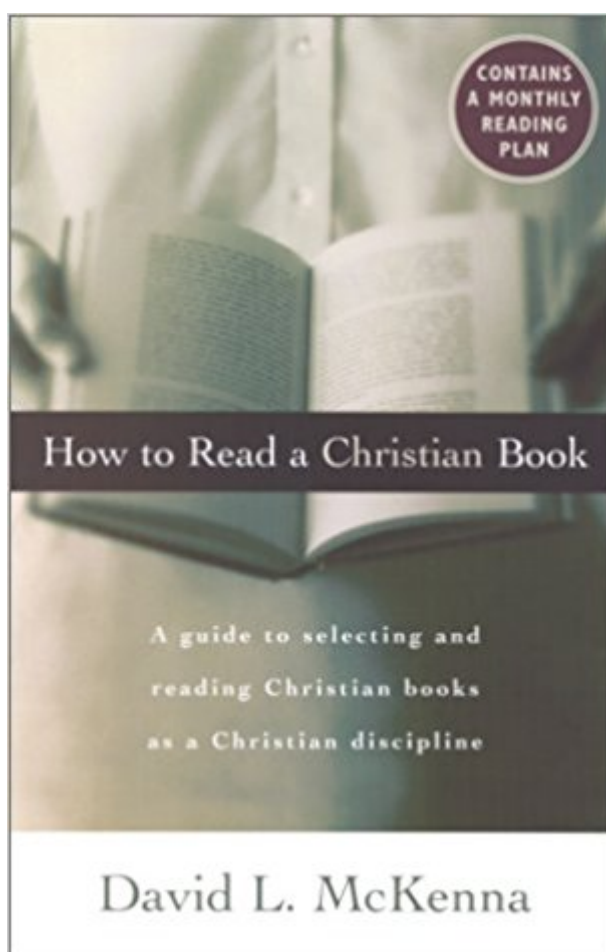


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How To Read A Christian Book: A Guide To Selecting And Reading Christian Books As A Christian Discipline



Synopsis

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, readers have a dizzying selection of Christian books from which to choose. Those wondering where to start have a helpful new resource in *How to Read a Christian Book*. After an introductory chapter explaining the importance of reading Christian books, the author teaches readers how to choose a good book, how to judge the quality of books, and how to read Christian books as a spiritual discipline. He shows how to plan personal libraries, providing a list of books to help readers get started and make wise choices. McKenna takes all this one step further by selecting what he considers "classics" and developing a reading program. This thorough resource provides not only a list of the very best books in all the various disciplines (fiction, spirituality, etc.), but an excellent reading program as well.

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Customer Reviews

Christians, says retired college president McKenna, come to reading naturally; they call themselves "the people of the book," and they ground their lives in the Bible. But they also read other books, lots of them, and McKenna is here to help them maximize their reading experience. Good reading starts with good books, and McKenna points to book reviews, as well as the shelves of one's friends, to help readers find them. For those ready to commit to building a whole library, McKenna offers guidelines: One should have several versions and translations of the Bible and many biblical reference books, as well as books on Christian living and some specialized "Christian thought" books, such as Greg Boyd's *Letter from a Skeptic*. Readers should spend time with classics like

C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* and Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. McKenna suggests that Christians should also read secular classics, such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, "selective[ly]" and cautiously. Helpful appendices (including Christianity Today's and the Modern Library's "Books of the Century" lists) round out this useful volume. At times, McKenna is a little simplistic (most readers, for example, don't need to be told to pay attention to respected friends' reading suggestions), so seasoned bibliophiles won't find much that is new here. But curious Christians who want to get serious about reading should make this their first pick. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

David L. McKenna is the former president of Asbury Theological Seminary. He has written numerous Christian books over his career. He is now retired and lives in Las Vegas.

