

# The Power of Books and How to Use Them

[December 08, 1986](#) / by [John Piper](#)

The Bible is a book. It has changed the world. Some uninspired books have also done tremendous good for the cause of God and truth. Some classic biographies, for example, have fueled the fire of missions for hundreds of years. Like Jonathan Edwards' [Life of David Brainerd](#).

Let me suggest something to do with books and friends that you may never have done before. Evidently it was the custom of the pastors of the Northamptonshire Baptist Association in England in the late 1700s to meet together periodically for prayer, fasting and *reading to each other*.

For example, John Ryland's diary from January 21, 1788, says,

Brethren Fuller, Sutcliffe, Carey and I, kept this day as a private fast, in my study; read the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, Booth's Charge to Hopkins, Blackerby's life in Gillies' Historical Collections and Rogers of Dedham's Sixty Memorials for a Godly Life, and each prayed twice. Carey with singular enlargement and pungency. Our chief design was to implore a revival in the power of godliness in our own souls, in the Churches, and in the Church at large.

Their aim was not recreation but spiritual warfare and strategy. Reading to each other was part of the tactics.

On another occasion Andrew Fuller wrote in his diary,

Read to our friends this evening, a part of Mr. Edwards' *Attempt to Promote Prayer for the Revival of Religion*, to excite them to the like practice. Felt my heart profited, and much solemnized by what I read.

When Bethlehem's pastoral staff took an overnight retreat at the beginning of November we tried it. I photocopied a chapter from Brainerd's diary and a chapter from a biography of Ann Judson (Adoniram's wife). For two of our hours together we read these to each other, one page each around the circle until done.

It was a powerful experience. Brainerd's chapter led us into one of the most intense times of prayer we have ever had together. We heartily recommend the practice to other groups.

But it is crucial that you read rich, God-centered material, not just anything under the name Christian. Where can you go to get it cheap? I have a tip.

[Trinity Book Service](#)

116 Horseneck Road

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The postage is paid by them and the discounts are the best I am aware of and the selection is rich and deep. Let me mention some examples. Matthew Henry, who died in 1714, wrote a commentary on the whole Bible in six large volumes. George Whitefield used to read Henry on his knees along with the Greek New Testament. It is a rich and perceptive devotional

commentary as good for your heart as for your head. All six volumes are available from this book service for only \$26.95. This is simply incredible!

Other examples: J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* for \$2.75; and *God's Words* for \$4.15.; John Stott's *Basic Christianity* for \$2.05; John Blanchard's *Right with God* for \$1.90; biographies of William Borden, Adoniram Judson, John Knox, David Livingston, George Mueller, John Newton and Charles Spurgeon for under \$3.00; and books for young people like John White's *The Tower of Geburah* for \$5.55, etc.

Make all your reading purposeful. Great books have changed the world by changing people's lives.

Reading for my life—and yours,

Pastor John

Topic: [Life of the Mind](#)

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