



**Your Personal Library
Can Transform Your Ministry**
Why The Right Books Make a Difference
By Phil Cooke

*"When I get a little money I buy books;
and if any is left I buy food and clothes."*

-- Erasmus

Reverend Bill Cooke in Charlotte, North Carolina has an awesome personal library. Being a pastor as well as a historian require lots of reading, and for Bill Cooke, that has never been a problem. I was the "preacher's kid" that grew up in that pastor's household, and some of my earliest memories have to do with my dad's reading habits. Waiting at the doctor's office, standing in the grocery line, on vacation, or before bedtime, my dad always had a book in his hand.

It may sound like the life of a nerd, but the fact is, my father is anything but a nerd. He was an All-State football player in High School, a Golden Gloves Boxing Champion, and was in the First Marine Division that hit the beaches and saw the bloodiest fighting throughout the Pacific during World War II.

No, a nerd would not be the way to describe my father.

From his youth, in a small mill town in North Carolina, he realized that knowledge would be the best way to lift him out of back breaking factory work, and into a better life. So after the war, he enrolled in college and starting reading. By the time I came along in the 1950's it didn't take long for my dad's reading habits to rub off on me, and suddenly I find my own library growing exponentially.

(One thing he didn't teach me was how to avoid the stern look on my wife's face when I come home with another book in my hands.)

What did I learn from my father about reading?

I learned that reading can prepare you for just about anything. As a pastor, especially during the sixties and seventies, when America was going through one of the most radical transitions in its history, my dad had answers. Not just simplistic, "pat" answers, but real, in-depth answers that helped people face challenges of politics, education, morality, family issues, and much more. When other pastors struggled to understand issues like racism, Viet Nam, evolution, creeping liberal theology, or personal issues like divorce, suicide, or abuse, my father had a "deep bench," and was tapped into resources that date back to the earliest days of the faith. Even today, though he's semi-retired, I'm amazed that his book buying has continued unabated. Retirement to my father simply means "more time to read."

I didn't follow my father into the ministry. In fact, today, I'm a television and film director based in Burbank, California. But I also consult with numerous churches and ministries on media issues - particularly how we can use the media more effectively to reach this generation for Christ.

But in working closely with pastors and ministry leaders today, I'm regularly surprised - even shocked - at how few books they own. It is not an unusual event for me to meet with a pastor or ministry leader and notice that he owns less than 10 books. And most of those volumes are recent "fluff" on the latest trends. In many cases, they focus on financial prosperity, positive thinking, or "how-to" books. Sometimes, many pastor's "libraries" look more like a motivational collection than a pastor's bookshelf.

I want to be motivated, and I certainly would like to be prosperous. But if you're getting your ministry advice from Tony Robbins, rather than the historic church fathers, you're feeding your congregation fast food rather than steak, and eventually, the signs of spiritual malnutrition will start showing.

But what types of books should go into a well designed pastor or ministry leader's personal library?

The answer to that is as varied as the pastors you interview. In fact, ask ten pastors and you'll probably get ten answers. However, in talking with numerous pastors,

professors, and ministry leaders, and from my own graduate research, I've discovered a common framework that I believe will help you begin to create a powerful resource for your ministry. The framework consists of six main areas:

Christian History	Apologetics
Biography	Current Culture
Theology	Fiction

History: Why duplicate the mistakes of the past? By learning the history of the Church, we can see the mistakes others made and avoid them today. In the same way, we can learn from past success and take our ministry to a new level. Recently, the world mourned the death of Mortimer J. Adler who died at age 98. All his life, Adler believed in the power of unchanging standards of truth, and understood the value of "the classics" - the great books of the past whose principles and lessons never change. In fact, he instituted the "Great Books" program which had enormous influence on American education. He understood that there are "eternal verities" - issues that mankind struggles with from generation to generation, and if we're not learning from the past, we're leading lives of shallow futility.

Discover the riches of Christian history. Study the faith from its beginnings, and you'll encounter a world you never knew existed, and learn ideas you never dreamed.

