



Library Lines

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14 BEST BOOKS OF 2014

BY TOM REINKE

At Desiring God I cherish being surrounded by collaborators and online friends who treasure great books, and who eagerly celebrate and share the most noteworthy titles as they come along.

In 2014, delicious non-fiction Christian titles ran off presses like hot donuts rolling off the assembly line at Krispy Kreme. As I narrowed my list of finalists down (to about five dozen!), it dawned on me that I should begin with thanks to the wise and dedicated writers, editors, and publishers who brought us such an excellent offering. Thank you!

The bibliophilic bounty makes choosing my top list difficult (in a fun way). I pulled it off by using my scientifically subjective algorithm of intuition about what books I think (1) serve the widest crowd, (2) offer the most unique insights, (3) and seem to promise the most enduring impact in the years ahead.

Here's my top 14.

1. Tim Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (Dutton). Unique, fresh, and deeply rooted in history — this book is vintage Keller in his most carefully researched and most Reformed self. In part, it's a celebration of the rich tradition of prayer enjoyed by our forefathers. But its greatest strength is the use of Scripture to frame the prayer life (a bulk of the book is about how Scripture is essential to it). When I finished this book, it instantly topped this year's book list. Reformed to the core, practical, comprehensive, God-centered, Christ-focused, and joy-saturated—the book is rich on many levels. (And be sure to read the footnotes, where you'll discover a second book of bonus content!)

2. *ESV Reader's Bible* (Crossway). The biggest book buzz this year belonged to the Kickstarter Bibliotheca Bible, an elegant, handcrafted, multivolume edition of the Bible you want to sit and hold and read and enjoy. Crossway had already planned the release of a Bible that pretty much matched it feature-for-feature, with a superior translation, and packaged in a more affordable and convenient one-volume edition. Remove the section headings and chapter and verse numbers, and you're left with the bare text of Scripture, ready to be read like any book. I

expected that. I was unprepared for how this Bible would change my reading habits, and how I would fall in love with reading the sweeping narratives of Scripture, the Prophets, and the Wisdom literature. Reading Proverbs, for example, I was struck by how individual bits of wisdom are meant to fit into a cohesive plan of lifelong God-fearing obedience. Simple and clean—this Bible displays a winning recipe for innovation.

3. Dane Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Crossway). This book nails the core of what we celebrate at Desiring God. Delighting in God's beauty is the high-octane fuel for the Christian life. And this God-centered delight frames all the other gifts he has given us to enjoy. As Dane writes, "True joy derives not from God and job, family, sex, friends, food, rest, driving, buying a home, reading a book, drinking coffee—but from God in these things . . . Every taste of beauty in this world, from the roar of waterfalls to the chatter of birds to the richness of true friendship to the ecstasy of sexual experience, is a drop from the ocean of divine beauty. Every pleasure is an arrow pointing back to him. Joy is from, and only finally in, God" (79). As you can see, Dane is a realist, and in this book he highlights Edwards's greatest contributions to the church, and critiques his failures, but mostly he just helps average Christians come alive again to God's beauty.

4. Stephen Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking A Pauline Theme* (Eerdmans). This is a magnificently short, clear, and profound book on the precious doctrine of justification. Not only is it deliciously good theology, it's a nearly perfect model of how serious academic theology can be done (and should be done!) in rich prose for the joy and health of the church . . . and in 100 pages.

5. John Piper, *Seeing Beauty and Saying Beautifully: The Power of Poetic Effort in the Work of George Herbert, George Whitefield, and C. S. Lewis* (Crossway). If you are a preacher, public speaker, writer, poet, or songwriter, and you find yourself called by God to creatively

engage culture with the truth of God, this may be the most important book of the year for you. What we say is critically important; but how we say it needs our desperate attention as well. In this book John Piper not only serves as a model of creative writing but also a historian of three men who mastered the feat in history past.

6. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (WJK). Many skilled writers today help us do church right. But no serious theologian gives a more cohesive and compelling vision for the local church than Vanhoozer. A reader has "gotten" Vanhoozer's theology when he or she feels an insatiable urge to gather again with the people of God. While most of what he's written has been aimed at academic audiences, this is his first attempt to bring the cookies down, to serve up his vision of theology in an appetizing way for all the people of God. Looong overdue, but fresh and delicious.

7. Drew Dyck, *Yawning at Tigers: You Can't Tame God, So Stop Trying* (Thomas Nelson). This is a welcome and much-needed reminder of how the hard things of God in the Bible are meant to stir our love for him and mission with him. It's time to stop apologizing for God, and time to humbly worship him as he has revealed himself in the Bible. God is not a kitten, he's a tiger. He's good, but he's not tame. If we choose to live in denial of God as he revealed himself, our worship will weaken, our standards of purity will diminish, our mission will skid to a halt, our message will be hollowed out, and our part in God's global work will become more and more trivial. All that's at stake.

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