

The Profitability of Reading

The seasons are flying by faster and faster for us baby boomers who at one time basked in the “summer of eternal youth.” As a teen, my idea of summer was youth camp, Vacation Bible School, water sports, and a great book to read. At Christchurch we have finished our youth camp and Vacation Bible School, but you still have time to get in a good read. We shall be letting you know soon about *The Reader’s Reward*, given to those teens who read at least three good books over the summer, preferably classics. It’s not too late to finish up the summer with some good reading. To help encourage our people, especially our young people, to read, allow me to give you some reasons for reading.

1. You have an opportunity to meet truly great people.

A wise man once said, “You are the same person one year from today except for two things - the people you meet and the books you read.” Truthfully, in reading you are able to do both, not only enjoy the benefit of reading but meet people at the same time.

When the best authority on the Civil War said that Major General Patrick Cleburne a young Irishman may have been the finest field commander in the conflict, my interest was perked. I was fascinated when I read that this young man, with hard work, put himself through law school, ran the local dry goods store in Helena, Arkansas and defended his friend’s honor in a gun duel that nearly cost him his life. When I read of how he gave his life to Christ in an old fashioned camp meeting, I was convinced I had to know more about this man. It wasn’t until I read a recent biography published by University of Kansas Press entitled, *Stonewall of the West* that I got to know the man. Cleburne was fearless in battle, even up to the point of his death in his early thirties at the Battle of Franklin. Even though he was a southern general, he wrote a thirty-two page document on how blacks could help win the war for the south and how they could be emancipated. As I read the book, I felt as though I knew the man. He became so real to me, I nearly wept when I read of his valiant death.

I have been able to know Lou Gherig, Theodore Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Douglas McArthur, Martin Luther, Billy Sunday, D. L. Moody and Ronald Reagan through books.

“I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD...” (Jeremiah 5:5).

2. You widen your field of knowledge and develop compassion.

When we read in unfamiliar territory, we gain knowledge beyond our frame of reference. One of the great deficits in the psyche of the average man of the street is the glaring lack of compassion. An old saying goes like this, “You never really know a man until you walk a mile in his shoes.” Reading can take you down the extra mile that illuminates and educates. When we find what makes a person tick, we understand more clearly why they act and respond the way they do. *“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding”* (Proverbs 4:7).

Speak the name Chief Blackhawk and immediately we think of a vicious, out of control Indian who initiated the historical Blackhawk Wars of the Midwest. But when you read of his life, the picture changes. In traditional Indian culture, the medicine man was never the chief and never led braves into battle. Chief Keokuk (a town in Iowa is named after him) made a deal with the white settlers that gave away land that was not his to give. In short a double cross took place and the Sauk Indian nation drafted Black Hawk to lead them into battle to hold their holdings and keep them free. He became such legend that when he died his ashes were sent to a museum in Davenport, Iowa. Soon afterward, his ashes were stolen. I have asked people all over the nation, “Do you know where the phrase Iowans treasure, ‘Hawkeyes’ comes from?” I have never had one person in about ten years give a correct answer - even the strident football fans who root ever year for The Hawkeyes. As Paul Harvey would say, here’s the

rest of the story: Citizens all over Iowa began to try to locate the stolen ashes of Chief Blackhawk and the fanatical searcher was called, "A Hawkeye," one who had dedicated eyes for what was left of a man who deeply loved his people and did not want them to be taken advantage of. All it takes is an afternoon or evening of reading to develop compassion for the hurting and sometimes misunderstood people in this world.

3. You travel to places where you've never been.

Ludwig Von Beethoven was reared in an area of Germany that was just a few years ago located in East Germany, a place where the western world did not have easy access to. But no problem; I read his biography during the cold war and I didn't need a visa or permission from the communists; I was there.

There are places in time that we cannot reverse and travel to, but through reading it can become a near possibility. I remember hearing the pastor of the largest church in America say, if he could travel back in time and hear any preacher; he would choose to hear George Whitfield. That motivated me to take a time machine excursion. In my library is the two volume biography of George Whitfield, and when I read from his life; I am there. I can hear his voice, see his tears, and hear his laughter.

To what places would you like to travel? With whom would you like to go? And who would you like to see when you get there? These places and individuals are all only a book away. No wonder when the apostle Paul was nearing death, he requested Timothy to bring the books. *"The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments"* (II Timothy 4:13). Paul may have been in prison, but he didn't have to stay there if he had his old fiends, the books, with him.

- Pastor Pope -

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