Biography: Somehow, we believe that only the hottest TV evangelists or most "talked about" Bible teachers have cornered the market on the latest insights. We've fallen into "celebrity" worship just like the secular world. But we forget about the men and women of the faith whose teaching and preaching changed the course of history. Have you read the biography of Martin Luther who began the Protestant Reformation? William Tyndale, whose translation of the Bible into English earned him the honor of being burned at the stake? What about Augustine, Calvin, Muller, Spurgeon, Wesley, Wilberforce, Carey, and the list goes on and on? These and others influenced governments, spoke to thousands without the aid of microphones, created modern day missions, and changed the course of history.

Theology: Theology, particularly what is called "systematic theology" is simply the study of what the Bible teaches about any given subject. It is a disciplined, orderly approach to the Bible, and a serious knowledge of theology should be the basis for any leadership position in the Church. Sadly, the Church today is filled with inaccurate and erroneous teaching, but the most effective vaccination is a strong dose of sound theology. If you don't have at least a few volumes on the subject, you're missing a key resource than can transform your ministry.

Remember - understanding good theology allows your church or ministry to be "self-correcting" - not subject to the winds of the latest "trendy" or erroneous teaching.

Apologetics: While "theology" is the study of what the Bible teaches, "apologetics" is essentially the defense of those principles. Today more than ever, Church leaders need to understand how to defend Christianity from the onslaught of competing worldviews. How does orthodox Christianity stack up against the claims of Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientology, or the New Age movement? I believe apologetics is one of the most neglected areas in the church today. In a culture where cults and false religions are winning converts at record paces, few Christians have the scriptural knowledge to persuade others to the Truth. One of the best things you could do for your church is to start teaching a class in Christian apologetics.

Understanding Current Culture: The history of evangelism is littered with the failed efforts of those who loved God and understood the Bible, but had no clue about how to relate their faith to the immediate culture. Does the Bible address explosive issues such as evolution, homosexuality, abortion, or euthanasia? You can hardly turn on the news without hearing the current debates about stem cell research. But do you understand the gravity of this debate, or it's implications in light of Bible teaching?

If a successful, educated married couple in your church come to you seeking advice about having an abortion, a simple "*God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life*" approach just isn't enough. While that statement is true, the couple also lives in a culture where personal freedom is paramount and every other message they receive tells them that abortion is her right, and her rights are all that matter. Therefore to minister

effectively, you need to comprehend the culture, so you can provide Biblical answers in a way they will understand.

The secular culture didn't get this way overnight, and it will take more than shallow teaching to make a course correction. We need pastors and church leaders who understand the issues within culture and can provide intelligent, thoughtful answers.

Fiction: Except for a couple of volumes from the "Left Behind" series, or a Frank Peretti novel, this is probably the least likely type of book you'll find on a pastor's shelf. For some reason, Christians have historically viewed fiction through skeptical eyes. One pastor said, "I don't have time to read anything that isn't true." He's correct - fiction isn't true. However, fiction is "Truth" with a capital T. I find it interesting that Jesus spent an enormous amount of his earthly ministry telling stories, and yet many pastors are horribly inept storytellers themselves.

The Christian community needs to regain its understanding of fiction. But I'm not talking about most of the shallow, trite, and cheesy fiction you usually see on Christian bookstore shelves. I mean powerful novels and short stories by writers such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky (Crime and Punishment and The Brothers Karamazov), Flannery O'Connor (A Good Man is Hard to Find and The Violent Bear it Away) Madeleine L'Engle (A Wrinkle in Time), John Bunyan (The Pilgrim's Progress), C. S. Lewis (The Narnia Series), and many more. In fact, if you're in the ministry and haven't read the short story "Father Sergius" by Leo Tolstoy, (From his short story collection "Master and the Man") you're missing one of the rare opportunities of literature. Once you read this story, you'll never see your ministry in the same light again.

