

The Power of a Good Book

I grew up in a home with books – lots of them. Our furniture was old and tattered. Our roof leaked. Our hardwood pine floors had splinters the size of Popsicle sticks. But we had bookshelves filled with books. Admittedly, I didn't enjoy reading as a child...UNTIL. Until I heard someone say, "if you want to keep something from a black man then put it in a book." The last thing I wanted was anything to be kept from me so I consulted the most voracious reader I knew – my father. My father was always reading three books. One he kept in the bathroom; one he kept on the nightstand next to his bed; one he kept in the living room on the arm of his chair. Well, that was forty years ago and I have read between three and five books per month, every month since then. It is requirements that I have passed on to my children, one I relentlessly share to my congregation and the one I implore you adopt beginning today.

Cicero said, ***"A room without books is like a body without a soul."***

Mark Twain said, ***"The person who does not read has no advantage over the person who cannot read."***

Tahereh Mafi said, ***"I spent my life folded between the pages of books. In the absence of human relationships, I formed bonds with paper characters. I lived love and loss through stories threaded in history; I experienced adolescence by association. My world is one interwoven web of words, stringing limb-to-limb, bone to sinew, thoughts, and images all together. I am a being comprised of letters, a character created by sentences, a figment of imagination formed through fiction."***

There is power in a good book.

To this day I teach my own children and now encourage you to ask those you spend time with a simple question – *"What are you currently reading?"* If there is a blank stare or too long a hesitation before they answer, then consider surrounding yourself with people who feed their mind and not just their body. Books accomplish at least four things in our lives.

1. **Books develop our skills.** I have learned to paint, cook, and work on my motorcycle and many other things simply by reading.
2. **Books enlarge our territory.** By turning the pages of a book you can visit any place, any planet and spend time with any people without the need of a plane ticket or hotel reservation. Your greatest escape will always be found in the pages of a book. This is the reason the movie is never as good as the book.
3. **Books heal our soul.** The soul houses my intellect, will and emotions. All three of these areas of our person can be cared for in the pages of a book – especially my favorite book, The Holy Bible.
4. **Books shape our opinions.** We live in a society where critical thinking and analytical problem solving are no longer encouraged. A society where we would rather be told what to do than how to figure out the solution for myself. As we develop an appetite for reading we also develop our opinions and gather information on a range of subjects and issues. This one fact alone will create a more responsible citizenry.

If you should need a good action plan for reading in your home, then simply start by replacing one hour per day of any other regular activity (preferably television watching) with reading.

If you need proof beyond me of the power of a good book, then consult the greatest book ever written – The Bible. In it is a story of an African male who is found reading. He was an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading because clearly, he had an itch that needed to be scratched. You see he was looking for answers. His quest took him to take a pilgrimage to the Holy City where he visited the temple, participated in worship, had conversations with key leaders and personnel and left feeling disappointed, unfulfilled, and frustrated by materialism, political arguments, and legalism. The change occurred when he picked up a book. That book had every answer he needed, and it forever changed his life.

There is indeed power in a good book.

Here are some recommendations from our summer family lists over the years:

For Youth and Teens

Charlotte's Web – E.B. White

The Giving Tree – Shel Silverstein

Holes – Louis Sachar

The Hobbit – J.R.R. Tolkien

Jonathon Livingston Seagull – Richard Bach

The Fault in our Stars – John Green (this is my daughter Jada's favorite book)

Paper Towns – John Green

Stamina – Derek Anderson

To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee

Night – Elie Wiesel

Romeo and Juliet – William Shakespeare

Non-Fiction

Famine in the Land - Steven Lawson

Outliers – Malcolm Gladwell

Saving Eutychus – Millar and Campbell

God's Politics – Jim Wallis

Holy Ambition – Chip Ingram

The Coming Jobs War – Jim Clifton

America the Beautiful – Dr. Ben Carson

The Souls of Black Folk – W.E.B. DuBois

What book are you reading? What book would recommend?