

2022 Literature Report

What have you read in the past three years? How much do we read aside from facebook posts and snippets from articles? I'd like to share with you some of the most impactful books on my life in the past couple of years and hope that we can all be enlightened just a little.

I have in a past report shared a book by Ben Sasse, the junior senator from Nebraska. Since then he wrote another book that is so pertinent to the times we live in. Them: Why we Hate Each Other - and how to Heal was published in 2018, but is even more relevant now. From the dust jacket - Something is wrong. Nearly half of us think the other political party isn't just wrong; they're evil. What's causing the despair? Sasse argues that our crisis isn't about politics: We're lonely. Traditional tribes of place are evaporating, and we rally against common enemies so we can feel part of a team. And the digital revolution is throwing gas on the fire. We must rediscover real places and human-to-human relationships to heal our lonely souls. Remember, this was 2018, pre-pandemic. It really caused me to examine my life. Who do I associate with that is outside of my close circle of "like-minded" individuals? After reading this book I began attending the quilt club meetings - a group of women who share a common hobby, from all different political and religious backgrounds. I also joined the library book club, which further nudged me out of my comfort zone. One of the best examples I can think of for this community mindedness is Minneola Kansas.

Warren Peel writing for the *Gentle Reformation* blog refers to faction friendships. Do we relate more closely to those who share our position on current social issues than to our brothers and sisters in Christ? Do we put as much effort into saving lost souls as we do into convincing others how right our opinion is?

One of the changes I have experienced in the past couple of years has been the incredible blessing that technology can be. Now as Brian Tracy asserts in Eat That Frog! technology is a terrible master, but it is also a wonderful servant. I am not now, nor ever claim to be a techy person, but I am competent enough that I could join when my sister-in-laws invited me to join meeting weekly via Zoom for a Bible Study and have benefited greatly from not only the time of fellowship but also study of God's word and books focused around the Scripture. Some of the notable books have been:

Union With Christ by Rankin Wilbourne. That is what the Bible is all about. I recently attended a funeral of a gentleman who passed away far too soon (from our perspective) but as his son said during the service "Dad is now enjoying what we were all created for - living in the presence of his Savior." Union With Christ wrestles with one of the hardest paradoxes in Scripture:

Does the Bible teach an extravagant grace that asks nothing of us, or a radical discipleship that demands everything from us? *

I got in on the tail end of the sisters study, but I would really like to examine it deeper than just reading through that I have done. Christi Townsend from Hope Community congregation put together study questions that are very helpful in looking at this challenging book.

Aging with Grace: Flourishing in an anti-aging culture by Sharon W. Betters and Susan Hunt. Through a series of alternating chapter on Thinking Biblically (looking on Scripture passages dealing with aging) and Living Covenantally (looking at women in the Bible) we are led to face the realities of aging and how to do it in a biblical manner. For the first time in my life my pastor is younger than I am. I realized recently that right now I am the exact age that my MIL was when I

married Steve. I am so glad to have my daughter and granddaughter here enjoying this retreat, but it reminds me again that I am one of the older women. (The Afternoon of Life, Elyse Fitzgerald) Although this book is most appropriate for those in my age bracket, all of us can benefit from it. No one turns 50 or 60 or whatever age and suddenly becomes a sweet little old lady or grumpy old grouch. The groundwork is laid long before, and we need to focus on becoming the type of godly women that we want to be in our later years.

Lastly, Now that Faith Has Come by Beth Moore. How many of you have done a Beth Moore study? I had never before (and may never again) but the sisters group has been studying Galatians using this book. It is incredibly thorough, almost to the point of going off on tangents, but we have delved into Galatians very deeply.

Let Them Be Kids by Jessica Smart

A former English teacher and homeschooling mother of three, Jessica Smartt felt the weight of helping prepare her kids for life, seeking to raise her children with a sense of adventure, self-confidence, manners, faith, and the ability to use technology wisely.

Let Them Be Kids is Jessica's offering of grace and confidence to moms, providing practical ideas to meet the challenge of raising children. Part story, part guidebook, every chapter includes doable parenting strategies and encouragement for the journey, equipping moms with ways to provide a safe, healthy, Christ-centered upbringing for our children. Her well-researched, tested methods, woven together with her personal stories and witty humor, deliver wisdom on tough topics, such as:

- Managing technology and fostering creative playtime
- Balancing family time versus sports and extracurriculars
- How and why to let your kids be awkward

- Protecting innocence and purity
- Showing grace when kids disobey

I listened to this as an audiobook, read by the author. If I was still in my mothering years I definitely would purchase the book to have as a reference.

