

A LETTER FROM DR. SEAN LUCAS

May 7, 2020

My dear Friends:

After all the rain over the first three months of the year, hasn't this spring been unbelievable? I don't remember a spring quite like this one—the stunning blue skies, the gorgeous flowers, the cooling breezes. Usually in the Mississippi Valley—whether St. Louis, Memphis, or south Mississippi—we go straight from winter to summer. These beautiful days (and our “safer at home” requirements) have let me spend a little bit more time than normal in our backyard swinging in the ENO and reading. I thought perhaps I'd share three books that I've read thus far in 2020 that you may want to add to your reading stacks for the rest of the year.

Erik Larson, *The Splendid and the Vile*. Many of you know Larson from his other books, like *The Devil in the White City*. This new one focuses on Churchill and London during the Blitz in 1940-41. I'm a huge Churchill fan—this one set me off on a run of Churchill books, but in itself it does not disappoint. Larson's prose is crisp and clean, the drama is real, and Churchill is stout and firm. As we prepare to observe the 75th anniversary of V-E Day tomorrow (May 8), this would be a good book to pick up and remember why we celebrate the Allied victory and values.

W. David O. Taylor, *Open and Unafraid*. A completely different book from the previous—this is a marvelous overview of the Psalms that I read prior to preaching through Psalm 91. Two things this book did for me. First, it created a deep longing for the Psalms to shape me and my prayer life more thoroughly than they presently do; second, it helped me understand—perhaps for the first time—the value of Eugene Peterson's work in *The Message*, especially in the Psalms. Getting the Psalms into me and me into the Psalms has kept me (somewhat) sane during our present pandemic.

Donald Hall, *Essays after Eighty*. Again, a completely different book from the previous two. Donald Hall was poet laureate of the United States in 2006-07 and received the National Medal of Arts in 2010. While his poetry is fine, it is his prose that I find so enjoyable. In this little book of short pieces he works with his familiar themes—especially his New Hampshire farm and his marriage to Jane Kenyon which ended with her death in 1995—but puts them in the context of aging. While there are some crudities and some repetition, his observations on aging are poignant, often funny, and always offered in sparkling prose. I love to read good writing—and this is.

There are other books that I've read thus far that I've thoroughly enjoyed—and I'm presently re-reading *Lord of the Rings* for the umpteenth time, this time in a single-volume edition. I hope there have been books that you've enjoyed enough to share too.

In the grip of God's grace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sean".