

Could the 12 Books That Transformed My Life Change Yours?

“Larry, can you send me a list of the most influential books that God used to shape your life?”

Missionaries who risk their lives daily in a foreign land sent me this request. My wife and I spent 3 1/2 hours with them in our home, and this humble couple who challenge me incredibly deserved a well-thought-out response.

Celebrating a birthday this week plus soon commemorating 47 years in vocational ministry, it seemed like an excellent time to recall the books that revolutionized my life.

The Christian and His Reading

“Please bring with you ... the books, especially the manuscripts” (2 Tim.4:13, PHILLIPS).

Paul’s counsel to Timothy doubtless had reference to the Old Testament Scriptures but has application for other areas of reading as well. With his life drawing to a close, the apostle desired to invest his last season of life in continued growth and study, a learner to the very end. May that be our magnificent obsession too.

The Book of Ecclesiastes, penned by King Solomon, humanity’s wisest man, tells us, “Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness to the flesh” (b). Therefore, it behooves us to be selective in our reading. Francis Bacon, the brilliant statement from the 16th century, reminds us, “Reading makes a learned man; speaking a skillful man; writing, an exact man.”

John Wesley had a passion for reading. Most of it was done

while riding his horse! He propped up books on his saddle which enabled him to get through hundreds of volumes on a wide range of subjects.

“Leaders are readers” is the classic exhortation motivating us to engage in fellowship with great minds and those of exemplary character and fruitful lives. Remember the challenge, “You will be the same person you are today in a few years except for the company you keep and the books you read.”

Charles H. Spurgeon counseled his students: “Master those books you have. Read them thoroughly ... a student will find that his mental constitution is more affected by one book thoroughly mastered than by 20 books he has merely skimmed. Little learning and much pride come of hasty reading ... in reading let your motto be “much, not many.”

So what are the top 12 books God used to mold me as a man of God? After sacred Scripture, here’s my list, not necessarily in any order of importance.

My Top 12 Influential Books

1. *Spiritual Leadership*, J. Oswald Sanders: This classic book combines illustrations and quotations from the lives of successful Christian leaders throughout history. The author reveals the burdens of a holy calling: the qualifications, the character traits, the habits and the cost. Magnificent!
2. *Just As I Am*, Billy Graham: My role model for almost five decades wrote his autobiography near the end of his life. It is the inspiring story of how a man of God grew into a man of great influence. Examining his life and ministry enables us to learn from one of the greatest Christian leaders of all time.
3. *Competent To Counsel*, Jay Adams: Highlighting Romans 15:14 that Christians be “competent to counsel” each

other, the author presents readers with the “creme de la creme” training manual on biblical counseling, although it skips the supernatural element I personally would add. Possibly the premier preacher of the 20th century, Ern Baxter, said this was an “absolute must” so I got it, devoured it and continue applying the principles 40 years later.

4. *Shaping History Through Prayer and Fasting*, Derek Prince: For 42 years I’ve had the honor of being a board member of Intercessors for America national prayer ministry launched by Derek. This man was a personal friend of mine and labeled by John Hagee as “The greatest Bible teacher of the 20th century” (I concur). His prayer manual inspires and teaches us how prayer and fasting has and can literally change the world.

5. *Evangelism Explosion*, Dr. D. James Kennedy

This book lays out the author’s God-given initiative for personal evangelism to awaken the sleeping giant of the church to reach the lost with the transformative message of the gospel. Millions have been trained throughout the world with the program brilliantly presented in this masterpiece manual on lifestyle evangelism. My own “Loving Lifestyle Evangelism” (free on You Tube) was influenced by Dr. Kennedy’s material.

6. *How to Give Away Your Faith*, Paul Little

Every generation has the privilege and responsibility to reach its own. This practical book helps the multitudes who want to witness but are often frustrated because they don’t know how or get stymied with legitimate objections raised by the lost. How grateful to God I am to this day that I was providentially given a copy of this InterVarsity book in the early 1970s.

7. *A Patriot’s History of the United States*, Schweikart and Allen

This clear, concise and comprehensive account of America from its discovery to the present day taught me an honest evaluation of the history of the United States. With accuracy it dispels the narrative that our past is a tale of racism, sexism and bigotry to help the reader discover our origin and God's providential hand over the formation of our nation to be a shining light to the world.

8. *How Should We Then Live?*, Dr. Francis Schaeffer

This prophetic, extraordinary book by one of the great Christian minds of the modern era, emerged in the '70s to jolt Christians to the condition and direction of Western civilization and what we needed to do as "salt" to prevent America following the slippery slope of decline seen in nations that preceded us. He formulated a hopeful, positive proposal for the future but only if we were culturally engaged and jolted out of complacency and silence on the moral issues of our day (our "Bullseye Challenge" was influenced by this classic).

9. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Robert Coleman

This is the signature book, the gold standard outlining the plan Jesus had to evangelize the world by discipling others. "Ministering to the multitude but investing in the few" was the method of the Master. I caught the vision and for almost 47 years I've mentored multitudes who've done likewise in the often neglected and ignored multiplication process established by Jesus.

10. *Man of Steel and Velvet*, Aubrey Andelin

Celebrating over 42 years of covenant marriage, I am grateful to God for many resources that gave me a biblically informed understanding of manhood, womanhood, marriage and family. With Jesus as our role model, this wonderful book presented the challenge of masculinity blended with sensitivity. For my life and ministry, I've endeavored to model the practical wisdom

that the author (coming from a Mormon background) presented so clearly and concisely in the book.

11. *The Disciplined Life*, Richard Shelley Taylor

Early on this book came across my path providentially, and I was challenged to reject the shallowness of a culture that strives for self-indulgence and the path of least resistance. The little book had such an impact on my life that I bought dozens and gave it to those I was discipling.

12. *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie

This often maligned and misunderstood book on human relations was a life-altering book in my early years of life. Originally published in 1936, it has sold over 15 million copies worldwide and is considered one of the best selling books of all time. I learned so much about being sincere, serving others and cultivating Christlike social skills through this simple, practical manual.

Here's the deal: Though many champions throughout history have influenced me through their writings, alongside more modern heroes of the faith like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., C.S. Lewis, Chuck Colson, Arthur Wallis, James Dobson, William MacDonald, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Winston Churchill and others, I hope this window into my journey inspires you to be a reader and remain a learner to leave a legacy for the glory of God.