One thing that the past couple of years have brought to my attention more strongly than ever before is how sheltered a life I lead. This is a blessing in so many ways, but in order to sympathize and empathize with and minister to others, we do need to have an insight into the experiences of others and books can be a way to do that. These are some of the books that have helped me glimpse the experiences of others.

What is a Girl Worth? by Rachael Denhollander. Rachael Denhollander's voice was heard around the world when she spoke out to end the most shocking USA gymnastics scandal in history. The first victim to publicly accuse Larry Nassar, the former USA Gymnastics team doctor who sexually abused hundreds of young athletes, Rachael now reveals her full story. How did Nassar get away with it for so long? How did Rachael and the other survivors finally stop him and bring him to justice? And how can we protect the vulnerable in our own families, churches, and communities? I see the story of Esther so clearly in the life of Rachael, placing her with gifts and calling "for such a time as this".

Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was and Who God has Always Been by Jackie Hill Perry. I listened to this as an audio book read by the author and it gave so much authenticity to her words, far more than if I had just read them on a page. Jackie grew up fatherless and experienced gender confusion. She embraced masculinity and homosexuality with every fiber of her being. She knew that Christians had a lot to say about all of the above. But was she supposed to change herself? How was she supposed to stop loving women, when homosexuality felt more natural to her than

heterosexuality ever could? At age nineteen, Jackie came face-to-face with what it meant to be made new. And not in a church, or through contact with Christians. God broke in and turned her heart toward Him right in her own bedroom in light of His gospel.

Educated is the autobiography of Tara Westover who was seventeen the first time she set foot in a classroom. Born to Mormon survivalists in the mountains of Idaho, she prepared for the end of the world by stockpiling home-canned peaches and sleeping with her "head-for-the-hills bag." In the summer she stewed herbs for her mother, a midwife and healer, and in the winter she salvaged in her father's junkyard. The family was so isolated from mainstream society that there was no one to ensure the children received an education, and no one to intervene when one of Tara's older brothers became abusive. As a way out, Tara began to educate herself, learning enough mathematics and grammar to be admitted to Brigham Young University (birth certificate). Her quest for knowledge would transform her, taking her over oceans and across continents, to Harvard and to Cambridge. Only then she wonder if she'd traveled too far, if there was still a way home. **After reading this book, I had the opportunity to hear Tara Westover speak (via Zoom) and one of her comments struck me, similar to statements of Rosaria Butterfield. It wasn't people who bashed her over the head with facts or logic that got through to her with truth, but those who became her friends and walked along side of her.**

A similar book, Hillbilly Elegy: A memoir of a family and culture in Crisis by JD Vance explores how the author came to terms with his "hillbilly" past, eventually attending Harvard Law School.

Undeclared - Jim Thorpe and the Carlisle Indian School Football Team by Steven Sheinkin "Along with Thorpe's fascinating personal story, Sheinkin offers a thought-provoking narrative about the evolution of football and the development of boarding schools such as the Carlisle Indian School. **Many of you have probably read The White Chief of Cache Creek by Faith Martin and Charles McBurney. It is on my reading list, partly to be able to compare to other Indian Schools of the era.**

This Blessed Earth: A Year in the Life of an American Family Farm by Ted

Genoways. All Iowa reads book

In 2008 our oldest son graduated from Geneva College and by mid-summer had secured a job as a manufacturing engineer at West Liberty Foods, which among other things, is the largest supplier of sliced meats to Subway restaurants, providing the franchise with one million pounds per week. In 2009 The Des Moines Register ran an article implicating West Liberty Foods in a scandal involving the mistreatment of men with disabilities. The processing company was cleared of all wrongdoing, but I continued to follow the story. Several years later, the photo of an iconic blue schoolhouse which I had driven past in visiting the area, caught my eye on the cover of The Boys in the Bunkhouse by Dan Berry at our local library. I will read part of a synopsis of this true story from the Iowa State Historical Society.

The Abilene State School in Texas struck a deal in 1966 to send six developmentally disabled men to a turkey-and-sheep ranch in central Texas, where they could live and learn basic agricultural skills.

