

LIFE ON LIFE

Becoming More Like Jesus... Together

Choosing a Christian Life Book

Why Use Christian Books

Why would we even consider using any other book than the Bible when we are discipling another Christian? Doesn't the Bible contain in itself all we need to know for life and godliness? Well, yes, but there are several benefits to be gained from reading books by Christian authors.

- First, it is enormously beneficial for Christians to converse with one another about spiritual things. No one would deny that. When you talk to another person about Christian life or doctrine, it can help you to understand God more clearly, and can even lead you to love Him more than if you thought about spiritual things on your own. Reading a Christian book is like having a conversation with a person who cannot be with you in person. Thousands of Christians have thought about God and written those thoughts on paper. It is a wonderful thing to be able to learn from them, to be taught by them, even though they cannot be with you in person!
- It is important for Christians to remember that we do not stand alone in history. Christianity did not begin with us, and it will not end with us if the Lord tarries. While the Bible does contain all truth that is necessary for salvation and godliness, God has been at work among His people for the last 2000 years, teaching and training them to read His Word and to understand it. There is a wealth of knowledge and wisdom in books from the past that we would do well to read and consider. Of course even the greatest of the Christian authors are not inspired and not authoritative like the Bible, but what a benefit it is to be able to read their thoughts about God's Word and learn what the Holy Spirit has taught them!
- You have a limited amount of time. Maybe you decide there is a topic you both want to study (like prayer or the character of God), but you don't have enough time as the discipler to pull together a comprehensive study on the subject. Praise God, there are lots of good Christian authors doing good work in advance, and it is a huge help to you to take advantage of their good work. Reading a good Christian book can facilitate your discussions about important aspects of the Christian life, faith and godliness. Sometimes, because of your limited time, you are not able to *both* teach good Christian material and also have time to discuss it and apply it to each other's lives. So, reading a good Christian book with someone else "injects" content into the relationship. You can both read the material on your own and then spend your limited time together discussing and applying the material.

How to read a Book

- Read a book with pencil in hand. Mark the book up! The book won't mind! In fact, the best way to remember certain passages of the book is to mark them up. Argue with the author! Have a conversation with the author. It will help you to understand the material better. Marking a book will also facilitate your one-on-one discussion with a friend—you will more easily be able to find a passage that you remember. It is far too often that people remember a passage and then fumble around for ten minutes trying to find it in the book. A simple check mark on the page of a book could make the difference between a well-placed point to the disciple's life and a complete waste of his time.
- Read a book in two different ways. First of all, read it for yourself. See how the ideas affect you. Most of the time, the places of the book that affect you will also affect the disciple. Also, read the book looking for specific points of conversation for you and the disciple. Mark those places and make it a point to talk to the disciple about them.
- Ask good questions. Never, never, never ask yes-or-no questions. Nothing kills a conversation so quickly. Ask something like, "Why does it matter that the author thinks that Jesus is God? Why is that important to what he's saying?" Other good questions are, "How does this idea change the way we think about God?" or "What faulty presuppositions does this idea act to shatter?"
- Also, don't ask "What does the author say?" This is not a book review, nor is it a test to check their comprehension. Your task is to apply the book to the person's life, their thinking, and their heart.

Choosing a Good Book

- There are essentially two kinds of books that you can pick to read with a disciple—doctrinal and devotional. Doctrinal books will deal most directly with Christian teaching. They will be didactic and systematic, trying to teach truths of the Christian faith. Devotional books will seek to take truth that we already know and apply it forcefully to our lives. Now that said, most books fall somewhere along the middle of that continuum. Very few books will contain only doctrine, or only devotional. Most will contain some of both, in various mixtures.
- The book that you choose for the person you are meeting with will depend largely on his or her need and interests. Young Christians will often benefit greatly from a book that seeks to teach them the deeper truths of the Christian faith. Older Christians may need to have truths they already know drawn into their everyday consciousness. Be wise in choosing a book for the disciple. Don't cater entirely to their interest, but take stock also of their need at this point in life. Maybe the person has a raging interest in apologetics, but they would benefit more by learning about the sovereignty of God or thinking about the meaning of Christ's death in their own life.
- In general, the books you choose should take into account both need and interest. Be careful not to choose books based solely on the title. Many young Christians fall into that trap. They see a title that looks interesting, read it, and find out that it's written by a liberal monk who denies the divinity of Christ. Pick books by author, not by title. Find a few authors that you trust, read their works, and move outward from there.