

READING

1. Biblical Principles.

- a. We are to weigh, study, and arrange written material with care.
 - (1) **Ec 12:9** 9 Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing, studying, and arranging many proverbs with great care.
- b. We are to seek words of delight and write words of truth.
 - (1) **Ec 12:10** 10 The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.
- c. We are to beware of anything being the words of the wise given by Jesus.
 - (1) **Ec 12:11** 11 The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings. They are given by one Shepherd. 12 My son, beware of anything beyond these.
- d. We are not to weary ourselves with study.
 - (1) **Ec 12:11** 11 Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.
- e. We are to love God with all of our mind.
 - (1) **Mt 22:37** 37 And [Jesus] said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.
- f. In Jesus are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
 - (1) **Col 2:3** 3 ...In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
 - (2) **Eph 4:21** 21 ...Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus....
- g. Only Scripture is God-breathed.
 - (1) **2 Ti 3:16** 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness....

2. General Principles.

- a. Seek to be well-read, not widely read.¹
 - (1) “There have always been literate ignoramuses who have read too widely and not well.”²
 - (2) “The great writers have always been great readers, but that does not mean that they read all the books that, in their day, were listed as the indispensable ones. ...[B]ut what they did read, they read well. Because they had mastered these books, they became peers with their authors. They were entitled to become authorities in their own right. ...[O]ne approaches the ideal of good reading by applying the rules we have described in the reading of a single book, and not by trying to become superficially acquainted with a larger number.”³
 - (3) The primary aim is to read well, not widely. You should not be disappointed if you read no more than a handful of books in a year.⁴

¹ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 11-12.

² Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 11.

³ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 164-65.

⁴ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 338.

- (4) “It is not the reading of many books which is necessary to make a man wise or good, but the well-reading of a few, could he be sure to have the best.”⁵
- b. Recognise the four classes of books.⁶
 - (1) First class: the 99% of books that will not improve your reading.
 - (2) Second class: the 1/1000 books that are worth reading analytically—once.
 - (3) Third class: the 100 books that cannot be exhausted by the very best reading.
 - (4) Fourth class: the ten books you would take if you were marooned on a desert island for the rest of your life.
 - (5) Tips.
 - (a) Use trustworthy reading lists to determine the second and third class books.
 - (b) “Since you are mortal and your time limited, and the number of ‘worthwhile’ books...greatly exceeds your reading capacity, read the best whenever you can find it, and don’t waste time—or money—on inferior and second-rate works. Seek out and get and read the best, even if they are more expensive or more challenging. ...The best guide is to ask people who read a lot. You will soon discover whose opinion is worthwhile and whose isn’t. Seek to read the best two or three books on a subject; read them closely, and you will be well-informed on the subject they cover.”⁷
- c. Read every book according to its merits.⁸
 - (1) “...[S]ome books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and a few to be chewed and digested.”⁹
 - (2) We can learn only from our “betters.”¹⁰
- d. Take part in the great conversation.
 - (1) “Read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider.”¹¹
 - (2) “...[T]he great books are involved in a prolonged conversation. The great authors were great readers, and one way to understand them is to read the books they read.”¹²
 - (3) “The study of doctrine should not only help us understand the truth but it should also help us to express it in the very best and clearest way because we have thought about it carefully. Looking over the shoulders of the ancients and listening in on their discussions are of great help in doing this.”¹³

⁵ Richard Baxter.

⁶ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 332-36.

⁷ Doug Kutilek.

⁸ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 165.

⁹ Francis Bacon.

¹⁰ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 10.

¹¹ Francis Bacon.

¹² Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 170-71.

¹³ Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, 72.

