



# Books That Make You Think

A perspective and some suggestions to help you decide what to read next

BY LARRY THIESSEN

This year over 300,000 English books will be printed in North America and added to the vast array of literature that grace the shelves of libraries, homes, offices and bookstores. The sheer amount of material available is beyond comprehension. With all this at our disposal, how does anyone ever decide what to read?

The many choices can be overwhelming. Most of us depend on recommendations from friends, trusted colleagues and periodicals. And every once in a while we make the decision to ‘read a classic.’ Which makes me ask, “What is a classic and how did it become one?”

We use the word *classic* to describe all kinds of things. A car can be a classic. Something that identifies a generation, like a film or art work can be a classic. We sometimes just say, ‘that’s classic’ to describe some situation or person. Usually we think a classic is something old, or something that just stands out above the rest. At the very least it has stood the test of time and still has meaning.

When it comes to books, we wonder if there is a ‘top ten list of books that we should all read’. With all the books in print it is hard to imagine that anyone could come up with such a list. I could try to list some classics here but I’m sure I’d miss the mark.

I’ve tried to read what others have called classics. I have to admit that while it felt good knowing that I was reading these great tomes, in the end I didn’t always ‘get it’. I didn’t see what

others were seeing. I felt lost actually.

So instead of trying to list the most important books to read, my premise here is that a ‘classic’ is any book that changes the trajectory of your thinking. When something so resonates inside our minds and souls that we think and act differently, it really is something special and something worth sharing.

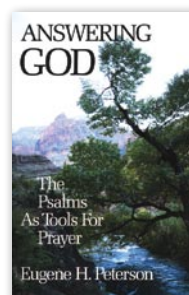
But here is the caveat. Books that have changed you might not change the next person in the same way just like some of the old classics don’t do anything for me. So don’t be offended if your classic doesn’t become one for someone else.

With that as my background allow me to share with you a short list of some of the books that have been classics for me in the sense that they changed my thinking. These are books that are worth reading more than once.

## ANSWERING GOD

by Eugene Peterson

I picked up this book many years ago, when I was into my ‘read through the Bible in a year’ phase. While reading that much of the Bible might be a good practice, this book brought me up short and showed me that the Scriptures can be (and should be) read slowly, contemplatively, musing over a passage for days, weeks, years if necessary—growling

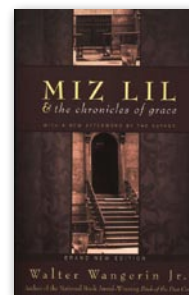


over the word as Eugene translates Psalm 1. No one is being graded on who reads the most. It changed the way I approached my Bible reading and still resonates with me today.

## MIZ LIL AND THE CHRONICLES OF GRACE

by Walter Wangerin

In this beautifully written autobiographical work, Wangerin tells the story of his life as a white, Lutheran pastor in a black inner city church.



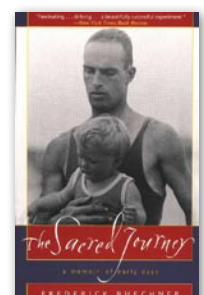
The book is arranged such that you get one chapter set in his parish, with the next chapter set in his growing up years. What becomes so evident is that as a boy he

always seemed to get what God was doing but as a pastor he rarely does. So many rich characters. Such wonderful prose. This book should be required reading for every pastor (how about putting it on the ordination reading list!).

## SACRED JOURNEY

by Frederick Buechner

Somewhere along the way I began to realize that just about every book I was reading had a quote in it from Buechner.



And they were poignant quotes! I didn't know much about him until one day a friend gave me the *Sacred Journey* which tells the early story of Buechner's life up to his conversion. I soon began to see why he is quoted so much as his understanding of life and faith is rich and compelling. I have read this book over and over and read it aloud in more settings than I can remember.

## DIVINE CONSPIRACY

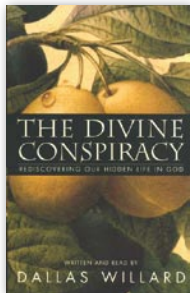
by Dallas Willard

Of all the books that I have read in the past twenty-five years, this one might have had the biggest impact.

Talk about changing the trajectory of your thinking!

It's a weighty book indeed (truth is I had to take a couple of runs at it before I really got into it and it still took me six months to read). But once I got there

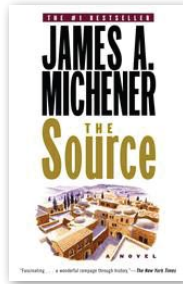
my eyes were opened to a vision of the Kingdom like I had never seen before. I genuinely believe that it is *the* best book on what it means to be a Christ follower in the world.



## THE SOURCE

by James Michener

Eugene Peterson once said that the mark of a great book is that it takes you in different directions as you are reading. You are reading the story but your mind is seeing other applications.



*The Source* was one of those books for me. It's a vast fictional treatment of religion that spans thousands of years and it opened up my world

and gave me a picture of God that so transcended anything I had thought before.

## SACRED ROMANCE

by John Eldredge/Brent Curtis

This book was written before Eldredge became a big name so it flew way

under the radar. Truthfully I think this is his best work and it set the tone for us to realize that in the end the relationship that God has



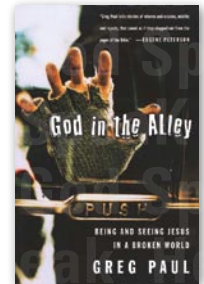
with us is a 'sacred romance' filled with adventure. After reading this book my prayer became, "may I live with my eyes wide open and my heart unafraid."

## GOD IN THE ALLEY

by Greg Paul

I'm sure this book may never be considered a classic but it makes my list because I have not been the same since I read it. Paul writes

as an active pastor on the front lines of inner city Toronto and he captures our minds and hearts with humbling stories of disenfranchised people. Over the years I have literally begged people to read this one and still do today. Be prepared to be changed.



Looking back over this short list I doubt that any of these books would be considered 'classics.' Not in the traditional definition anyway. None of them have been around that long, but these are some of the books that I would take if I was consigned to a desert island. Books that can be read over and over again with new insights gleaned each time. And they made a difference in me.

So in the end, a classic is individual. If it changes (or challenges) your thinking for good, then it just might qualify. And as time changes, so do these classics. I firmly believe that I will read a few more this year. Go ahead and launch out with one that I've recommended. I can't guarantee that it will do the same for you as it did for me, but the next classic might be closer than you think.

Read on!

*Larry Thiessen lives in Calgary, Alberta and is the former manager of Christian Publications bookstores*

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