

Voices: Five books that made me a better Christian

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Lately, I've seen a trend on Facebook of people sharing the "books that have shaped me." Naturally, I've considered what my life-changing books might be.

I read a lot of books — many of them difficult and technical as I pursue a Master's degree with an eye toward a Ph.D.

My first thoughts were mostly technical theological works that changed the way I think about God and trickled down into the rest of my life. But I also considered some that were more directly influential on my spiritual growth and some that taught me what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Here are five of those and what I learned from them. (The Bible obviously goes without saying here.)

"Confessions," Augustine of Hippo

"Confessions" is Augustine's autobiographical reflection on his conversion to Christianity. At its core, it is a meditation on the nature of God and God's relationship to the human experience of faith.

Augustine recounts his life from birth through his early rejection of Christianity to his ultimate conversion experience. In doing so, he offers himself as an example of how a wandering soul comes to know Christ.

"Confessions" is surprisingly readable, psychologically profound and theologically astute. I've lost track of how many times I've read it at this point, and each read still makes me think more deeply about God's work in

all people's lives.

“The Godly Man’s Picture,” Thomas Watson

“The Godly Man’s Picture” is a devotional work by Puritan preacher Thomas Watson. “He that hath clean hands, and pure heart; to describe such a person is the work of this treatise.”

Watson’s work is a compendium of reflections of characteristics of a godly person listed in Scripture. He offers 24 such meditations, each of them compelling and profound.

Some of them are self-explanatory and hardly need to be said: a godly person is a person of faith, a person of prayer and so on.

Others are less commonly considered: a godly person is “careful about worship” and “one who weeps.”

It’s hard to describe reading this work, and my summary doesn’t do it justice. Watson spiritually breaks the reader down and rebuilds him or her through an incredible balance of exhortation to holiness and a reminder of God’s grace and understanding.

I could recommend this book more easily to anyone than any other book on this list. No book on the Christian life balances challenge and assurance in a better manner.

“Discipleship,” Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.”

Bonhoeffer’s words are even starker when considered in light of his death

at the Flossenburg concentration camp in 1945.

Bonhoeffer's classic work is a reminder that free grace is not easy grace, but a call to radical, costly faithfulness.

His chief concern in this work is pointing out that following Christ requires a reorientation of one's life that will, inevitably, produce conflict with the larger culture one finds oneself within. Discipleship requires conflict with existing values systems; it requires suffering.

"Discipleship" is a somber read but an important one that remains timely and prophetic.

"Silence," Shusaku Endo

"Discipleship" asks if we are willing to suffer for Christ's sake; "Silence" asks if we are willing to cause others to suffer for Christ's sake.

"Silence" is a historical novel about two Portuguese Jesuit priests who travel to Japan in the midst of an intense persecution of Christians during the 17th century.

The less said about the plot from here the better. "Silence" is an uncomfortable but poignant meditation on the relationship between faith and suffering.

"Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham," Billy Graham

The title says it all. I've written [before](#) about my deep admiration for Billy Graham. Everything I've written about in that article is on full display in "Just As I Am," Graham's account of his life from his childhood on a dairy

farm during the Great Depression through his reflections on his old age and hopes for the new millennium.

Graham recounts in full honesty the doubts and difficulties that accompanied his enormous ministerial successes. There's something I find comforting about the world's greatest evangelist dealing with self-doubt even as he preached to millions. The lifelong faithfulness of God is on full display in Graham's life.

What books have made you a better follower of Christ?

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