

# How do you decide which books to read?

[May 14, 2008](#) / by [John Piper](#)

*The following is an edited transcript of the audio.*

## How do you decide which books to read?

1) Largely from other people's recommendations that are within the scope of the kinds of things I want to or have time to read.

If other people I trust tell me that something is astonishing and worth my while, I go for it. They usually read faster than I do, so they read more books than me and know which ones to recommend.

2) Sometimes I just feel very burdened about an issue and very interested in a certain aspect of it.

Take the issue of racial harmony. I'm always thinking about what I should be reading so that I can go deeper and become wiser about ethnic diversity and racial harmony in our country. A woman came up to me after church and said she had just read the autobiography of Clarence Thomas called *My Grandfather's Son*. She said it was so good, so helpful and that I should consider it. Bang! I bought it. I put it by my bedside and I read it—I devoured it.

So that was for two reasons: a life commitment to grow on that issue and a recommendation from a woman in my church.

3) Another factor is proven time.

I don't think we ought to be reading new books all the time. I think we should read old books. And then the question is whether time and history has proven them. There are some books that have been around forever, and they are, generation after generation, witnessed to as being very shaping to people's lives. So I think we should constantly be exposing ourselves to those classics and not always reading the latest thing.

So I recommend reading 1) things that relate to the passions of your life, 2) recommendations from people that are responsible and that you respect, and 3) time-proven, classic, deep works on various issues.

## What are two or three classics that you would recommend to just about anyone?

The Bible, the most proven and most useful book, should be in your reading list every day.

[Pilgrim's Progress](#) by John Bunyan. Everybody, I think, who can read English can benefit from working their way through that.

In my own life I put [The Religious Affections](#) by Jonathan Edwards very high up the list. And for those with a really strong theological bent, [The Freedom of the Will](#) by Jonathan Edwards. Two massively influential books in my life.

[Bondage of the Will](#), by Martin Luther.

[Institutes of the Christian Religion](#) by John Calvin.

[The Mortification of Sin](#) and [Communion with God](#) by John Owen.

Topic: [Life of the Mind](#)

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