Levels of Reading

3. Level One: Elementary Reading.

4. Level Two: Inspectional Reading.

- a. Stage one: Systematic skimming.
 - (1) Look at the title page and the book's preface.
 - (2) Study the table of contents.
 - (3) Check the index.
 - (4) Read the publisher's blurb.
 - (5) Look at the chapters that seem pivotal to its argument.
 - (6) Turn the pages, dipping in here and there.
 - (7) Read the last two or three pages of the book.
 - (8) Note: Spend no more than a few minutes, at most an hour.
- b. Stage two: Superficial reading.
 - (1) Read the book through without stopping to look up or ponder the things you do not understand. Race through even the hardest book.
 - (2) Place your thumb and first two fingers together (or hold a pen). Sweep this "pointer" across the type in Z motion down the page.
 - (3) Don't stop to underline, highlight, or make notes! Place simple marks in the margin. Underline only in post-view.
- c. Stage three: Post-viewing.
 - (1) Reread first and last paragraphs. Reread all heading, summaries and charts.
 - (2) Reread all sections marked in the margin. Highlight sections still considered significant.
 - (3) Take notes on the book's structure.
- d. Notes.
 - (1) The aim of inspectional reading is to get the most out of a book in a given time.
 - (2) Think of yourself as a detective looking for clues to a book's general theme.
 - (3) Skim to discover whether the book is worth reading carefully.

5. Level Three: Analytical Reading.

- a. Stage one: Find out what the book is about.
 - (1) Make the book your own.
 - (a) Underline.
 - (b) Place vertical lines at the margin.
 - (c) Place a star, asterisk, or other doodad in the margin for the 5-10 most important statements in the book.
 - (d) Place numbers in the margin.
 - (e) Place numbers of other pages in the margin.
 - (f) Circle key words and phrases.
 - (g) Write in the margin or at the top or bottom of the page.
 - (h) Make a personal index on the back endpapers.
 - (i) Outline the book on the front endpapers.
 - (2) Take notes on the book's concepts.

- (3) Classify the book according to kind and subject matter. Know what kind of book you are reading.
 - (a) Fiction.
 - (b) Non-fiction
 - 1) Theoretical.
 - a) History.
 - b) Science and mathematics.
 - c) Philosophy.
 - 2) Practical.
- (4) State what the whole book is about with the utmost brevity.
 - (a) The summary is to be brief, accurate, and comprehensive.
- (5) Enumerate its major parts in their order and relation, and outline these parts as you have outlined the whole.
 - (a) “The most readable book is an architectural achievement on the part of the author.”¹⁴
- (6) Define the problem or problems the author has tried to solve.
 - (a) State the main question that the book tries to answer and state the subordinate questions. Put the questions in an intelligible order.
- (7) Answer these questions precisely:
 - (a) What is the book about as a whole?
 - (b) What is being said in detail, and how?
 - (c) Is the book true, in whole or part?
 - (d) What of it?
- b. Stage two: Interpret the book’s contents.
 - (1) Come to terms with the author by interpreting his key words.
 - (a) “If you do not understand the passage, it is probably because you do not know the way the author is using certain words.”¹⁵
 - (b) Every field of knowledge has its own technical vocabulary, which must be discovered by the reader.¹⁶
 - (c) You have to discover the meaning of a word you do not understand by using the meanings of all the other words in the context you do understand. The surrounding words are the context for the words to be interpreted.¹⁷
 - (2) Grasp the author’s leading propositions by dealing with his most important sentences.
 - (a) The important sentences are the ones that express the judgments on which the writer’s whole argument rests.¹⁸

¹⁴ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 77.

¹⁵ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 102.

¹⁶ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 104.

¹⁷ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 106-07.

¹⁸ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 120.

