

# Books Worth While

by J.R. Miller

---

*The sermon emphasizes the importance of wise discrimination in reading and selecting books that will have a lasting impact on our lives.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 1:7, Proverbs 4:23, Ecclesiastes 12:12, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 15:33, Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3:2, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, James 1:5

**Topics:** "Discernment in Reading", "The Value of Literature"

---

## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of discerning what we read, arguing that not all books are beneficial or worthy of our time. He warns against the dangers of reading empty novels that provide no lasting value and can diminish our mental faculties. Miller encourages readers to seek out books that inspire, educate, and elevate our character, rather than those that merely entertain. He advocates for a careful selection of literature, urging young people to prioritize classic works that have stood the test of time over transient popular titles. Ultimately, he reminds us that the right books can enrich our lives and shape our ideals.

---

## Transcript

Much is said in commendation of books. But, as in other matters, there is need for wise discrimination in what one reads. Not all books are worth reading. There are many that are utterly empty of anything that is noble or worthy. One might read them continually all one's life -- and yet be no wiser and no better. A hundred of them do not contain a dozen sentences that it is worth while to keep in one's memory, or that can be of any help or cheer or strength in one's life. This is true of many novels. They may excite a passing interest or emotion as they are read -- but when they have been laid down, they have left in the life no trace of beauty, no inspiration, no visions of loveliness, no impulses toward higher things, no enrichment. The best that can be said of such books, is that they are harmless. They could not be indicted for bad moral quality. They leave no debris of vile rubbish behind. Yet the effect of such reading is really harmful. It vitiates the mental appetite, and destroys the taste for anything solid or substantial. It enfeebles the power of attention, thought, memory, so that the mind is less able to grapple with important subjects.

Then there are books which are most pernicious in their influence. There are all grades and degrees of evil in this class. Some of them carry a subtle poison in their atmosphere which even seems delicious to those who breathe it. We need to keep most careful watch over our hearts, so that nothing ever shall tarnish their purity. Any corrupt thought, dallied with even for a moment, leaves a stain upon the mind which may never be effaced.

If we would keep the tender joy of our heart experiences unbroken, we must hold rigid watch over our reading, conscientiously excluding not only whatever is obviously impure -- but all in which lurks even a suggestion of evil.

A writer says: "Never read a book that is not worth reading for some end beyond the short-lived pleasure of a little excitement. A book is mainly to be judged by the gold dust which it leaves in the mind, as it sweeps like a river through its channel." Here is a word also from Richter: "The wish falls often warm upon my heart that I may learn nothing here that I cannot continue in the other world, that I may do nothing here but deeds that will bear fruit in Heaven."

When we think of the influence which our reading has upon our lives, we see at once the importance of selecting only books that are worth while. At the best, none of us can read one book in a thousand of those which are within our reach. Manifestly this one book ought, then, to be the best in all the thousand.

Yet many people make no choice whatever. They take the "last novel," regardless of its character. Many books are made only to sell. They are written, set up in type, printed, illustrated, bound, decorated -- all for money. There was no high motive in the writer, no thought of doing good, of starting a noble impulse in some life, of adding to the treasure of the world's knowledge or joy. They were made simply to sell. So it comes to pass that every year, a flood of really worthless publications is poured over the country. People go into ecstasies over trivial works which please or excite them a day, and are then old and forgotten; while books every way admirable are passed by unnoticed.

Young people should read tried and proved books. Many who have not the courage to confess ignorance of the last novel, regard it as no shame to be utterly ignorant of the classics. It is quite safe to say that not one person in a hundred now reads Milton's Paradise Lost, and that not one in a thousand has ever read a translation of Homer's Iliad. With all our glorifying of Shakespeare, how many really read even his great masterpieces? The Pilgrim's Progress is known to the masses of the people, only from being referred to so often. Very few read it. We should get courage to remain ignorant rather, of the mass of ephemeral books -- than to miss reading the great masters in poetry, science, history, religion, and fiction.

No book is really worth reading, which does not either impart valuable knowledge, or set before us some ideal of beauty, strength, or nobility of character. The ancients were accustomed to place the statues of their distinguished ancestors about their homes, that their children, by continually seeing them, might be stimulated to emulate their noble qualities. Noble lives embalmed in printed volumes have a wondrous power to kindle the hearts of the young, for, as a writer says, "A good book holds as in a vial, the purest efficacy and instruction of the living intellect that bred it." There are enough great books to occupy us during all our short and busy years. If we are wise, we will resolutely avoid all but the richest and the best.

"We need to be reminded every day," writes one, "how many are the books of unapproachable glory, which, with all our eagerness after reading, we have never taken in our hand. It will astonish most of us to find how much of our industry is given to the books which leave no mark -- how we rake in the litter of the printing press, while a crown of gold and rubies is offered us in vain."

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jr-miller/books-worth-while/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**