Touted as “the magic of simplicity,” the program aimed to deinstitutionalize people with physical and mental disabilities by giving them a job and integrating them into society. The ranch got a deal on cheap labor and the state saved money by privatizing their care.

Over the years, more than 1,000 young men apprenticed in the magic of simplicity, including several dozen who were sent to Atalissa, Iowa, in 1974 by Henry’s Turkey Service through an out-of-state contract labor agreement.

Their day-to-day routine, however, was hardly magical.

Hunkered down in a century-old two-story schoolhouse – a “bunkhouse” – on the outskirts of town, they were roused at 3 a.m. every weekday, fed breakfast and taken to a nearby processing plant where they caught, killed and gutted turkeys.

The men received food and lodging, and a pittance of a wage – the plant was paying Henry’s directly for the labor, and the men were receiving as little as 41 cents an hour. (Henry’s was capitalizing on the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 that let certified employers pay subminimum wages to workers with a disability.)

As the decades passed, the “R-word” took a spot next to the “N-word” in society’s lexicon. The rights of people with developmental disabilities advanced, and a spirit of inclusion emerged.

But society didn’t spend time with the men in Atalissa. They were still hidden away in a bunkhouse, receiving as little as \$65 a month in wages. Meanwhile, the turkey plant paid Henry’s more than \$500,000 for services rendered in 2007 alone.

By 2009, conditions at the bunkhouse had grown worse. Frustrated by a lack of response from several state agencies, a relative of one of the workers contacted a Des Moines Register reporter, who started making calls of his own. One call led to another and, eventually, social workers and investigators descended on the bunkhouse.

Today, the men have moved on from the bunkhouse and the turkey plant. Some stayed in Iowa, others moved back to Texas. But there were no retirement investments or a place to live as they approached their golden years.

In 2014, the city of Atalissa demolished the dilapidated schoolhouse, erasing the ever-present reminder of 35 years of cruelty and neglect.

Again - sometimes it isn't a bad thing to be sheltered from life's cruelties, but as Christians, we need to be aware of some of the brokenness in this world and how God might use us in those situations.

One avenue I have enjoyed to gain insight into other times, cultures and places is historical fiction. These aren't theology books, but stories that can help us understand people and places that we might never otherwise experience.

The Personal Librarian by Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray (Some of you may also like *Carnegie's Maid* by Marie Benedict because of the references in the Pittsburgh area)

In her twenties, Belle da Costa Greene is hired by J. P. Morgan to curate a collection of rare manuscripts, books, and artwork for his newly built Pierpont Morgan Library. Belle becomes a fixture in New York City society and one of the most powerful people in the art and book world, known for her impeccable taste and shrewd negotiating for critical works as she helps create a world-class collection. But Belle has a secret, one she must protect at all costs. She was born not Belle da Costa Greene but Belle Marion Greener. She is the daughter of Richard Greener, the first Black graduate of Harvard and a well-known advocate for equality. Belle's complexion isn't dark because of her alleged Portuguese heritage that lets her pass as white—her complexion is dark because she is African American. *The Personal Librarian* tells the story of an extraordinary woman, famous for her intellect, style, and wit, and shares the lengths she must go to—for the protection of her family and her legacy—to preserve her carefully crafted white identity in the racist world in which she lives.

The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek by KM Richardson The hardscrabble folks of Troublesome Creek have to scrap for everything. Thanks to FDR's Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project, Troublesome's got its very own traveling librarian, Cussy Mary Carter. Cussy's not only a book woman, however, she's also the last of her kind, her skin a shade of blue unlike most anyone else. In the backwoods of Kentucky, the No Coloreds Allowed sign in

the general store applied not only to African-Americans, but to the Blues (Fugates) who carried a recessive gene from far off France that altered the color of their blood. Inspired by the true blue-skinned people of Kentucky and the brave and dedicated Kentucky Pack Horse library service of the 1930s, *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* is a story of raw courage, fierce strength, and one woman's belief that books can carry us anywhere.

Other notable historic fiction that I would recommend include The Children's Blizzard by Melanie Benjamin (referencing many places in and around Omaha Nebraska), and The Sewing Machine by Natalie Fergie (and I would recommend listening to it on audiobook read in the authors native Scottish brogue.)

Ecclesiastes 12:12-13.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.