Remember - what's important in a fiction story is not the overt action, but the "subtext" - the real story behind the obvious action. When you read a great novel, you begin to see the many layers of meaning and insight, as if the writer is opening a secret door that reveals an entire world inside the story. That's why fiction stories are so much like life, and why Jesus used them with such great effectiveness.

Today, dramatic stories in movies, television, and popular novels drive this culture, and it's not difficult to see that this generation learns morality and behavior from

modern media. Therefore pastor, if you don't understand the fictional power of novels, movies, and television, you're missing the single greatest mission field of this generation.

So How Do I Start?

I have four suggestions for building a strong personal library. First, seek out experienced pastors and ministry leaders you admire for their advice. They will understand which books have helped them in ministry, and can assist you in finding the right tools that will help the most.

Second, talk with college or seminary professors. They will be especially helpful in the theology and history categories and their insight will be invaluable. You don't have to be a student - most Christian college professors would be happy to offer advice and counsel.

Third, whenever you have the opportunity, talk with a bookstore manager or librarian on a Christian college campus. College bookstore managers and librarians have to know all the competing texts as well as the current and historical books for a wide range of Christian subjects. His or her advice will be invaluable toward making the best purchases.

Finally, develop a lifelong attitude toward learning. If you intend to remain a vital Christian leader, you can never stop growing. Start building your library, enroll in a college or continuing education class, and keep learning from the giants of the faith.

In his excellent book Love Your God With All Your Mind, J. P. Moreland relates that during the Middle Ages the cultivation of a rich interior life through intellectual reflection and spiritual formation was of critical importance. But in this century, the ability to project a powerful image, attain celebrity status, or possess consumer goods has become our preoccupation.

How can we preach the radical message of Jesus Christ, when by all appearances, we're no different from the culture? It's difficult to argue with the message of Proverbs:

Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.

Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

About the Author:

Phil Cooke's television work has been profiled in the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and The Los Angeles Times. Along with consulting with numerous churches and ministries, he lectures at media conferences, universities and workshops, and teaches television and film directing techniques at Russia's Moscow School of Broadcasting. Phil Cooke Pictures, Inc. World Wide Web site is [Http://www.cookepictures.com](http://www.cookepictures.com) on the Internet. Sign up for his monthly e-mail media newsletter at the site!

Sidebar:

A Peek Inside The Libraries of Today's Church Leaders

While writing this article, I talked with a cross section of pastors across the country about the importance of building a strong personal library. One of the topics was *where to begin* - how does a pastor or ministry leader select the right handful of books to start the foundation?

So I presented them with a challenge: *"If you were stuck on a desert island with only ten books (not counting the Bible), which ten would you select?"*

The answers to the question were so remarkable, that I decided to include some of their responses. Ministries Today has allowed me include some of the lists I received from a cross section of pastors. I hope this gives you some ideas about where to start with your own library.

Jack Hayford, Founding Pastor of *The Church on the Way* and Chancellor of *The King's College and Seminary* prefaced his list with the comment: "First, there is no magic ten, but I consider "important" books those who have touched me at strategic points in my life. He includes books that meet primary needs in his ongoing, regular study for preaching and teaching. (Although he "cheated" a little by including multi-volume works, what are you going to say to "Pastor Jack?") Here's his list:

- 1) Strong's Exhaustive Concordance
- 2) Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (10 Volumes)
- 3) Harris-Archer-Waltke's Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (2 Volumes)
- 4) The New Englishmen's Greek and Hebrew Concordances (2 volumes)
- 5) 26 Translations of the Bible - (AMG Publishers) (3 Volumes)
- 6) With the Arndt-Bauer-Gingrich (Greek Lexicon) and Brown-Driver-Briggs (Hebrew); "lexically" use the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language (8 volumes)
- 7) Keil and Delitzsch - Commentary on the Old Testament - 10 Volumes)

- 8) Lenski's Commentary on the New Testament (12 Volumes)
- 9) A.T. Robertson's Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament
- 10) Nelson's Bible Dictionary / Encyclopedia (or other one like the classic International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

