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Learning to Love Literature

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Learning to Love Literature

Abstract

"I keep finding people to admire in books."

Posting about developing a love of reading from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/learning-to-love-literature/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Learning to Love Literature

 [all in allthings.org/learning-to-love-literature/](https://allthings.org/learning-to-love-literature/)

John Baas

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Philippians 4:8

Supper is done. The dishes are washed and put away. I've gone through today's school highlights and tomorrow's "need to know list" with the kids. I looked through the mail and most of it is now in the recycle bin. The chores that can't be put off to tomorrow...check. Time to relax. I think I'll flop on the couch and see what's on television...

My cable package has about 500 channels. Maybe more. I remember the days when there were 3 (or 4 when the UHF signal could bring in the PBS channel.) I don't need 500 channels. In fact, I probably don't need 10. But its "bundled." Home phone, internet service, cable TV all together. I've looked at going a la carte but it always ends up costing more...

At least with so many channels to choose from you'd think I could find something I'm interested in, but rarely is that the case. So I decide to read a book.

I'm not an e-reader yet. I still like the weight of a book in my hand and the feel of turning a real paper page. There is plenty in the home library that I haven't read. Some gifts, some read by other family members, some inherited...

I start with "[Gilead](#)" by Marilynne Robinson. It doesn't take long to identify with the main character/narrator, the elderly pastor John Ames, expecting to die soon and communicating in journal form to his young son. Robinson weaves a great story as Ames probes the relationships between fathers and sons (and *Father* and sons). Ames ponders big theological issues like grace, doubt, election, and forgiveness; reflects on interpersonal beauty and pain in connections between family members, friends and communities; marvels at the wonders in creation from his perspective in small town middle America with poetic beauty.

I find myself wanting to read and reread passages again to make sure I don't miss or forget anything. So many quotes worth remembering. One of my favorites comes as Rev. Ames response to a pestering question about election (and what Calvinist hasn't faced that challenge?). "There are certain attributes our faith assigns to God: omniscience, omnipotence, justice, and grace. We human beings have such a slight acquaintance with power and knowledge, so little conception of justice, and so slight a capacity for grace, that the workings of these great attributes together is a mystery we cannot hope to penetrate."

Next I turn to a section of literary classics—all similarly bound like a set of encyclopedias (remember those?)—inherited from my parents' library. I choose "A Tale of Two Cities." I'm familiar with the first part of the first line, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." After that I know nothing of the book or story. Once I tune my reading mind to Dickens' 19th century English writing style, I can hardly put it down. History, love, suspense, revenge, capture, escape, sacrifice, redemption. Characters that embody the worst of our depravity and the best of hoped for virtue. I finish reading through a teary blur. Why didn't a high school or college literature teacher assign this?!

I've become hooked on books! The television has been relegated to second or third choice.

So what authors have been recently holding my attention? A pretty eclectic mix. David Brooks, Eugene Petersen, Tom Brokaw, Laura Hillenbrand, Eric Larson, Dickens, Thomas Merton, Sarah Thebarge...

In “The Road to Character” NY Times columnist David Brooks says “moral improvement occurs most reliably when we come into contact with people we admire and love, and we consciously and unconsciously bend our character to mimic theirs.”

I keep finding people to admire in books. From real life heroes like Louis Zamperini in “Unbroken” and Sarah Thebarger in “[The Invisible Girls](#),” to fictional characters like Mr. Peggotty, in Dickens’ “David Copperfield,” who, like the parable’s good shepherd, leaves all to pursue his disgraced niece, saying, “I’m a going to seek her fur and wide, and if any hurt should come to me, remember that the last words I left her was ‘my unchanged love is with my darlin’ child, and I forgive her!’”

So many of these literary works have in them themes of redemption, glimpses of the image of God in the characters, along with reminders of the fallen nature of humanity, even in those we find ourselves most admiring. They help me view this world through new and clearer lenses.

I’ll still tune in to the late local news, hoping I can stay awake until the weather forecast. And if one of my favorite teams’ games is being broadcast, I might get drawn into a televised sporting event. But the list of books I want to read is growing faster than I can read them.

At the risk of making that list even longer, what great books are you reading?