

# A LETTER FROM DR. SEAN LUCAS

December 13, 2018

My dear Friends:

Every year toward the end of the year, I look back. Look back on ministry opportunities, successes, and failures. Look back on what went well and what didn't. And look back on the books that I read, or at the very least finished. When I did this last year, I told you that it wasn't a very good book-finishing year (which is different from a book-buying year, as my wife can tell you). In 2017, I was only able to finish 46 books, which seems good until I reflected on the fact that I finished 70 in 2016 (what was I doing in 2016 where I had the time and ability to finish that many books? Was I more disciplined? What was it?).

With a few weeks to go in 2018, I'm at 54 books completed, which is better. I have a couple that I'll finish before the end of the month. I tend to read several books on the same topic: earlier this year, I read several books on theology and art, Christian aesthetics, and architecture/city planning; mid-year, I read several books on Appalachian history in preparation for my next big book project. Most of those books probably wouldn't be interesting to you. But these books did stand out as well-written, informative, or soul-curing, which is my way of saying "enjoyable":

Joseph Crespino, *Atticus Finch: The Biography*. This came out earlier in the year—Crespino is a well-regarded historian who teaches at Emory University. In this book, he does a fascinating bit of historical reportage as he tries to find A. C. Lee, Harper Lee's father, in her two portrayals of him as Atticus Finch. Fascinating and persuasive connections through and through especially for those who love *To Kill a Mockingbird* (and/or hated *Go, Set a Watchman*).

Peter Taylor, *Summons to Memphis*, and Otis Sanford, *From Boss Crump to King Willie*. Obviously two very different books, but I put them together because they both told me things about Memphis. Peter Taylor won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1987 for his novel, telling the story of a widower whose children try to prevent his remarrying. But in the story, all sorts of things about families, memories, and Memphis come out that gave a helpful angle of vision on our town. Sanford's journalistic account of Memphis mayoral politics was even-handed and extremely useful for understanding why we are the way we are.

James Klotter, *Henry Clay*, and Rebecca Reynolds, *Courage, Dear Heart*. I mentioned these two books earlier this year and wanted to mention them again. Klotter's biography of Clay was one of the best written books that I've read in quite a while. And Reynolds's little book was just what I needed spiritually in August—twelve letters to those in various areas of struggle and loneliness. So, so good.

Tim Keller, *The Prodigal Prophet*. We just preached through Jonah this summer. It was the second time I had preached the book. I picked up Keller's new book, thinking that there would be nothing new to learn. Wrong. Keller does a fabulous job showing both the gospel and cultural arguments in Jonah's four short chapters. This was a valuable part of my devotional life in October after it came out.

Most of these were 2018 books and these were the best of what I read. You might find them enjoyable. However, when life gets really stressful, I usually get a P. D. James mystery novel (or Sherlock Holmes). I love reading books where the crime is solved and justice is served by the end of the novel—it helps to make sense of my often messy life, where I sit with folks who are looking for justice or looking for things to turn out right. What did you read this year that you enjoyed?

In the grip of God's grace,



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