



# building a Christian library

the MINISTRY PAPERS

## “I’m not a reader”

There will be a wide range of people reading this paper. For some it will be the longest publication you’ve read since the in-depth footy article in a Saturday paper a few months back. For others there’s nothing you love more than a “good read” and just the title had you salivating already.

First a word to the non-readers. We need to remember that we are people of the Word. People of *the* Book. The Bible. That makes us all readers. In fact, throughout church history wherever the gospel has gone, higher literacy has followed. We are people of *THE* book. We are readers. At the very least we will be eager to grow as avid, hungry, consistent readers of the Bible. And as we grow in our reading of the Bible we’ll also grow in our appreciation of books that help us to understand the Bible better. Some books you’ll find easier to read than others but it’s worth sticking at it and growing in it. Some books are harder work and need to be approached a chapter at a time. Others are important resource books that you may never read cover to cover (I’ve never done this with my concordance), but will be invaluable reference resources.

And now a word to the keener readers. The challenge for you in building a Christian library isn’t convincing you that you need to do it, but thinking through the how and why of doing it. There’s the issue of reading *discerningly*. That doesn’t mean we only read those we agree with, but that we do read remembering that the Bible is the book over all books. There’s also the issue of *training*, which is the focus of this paper. With limited resources, we need to spend wisely when building a library. This paper encourages you to prioritise buying books that not only equip you for ministry but that you will be able to use in ministry to and with others...

This ministry paper acts as a companion to the introductory papers ‘the ministry training church’ and ‘meeting one to one’. If pastor-teachers and leaders are going to get serious about training, we need to develop a training mindset. That’s what this ‘building a Christian library’ paper is all about. Building a library is not only important for equipping yourself to train others, it will be an essential tool in the training itself. Full-time pastor-teachers will probably build a more extensive library than discussed in this paper, although the principles covered may open up new ways of thinking about building a library. The main target of this paper is the motivated small group or ministry leader.



## read 2 Timothy 2:1-19

1. What does Paul call Timothy to make his priority (verses 1-2)?

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2. What images for ministry does Paul present in verses 3-7?

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3. What is Timothy to “keep reminding” those he trains (verse 14)?

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4. What does the ‘workman’ image for ministry imply (verse 15)?

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5. What part might building a Christian library play in being a workman who “correctly handles the word of truth”?

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Think of a few books that have played a role in helping you to understand God’s Word better. What was it about these books that meant they achieved that?

# a training library

There are some good books that we read once but probably won't ever read again. There are others that we'll come back to over and over. This paper focuses on the latter sort of book. They're the heart of a Christian library that is a *training* library. As you seek to grow in your own understanding of the Bible, and to similarly equip others, these books are the basic tools of the trade.

## Bibles

It's worth having a couple of Bible translations in your library (e.g. NIV and ESV). If you don't know the original language, comparison of the two will at least alert you to some issues and can help to clarify the meaning.

## Bible concordance

An essential. It's an alphabetical listing of all the words that are found in the Bible, with Scripture references along with part of the verse in context. If you can recall a keyword in a verse it'll help you find it. You can also use it to track a theme, although remember that one Hebrew/Greek word might be translated into different English words according to context (and similarly, the same English word may not always have the same word in the original behind it). Match your concordance to your main Bible translation.

e.g. *NIV Complete Concordance*.

## one volume Bible commentary

While we may want to start building a serious library which has a good Bible commentary on every book of the Bible, that is an expensive and lengthy undertaking. A one volume commentary is a great place to start.

e.g. *New Bible Commentary (4th Edition)* Carson D A (Ed) & others

## Bible dictionary

A Bible Dictionary is like an encyclopedia about the Bible. It has articles on: books of the Bible; people and places in the Bible; themes in the Bible. It has many useful maps and diagrams. The articles also have a bibliography at the end which is great if you want to read further.

e.g. *New Bible Dictionary (3rd Edition)* Marshall I.H. (Ed) & others

## dictionary of theology

Is similar to a Bible Dictionary but has more in-depth treatment of theological themes in the Bible, including theological figures and perspectives through church history.

e.g. *Evangelical Dictionary Of Theology* (2nd Edition) Elwell W.

*New Dictionary Of Theology* Ferguson Sinclair B (Ed), Wright D (Ed).

## dictionary of church history

As you enter more serious study you will find names, events and ideas from church history mentioned in commentaries and other books. A Dictionary of Church History can help give you the background to understand them.

e.g. *Oxford Dictionary Of The Christian Church (Third Edition)* Cross F.L.