A helpful book on the Christian discipline of reading filled with practical advice. The author was a president of a Christian college and an avid reader and he even shared how his interviews with potential faculty members include the question of what they read to gauge where they are at spiritually. As the first chapter points out in why Christians read, I agree with the author that a Christian who reads spiritually is also a strong Christian spiritually (and I might add, holistically). I thought his chapter on a three year reading plan was helpful even if I don't adopt his plan at least it gets me thinking about a longer and purposeful reading plan. Besides the practical advice throughout the book, the author's Wesleyan background does show up slightly in the book and some of his suggestions of the suggested books would not be books I would recommend. The books he recommend include works that are authored by Philip Yancey, Rick Warren, Tony Campolo, Richard Mouw, Ronald Sider, Mark Noll and Gregory Boyd. Some of these authors I have serious theological concerns with (Campolo, Mouw, Boyd), others for lack of theological depth (Hayford, Eugene Peterson, Yancey) still others their philosophy of ministry (Warren and Mouw) and while others I have reservation with the political views being advanced (Sider and Campolo). For the discerning Christian, this book still has something to offer to help believers read better. I still recommend *Lit!* by Tony Reinke as the top Christian book on reading. Below are helpful quotes and tips from the book: "The highest level of Christian reading is to read for integration, or as Adler and Van Doren say, "to see things whole." They also refer to this stage of reading as "synoptical," the idea of looking through a lens and seeing things come together in one picture. Immature readers of Christian books will take one book and view it as the summation of whole truth. More mature readers, however, will hold one book in abeyance until they have a chance to read other sources on

the same subject. Then, always looking through the lens of the God-breathed Word, they put different viewpoints into the perspective of the whole, relate the viewpoints one to another, and draw them together into a composite conclusion without sacrificing the truth" (60-61).
 "A passive reader is like a catcher who never returns the ball, while an active reader is one who fires the ball back in the form of questions that keep the game going and make the event exciting" (58).
 "For another thing, unless speed-reading results in better comprehension, we will be no better off than the hare in the well-known fable. Like the speedy hare, we may have superior reading speed, but those who take their time like the tortoise will win the race of comprehension. Of course, if we have the discipline to master both speed and comprehension, we will become world-class readers" (68).
 "If we can improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of our reading, we will get more from all the books we read. Christian books, in particular, deserve a quality read if they are to serve the purpose of helping us to understand the Christian faith and grow spiritually" (57).

I bought this book for one main reason- as a resource to help me decide which Christian books to buy in the future. As a Christian, there are almost an infinite number of books available these days. Some are good, some are great, and others are not worth the time or effort required to read them. The problem is deciding which ones to read, and/or which ones to buy to build a library of "Great Christian books". This book is specifically designed to help readers make the right choices. The book is a quick read, and has a few sections that are slightly boring. But, more importantly, it contains a comprehensive list of book recommendations for Christians. The book is worth the money for these lists alone. Additionally, the author has put together a suggested three-year reading program which I plan on starting soon. It has books from a wide variety of Christian subjects, that builds on many concepts over the three year period (foundation books the first year, more complex books the following years). I highly recommend this book for any Christian looking for a way to put together a quality reading program. If you are like me, you get overwhelmed by choices at most Christian bookstores. Luckily, this book can help you focus on quality books which will help enhance your Christian experience and development.

Let's face it. 80% of what is offered in Christian bookstores is useless drivel or worse. Remember the glut of so-called Christian "Y2K paranoia" books? McKenna's book concerns not just how to read a Christian book, but how to select one and how to build a solid Christian library. The appendices, which consist of several booklists, both religious and secular, are worth the price of the

book. For Christians who want to get serious about their reading, a very workable three-year reading plan is offered, with books in various genres of Christian writing. Unfortunately, Christian fiction and poetry is given short shrift here. This book is a very quick read and is a valuable addition to any Christian reader's library.

I read a review of this book in Quaker Life, and I picked it up at the bookstore last week. The author is thoughtful, literate, and engaging. I did not buy this for the help on how to be a better reader, but I was pleasantly surprised at the author's presentation of important issues to do with being a careful and discerning reader of all literature to start with, and then of Christian literature in particular. I went out and bought this for the three year reading schedule that is included at the back of the book. It looks excellent, and the appendices and other lists offered by the author are also excellent resources.

This small book provides an excellent argument for Christians to strive to be among the most well-read members of society. McKenna lays out his rationale for the statement, "a nonreading Christian is a contradiction in terms," outlines some of the questions to ask about books we read or consider reading, and then provides several lists of books identified as key texts for a well-read Christian. For any Christian interested in growing in maturity in the faith, this is a must-have reference.

It took me just 2 days to finish the book. If you have been bogged down with the variety of Christian literature in the market, this book will help you to sieve and distil the best for your soul and mind. The book exhorts Christians to be not just readers, but discerning ones. Any good Christian read should follow the guidelines of 2Tim3:16. The money spent would be worth every cent just for the lists and references given in the appendices of the book. Happy reading!

There's a lot of stuff in this book that I don't care about, in fact I only skimmed. However, it's worth the money simply for all the different lists and categories that he has created. Ranging from Christian classics, to contemporaries to secular work, McKenna creates an excitement to build a library of your own. Now only if I had the money to actually go out and buy books....

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