Jack Graham, Pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas has always been known for creative strategies, innovative ideas, and great vision. Where do those ideas come from? Perhaps it's his personal library. His list includes:

- 1) The Saving Life of Christ by Ian Thomas
- 2) A Diary of Private Prayer by John Bailie
- 3) Spiritual Leadership by J. Oswald Sanders
- 4) Heart Cry for Revival by Stephen Olford
- 5) Lectures To My Students by C.H. Spurgeon
- 6) Listening to the Giants by Warren Wiersbe
- 7) Evidence that Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell
- 8) Evangelism Explosion by D. James Kennedy
- 9) Expository Sermons on Revelation by W.A. Criswell
- 10) Ordering Your Private World by Gordon MacDonald

Ron Gleason, Pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (PSA) of Yorba Linda, California, studied theology both in the United States as well as the Free University of Amsterdam and the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Ron Gleason is my idea of a pastor - he's an internationally known Bible teacher as well as an avid baseball fan. He reads extensively in Dutch and German, (but was kind enough to send his top ten books in English). His list includes:

- 1) John Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion"
- 2) Herman Bavinck's "Our Reasonable Faith"
- 3) St. Augustine's "City of God"
- 4) William Cunningham's "Historical Theology"

- 5) Richard Lovelace's "Dynamics of Spiritual Life"
- 6) Donald Guthrie's "New Testament Introduction"
- 7) R.K. Harrison's "Introduction to the Old Testament"
- 8) J. Douma's "The Ten Commandments"
- 9) Richard Baxter's "A Christian Directory"
- 10) Jim Packer's "Knowing God"

Greg Laurie, Pastor of Harvest Christian Church in Riverside, California had just finished another successful Harvest Crusade in Angel Stadium in Anaheim when he took time out to send me his list:

- 1) "The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit" by CH Spurgeon
- 2) "Naves Topical Bible"
- 3) "The Westminster Pulpit" by G.Campbell Morgan.
- 4) "Lectures To My Students" by C.H.Spurgeon.
- 5) "The Making of A Man of God" by Alan Redpath.
- 6) "The Pursuit of God" by A.W.Tozer.
- 7) "Evangelistic Sermons" by Martin Lloyd Jones.
- 8) "The "Be" series by Warren Wiersbe.
- 9) "Preaching and Preachers" by Martin Lloyd Jones.
- 10 "The Sermon on the Mount" by Martin Lloyd Jones.

Ted Traylor, Pastor of Olive Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida is a former 1st Vice President of the Southern Baptist Convention and a powerful preacher. His list includes:

1. God, Revelation and Authority - Carl F. H. Henry
2. The Treasury of David - C. H. Spurgeon
3. Spiritual Leadership - J. Oswald Sanders
4. New Evidence That Demands A Verdict - Josh McDowell
5. Lead On - John Haggai

6. Hebrew Greek Key Study Bible - Zodiates
7. Holman Bible Dictionary
8. The Case for Faith - Lee Strobel
9. An Expository Dictionary of NT Words - W.E. Vine
10. Anointed Expository Preaching - Stephen Olford

And what about the library of Pastor **Bill Cooke** in Charlotte, North Carolina? After all, I had to ask my dad, since he started this whole idea. His only consideration in sending his list was: "I picked these books based on the fact that "I don't plan on being on the island too long." He sent the following list:

1. Lectures on Systematic Theology - Charles G. Finney
2. New Evidence that Demands a Verdict - Josh McDowell
3. Dictionary of Paul and his Letters - Editors: Hawthorne, Martin and Reid
4. A Century of the Holy Spirit - Vinson Synan
5. Hayford's Bible Handbook - Jack Hayford
6. The Apocalypse - J.A. Seiss
7. The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh - Charles A. Lindbergh
8. A History of Christianity in the U.S. and Canada - Mark A. Noll
9. The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study - Grant R. Osborne
10. The Triumph of the Crucified - Erich Sauer

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