## Bible atlas

While many Bibles have some maps in the back, a good Bible Atlas not only has a more extensive range of maps but also provides useful historical and cultural information. e.g. *The Oxford Bible Atlas*; *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*.

## Bible software

There are some terrific Bible software programs available although the best ones cost a few hundred dollars. Given that they are bundled with many of the tools listed above, however (including multiple English translations), the cost may be worth considering as you enter more serious study. Searching capabilities, for example, are extensive.

Check out [www.bibleworks.com](http://www.bibleworks.com) for a leading example.



## commentaries

It's recommended to start with a one volume Bible commentary (see opposite). Over time, however, you might decide to add commentaries on individual books of the Bible. They can be very expensive so a church library can be a good idea, or just borrowing from a minister/leader who has an established library. But if you're studying a book of the Bible in depth at church, or simply interested to study it more deeply, these commentaries can be a helpful addition to your library. However you need to use them carefully. There are two things in particular to watch out for.

Firstly, you need to be wary of *bad* commentaries. There are plenty of them out there, including many that don't share your convictions about the authority of Scripture. Start with recommendations from discerning teachers of God's Word, asking them which commentaries they've found helpful.

Secondly, with the problem of bad commentaries sorted, you now need to be wary of a *good* one! It can tempt you to be lazy in wrestling with the Bible text for yourself. And while it might be generally faithful to God's Word, that doesn't mean its conclusions are right every time. Commentaries are great servants but bad masters. Always spend plenty of time reading the text before turning to them. And do so with specific questions in mind. Use them to answer your questions not to raise a hundred you never thought of. Of course, there may occasionally be an insight or issue raised that's worth taking on board, but just be careful not to get lost in the detail.

There are 'sets' of commentaries (e.g. *Tyndale* or *Bible Speaks Today*) that can be an economical way to 'cover' several books of the Bible. However, often the best commentary on a given book of the Bible doesn't come in one of these sets, and all sets vary in their quality across different books.



## a lending library

We have seen that as you build your library, especially with limited resources, it's good to focus on books and resources that you'll use *repeatedly* to help your understanding and use of the Bible. Another priority in choosing books for your library will be those books that you'll want to *lend out* to others. Focus on building a lending library.

### it takes two

Books that you'll want to lend out to others will be a top priority in building your library. Discerning and timely placing of appropriate Christian books in the hands of a brother or sister is a greatly undervalued dimension of ministry to those in our care.

As good as lending books out is, however, there is something even better we can do for them. As spelt out in the 'meeting one-to-one' ministry paper, reading through a book with someone you meet regularly with (or start meeting with for this purpose) can be a wonderful path to Christian growth.

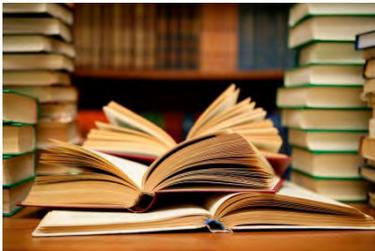
Whether it's reading a book to think through a specific issue or struggle that has arisen, or simply as a part of discipleship, this is vital ministry. And recalling our 'non-readers' from page 1, for many people this is a great way to make a start in reading Christian books. The support and accountability can make the difference between a failed start and a fruitful finish.

Given the importance of this one-to-one use of your library, you might consider buying *two* copies of certain key books that you regularly use in training or discipleship. It makes it much easier to make a start, even if the other person chooses at some point to buy their own copy. Just make sure the previous user hasn't written too many personal notes in the margin!...



There are hundreds of books that could be recommended here in addition to the basic tools on page 2. We all have our own favourite Christian books, especially ones that had a significant impact personally. What follows is not intended to be a definitive 'top shelf' but simply some recommendations of some 'stock standard' books that will be useful in your lending library. We'll start with a table of books for developing Christian thought (those marked with an asterisk are more heavy duty books).