- (b) The heart of an author's communication lies in the major affirmations and denials he or she is making, and the reasons he or she gives for doing so.¹⁹
- (3) Know the author's arguments, by finding them in, or constructing them out of, sequences of sentences.
- (4) Determine which problems the author has solved, and which he or she has not.
- c. Stage three: Criticise the book.
 - (1) You must be able to say, with reasonable certainty, "I understand," before you can say, "I agree," or "I disagree," or "I suspend judgment."
 - (a) "If you are reading a good book, you ought to hesitate before you say, 'I understand.'"²⁰
 - (b) "In reading good books, failure to understand is usually the reader's fault."²¹
 - (c) Ask yourself whether you can give a concrete example of a point you feel you understand.²²
 - (2) When you disagree, do so reasonably and not contentiously.
 - (a) Learning the truth is what matters, not winning the argument.²³
 - (3) Demonstrate you recognise the difference between knowledge and mere personal opinion by presenting good reasons for any critical judgment you make.²⁴
 - (a) Knowledge consists in those opinions that can be defended. Opinion is unsupported judgment.²⁵
 - (b) Acknowledge the emotions you bring to a dispute.²⁶
 - (c) Make your own assumptions explicit.²⁷
 - (d) Attempt at impartiality. Try to take the other fellow's point of view.
 - (4) Special criteria for points of criticism are:
 - (a) Show the author is uninformed.
 - (b) Show the author is misinformed.
 - (c) Show the author is illogical.
 - (d) Show the the author's analysis or account is incomplete.
- d. Notes.
 - (1) Analytical reading is the most complete reading possible given unlimited time.
 - (2) It is intensely active. The reader works at it until the book becomes his own.

6. Level Four: Syntopical Reading.

¹⁹ Mortimer J. Adler and and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 120.

²⁰ Mortimer J. Adler and and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 143.

²¹ Mortimer J. Adler and and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 143.

²² Mortimer J. Adler and and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 169.

²³ Mortimer J. Adler and and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 145.

²⁴ Mortimer J. Adler and and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 148.

²⁵ Mortimer J. Adler and and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 149.

²⁶ Mortimer J. Adler and and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 152.

²⁷ Mortimer J. Adler and and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 153.

- a. Rules.
 - (1) Find the relevant passages.
 - (2) Take notes about the shape of the discussion.
 - (3) Bring the authors to terms.
 - (4) Get the questions clear.
 - (5) Define the issues.
 - (6) Analyse the discussion.
- b. Notes.
 - (1) Syntopical reading is reading many books and placing them in relation to one another and to a subject about which they revolve.
 - (2) It is your concerns that are primarily to be served, not the books you read.
 - (3) “When you read a book analytically, you put yourself in a relation to it of disciple to master. When you read synoptically you must be the master of the situation.”²⁸
 - (4) Unless you know what books to read, you cannot read synoptically.²⁹

Other Helps

7. Speed Reading.

- a. Tips.
 - (1) Get ready to read. Eliminate all distractions.
 - (2) Use a clock. Take breaks.
 - (3) Ensure comfortable lighting and good posture.
 - (4) Establish rhythmical movement across the page. Try listening to classical music.
 - (5) Float across the top of the words.
 - (6) Read by phrases. Move your eyes from phrase to phrase.
 - (7) Don't stop to underline, highlight, or make notes! Place simple marks in the margin. Underline only in post-view.
 - (8) Have a positive attitude toward the material. Read with a questioning mind.
 - (9) Read for main ideas. The details will naturally fall in place.
 - (10) Ponder the material. Consider its implications. Make it part of you and share it with someone else.

8. Aids to Reading.

- a. Relevant experiences.
- b. Other books.
- c. Commentaries and abstracts.
 - (1) Don't read a commentary until after you have read the book.³⁰
- d. Reference books.
 - (1) Know where to find out what you want to know.
 - (2) There is an art of reading reference books.
- e. Notes.

²⁸ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 309.

²⁹ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 320.

³⁰ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 172.

- (1) It is best to do all you can by yourself before seeking outside help.

9. Approaches to Various Types of Books.

- a. Practical books.
- b. Imaginative literature.
 - (1) Stories.
 - (a) There are only a small number of plots in the world.³¹
 - (2) Plays.
 - (3) Poems.
- c. History.
- d. Science and maths.
- e. Philosophy.
 - (1) “The philosopher, like the poet, appeals to the common experience of mankind.”³²
- f. Social science.

³¹ Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 79.

³² Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*, 168.

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