

Review: On Reading Well

August 31, 2018

On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life through Great Books

By Karen Swallow Prior (Brazos Press)

Perhaps conditioned by Aesop's fables, many of us grew up looking for  "the moral of the story" when we read books. Somewhere along the way, an English teacher likely told us mature readers don't try to wring moral lessons from every story. As a result, we may have adopted an attitude that fails to consider how literary works shed light on life's moral dimension.

[Karen Swallow Prior](#) understands great literature helps readers explore human behavior in all its complexity, and from that exploration, we can gain moral insight. Rather than simplistically teaching readers "what to think," Prior asserts the process of attentively reading great literature helps us learn "how to think" about virtue. Good reading of great literature forms character, she insists.

Prior explores a dozen literary works to show how each illumines a virtue—the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and courage; the theological virtues of faith, hope and love; and the heavenly virtues of chastity, diligence, patience, kindness and humility. She examines characters and plots created by authors ranging from John Bunyan and Flannery O'Connor—whose Christian convictions informed their work—to "secular" writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Cormac McCarthy and George Saunders.

Read this book. It likely will prompt you to make a trip to the library and encounter great literature from a fresh perspective.

Ken Camp, managing editor

Baptist Standard