

Escaping the Shallows of Life by Reading!

Recently Nicholas Carr wrote a book entitled The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains. His argument is in this fast pace of internet usage, we are losing our ability to concentrate. We get easily diverted to checking our mail or googling. Getting our needed information through Google or Wikipedia is often like strip mining for relevancy. It takes a lot of time in deep reading to go through a book. Carr points out that we are losing something by abdicating the deep reading for the fast-paced internet. He is not opposed to internet; he is simply saying don't let the internet take the place of deep reading. In deep reading, we are open to the argument that the written page inculcates.

Paul said, *"Till I come, give attendance to reading..."* (I Timothy 4:13). I would like to challenge everyone this summer to move away from the shallows and get into some deep reading.

1. Reading is good for everyone.

C.S. Lewis said, "No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often more) worth reading at the age of fifty and beyond." Research has shown that reading can work on the brain to help deter the affects of Alzheimer's disease. The brain is a muscle; therefore to prevent atrophy, we must exercise it. What better way to exercise it than to read? Character is formed in the early years of our life. What better way to reinforce the proper attitudes than to read classics, especially those books that lift up our Lord and wholesomeness? Robert Pitman said, "It is the books we read before middle life that do most to mold our character and influence our lives."

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

2. Reading takes you to different places and different times with different people.

Vartan Gregorian said, "Any book creates for the reader a place elsewhere. A person reading is a person suspended between the immediate and the timeless." Emily Dickinson likened reading to a frigate (sailing ship) that had the ability to take even the poorest of us to other places: "There is no frigate like a book, to take us lands away, nor any coursers like a page of prancing poetry. This traverse may the poorest take without oppress of toll- how frugal is the chariot that bears the human soul."

As you read this summer may you escape the screaming demands of the nonconsequential and delve into timeless, transforming truth. Books have the power to transport, increase our creativity, and connect us to the wealth of human experience. You need no expensive fare, just a library card or a few well-spent dollars at your local bookstore. I wonder if Paul's key that could unlock his prison door was a good book, because in the last days of his life he requested, *"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) (emphasis mine).

3. Reading makes us think.

I know this may sound too simplistic, but hear me out. The deep reading required in good books will bring timeless truths to our attention. And it is some of these timeless truths that will set us free from accepting the non-thinking status quo.

The Puritan, Thomas Brooks said, "Books may preach when the author cannot, when the author may not, when the author dares not, yea, and which is more, when the author is not." Rene' Descartes said, "The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest men of past centuries." Italo Calvina said, "A classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say." The Bible tells us, "*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise...*" (Proverbs 13:20). What a joy to become acquainted with and friends with a person by walking with them through a book! So, allow me to encourage you to read what great books, even the ancient books, are still saying to us today. Clifton Fadiman said, "When you read a classic you do not see more in the book than you did before; you see more of you than was there before." A truly good book has the ability to bring out the real you and turn on those creative juices.

Reading will give answers to important life questions. Victor Hugo, who wrote *Les Miserables* said, "It is from books that men derive consolation in the troubles of life." Reading provides comfort in knowing others have gone through similar experiences we have and survived and often conquered. One reason Ezekiel was a great prophet is because he placed himself into the skin of the people to whom he was writing: "*...and I sat where they sat...*" (Ezekiel 3:15). So, pick up a book and "sit where they sat."

-Pastor Pope-