title	author	notes
Gospel and Kingdom	G. Goldsworthy	Christian interpretation of the old testament
God's Big Picture	V.Roberts	Similar to above but simplified
Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*	G.Goldsworthy	Directed to preachers but useful to all
The Faith of Israel*	W.J.Dumbrell	book by book survey of the old testament
Symphony of Scripture	M.Strom	Bible overview by books and themes
Back to Basics	Matthias Media	seven basic bible studies with training tools
Matthias Interactive Studies	Matthias Media	for group or one-to-one use
Dig Deeper	N.Beynon & A.Sach	tools for understanding the Bible
The Blueprint	P.Jensen & T.Payne	an introduction to Christian doctrine
Know the Truth	D.Milne	more detailed Christian doctrine
Knowing God	J.I.Packer	introduction to Christian belief
Institutes of the Christian Religion*	J.Calvin	Reformation classic theological overview
The Story of the Church	A.Renwick & A.Harman	Church History overview
Desiring God	J.Piper	living for God's glory
The Cross of Christ	J.Stott	atonement and other themes of the cross
Guidance and the Voice of God	P.Jensen & T.Payne	how God guides us
A Call to Spiritual Reformation	D.Carson	prayer—priorities from Paul's prayers
The Universe Next Door	J.Sire	an introduction to Christian worldview
A Spectator's Guide to World Religions	J.Dickson	an introduction to world's major religions
The Kingdom of the Cults	W.Martin	Christian response to all major cults
Know and Tell the Gospel	J.Chapman	an introduction to evangelism
The Truth about Jesus	P.Barnett	evidence for Jesus death and resurrection
Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity*	P.Barnett	a history of New Testament Times
The Greco-Roman World*	J.S.Jeffers	cultural context of the New Testament



## a living library

The books on the previous page were focused on developing Christian thought. That's a great place to start to develop the ability to 'think Christianly' about all issues that life and the world throw up at us. It can be useful, however, to add to your lending library books that address particular issues in life. That's what this next table covers. In addition to this list, Christian biography should also be a large part of our reading diet.

### how to read a book

It might seem obvious: pick it up and start from the front cover until you reach the back one, right? In fact, for many of us that's part of the reason why we don't always make it to the back cover. We dive in enthusiastically but sometimes lose our way because we're not seeing the forest for the trees. Here's a few things worth doing as you settle into reading a new book:

- read the preface/introduction and cover to get a sense of what the book is addressing
- look carefully at the table of contents to see what the chapters cover and the 'shape' of the book
- get a sense as early as you can what big question the author is answering or issue they are addressing—and what their 'take' is: what holds the book together?
- read with a pen/highlighter in hand (or pencil if you're a purist) and mark and comment away to keep engaged.
- always have a Bible on hand to look up references and check context

### how to find a book

Because of limitations of space, only title and author details and brief notes have been provided. Christian bookstores have good online information regarding prices and descriptions:

- [moorebooks.com.au](http://moorebooks.com.au)
- [reformers.com.au](http://reformers.com.au)
- [word.com.au](http://word.com.au)
- [koorong.com.au](http://koorong.com.au)

### why just books?

Limitations of space is also the main reason that other resources such as DVDs, CDs & web resources aren't covered here. While a future paper may cover such resources it is books that form the basic building blocks of a training and lending library.

title	author	issue
Encouragement	L.Crabb	encouragement
Don't Waste Your Life	J.Piper	discipleship
Hanging in There	J.Dickson	discipleship (teenagers)
Clearing the Cobwebs	K.Willis	Christian living
Beyond Greed	B.Rosner	materialism
The Marriage Builder	L.Crabb	marriage
The Single Issue	A.Hsu	singleness
Pure Sex	P.Jensen & T.Payne	sex & sexuality
One Flesh	G & A.Clark	honeymoon sex & beyond
What Some of You Were	C.Keane	homosexuality
Fatherhood	T.Payne	fatherhood
Disciplines of a Godly Man	K.Hughes	Christian men
Disciplines of a Godly Woman	B.Hughes	Christian women
Raising Kids to Love Jesus	H.Wright & G.Oliver	parenting
If I Were God I'd End all the Pain	J.Dickson	suffering
A Sneaking Suspicion	J.Dickson	evangelistic (for teenagers)
A Fresh Start	J.Chapman	evangelistic (adults)
Islam in Our Backyard	T.Payne	Islam
Nothing in My Hand I Bring	R.Galea	Roman Catholicism
The How and Why of Love	M.Hill	Introduction to Christian Ethics
Unnatural Enemies	K.Birkett	science & Christianity
At a Time Like This (tract)	S.Manchester	grief and loss
Two Ways to Live (tract)	P.Jensen	gospel outline

The last table relates to specific areas of ministry...

title	author	ministry
Going the Distance	P.Brain	encouragement
The Welcoming Church	P.Corney	welcoming
Their God is so Big	S.Carmichael	kids ministry (up to 8)
No Guts No Glory	A.Stewart	youth ministry
Leading Better Bible Studies	R & K.Morris	bible study groups
Growth Groups	C.Marshall	bible study groups
Mission Minded	P.Bolt	church strategy
Seven Practices of Effective Ministry	A.Stanley et al	church strategy
Biblical Preaching	H.Robinson	preaching
Setting Hearts on Fire	J.Chapman	preaching