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The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Dennis Foust



Equipping God's people through reading

Pastors, when you begin writing your sermons, on what do you stand? For what do you grab? Is there anything except "Sunday's coming" that sets the limitations?

In the 21st century, information is as ubiquitous as air. People are drowning in information and thirsting for knowledge. Never before has information been so available to the masses. And, never before has the public been so narrowly informed. Today's media confuses news, information and entertainment. Most people only read or hear the headlines. We have allowed the politically-biased television networks, corporate-sponsored internet, and syndicate-owned radio networks, newspapers and magazines to become the tributaries through which most of our information flows.

As a pastor, you could surrender to those who spoon-feed the public what they want us to hear or see. On the other hand, you could fulfill your role in Christ's church and proclaim a word of truth emerging from hours of reading, study and reflection.

One of the best ways you can invest yourself in the care and equipping of the people of God is by pursuing a disciplined reading program. Well-read pastors have the opportunity to offer substance and depth; to express wisdom by transforming information into knowledge that empowers people to serve faithfully in the continuity of Jesus' ministry.

The pastor's library is more than printed resources and bookmarked websites. Many lives are informed and enriched or deformed and impoverished by the ways a pastor views his or her professional library. This library should include books in each of these major categories:

- history
- philosophy
- sociology and politics
- literature (classical and popular)
- poetry

- fiction
- culture and travel
- biography
- science and nature
- theology and ethics
- mission of God and the church
- church history
- Bibles
- biblical backgrounds (atlas, concordance, dictionaries, culture, history, etc.)
- biblical commentary
- pastoral ministry
- preaching and teaching
- congregational life (worship, stewardship, community of faith, music, etc.)
- pastoral and congregational care
- psychology and counseling leadership
- spiritual formation
- family ministry
- human development
- Christian education
- church administration

For periodicals, consult the ATLA (American Theological Library Association) online service catalog. For \$250 a year, you can access more than 100 theological and ministry-oriented journals from the past 50 years.

Reading enhances your mind, stretches your imagination, informs your intellectual data center and causes "aha" moments in your spirit. A pastor's library inspires, informs, enlightens, renews and energizes. It causes you to reflect, understand, wonder, question, feel and act. Your library provides answers not otherwise knowable, takes you places you will never visit, introduces you to people you will never meet, and allows you to sense moments in time you did not experience and listen to words you will never hear.

It is through reading that you make decisions for yourself rather than just nodding to the view of another. As you read, you are able to see connections between one aspect of life and

another. Baptists have to read to exercise the principle of priesthood of the believer. If we do not read, we take on a herd mentality and begin to simply chant the biases of others. It is through reading that we learn to think for ourselves.

Following is a suggested reading program. You will want to rotate the areas of emphasis periodically.

Monday: biblical backgrounds, history (general and church), spirituality, prayer

Tuesday: philosophy, pastoral care, psychology, discipleship, mission

Wednesday: theology, ethics, classics, biography

Thursday: congregational life, leadership, preaching, sermons, worship

Weekends: fiction, current events, world issues, articles, general reading

Invest two hours each day in this disciplined and balanced reading program. With it you could be reading 15-30 books a month. This regimen keeps material from getting stale, provides unique connections of ideas as your reflections emerge — and promotes reading outside of your particular interest areas.

Take notes on your reading, and then file them by key words. Organize these in a system (ex: computer software) that allows you to retrieve the data easily. With this type of system, when you begin writing a sermon, you can ask your computer to tell you where *your* library offers information related to a specific topic. Over time you will find quotes and thoughts you marked several years earlier. This is just one of the benefits of a disciplined reading program.

The life of the pastoral person is invested in the vision of equipping other Christian believers to be effective ministers in the kingdom of God. Your pursuit of a disciplined reading program will reap much fruit in the years ahead. **BT**

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