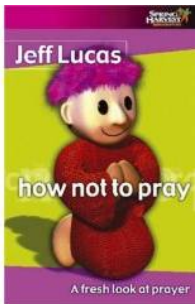


Prayer



How Not to Pray by Jeff Lucas *A gentle stroll*

The author of this book is extremely down-to-earth and honest, not pretending to be any better than the rest of us when it comes to prayer. What he writes is realistic but at the same time doesn't let us get away with any excuses!

This book is great for those who like their reading material in short, snappy paragraphs - if you're looking for a deep theological exposition on prayer then this isn't for you!

I thought the title was a bit misleading. I was envisaging a book of practical tips along the lines of 'top 10 mistakes made when praying and how to rectify them', whereas it comes more from the angle of why we often don't pray as effectively as we could.

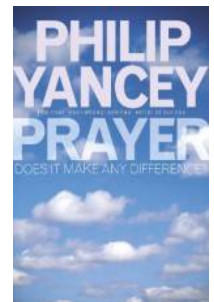
I found it took a while to get going but the parts where he drew out sections of the Lord's prayer, in order for us to understand more about what we're praying and Who we're praying to, were helpful.

A short book covering many points in easy-to-manage chunks, sprinkled with the usual great humour.

Prayer - Does It Make Any Difference? by Philip Yancey *A day's hike - requiring a bit more effort and stamina!*

Have you ever honestly asked the question - does prayer make any difference? Then this is a book for you! Yancey addresses the questions that many of us fear to articulate even to ourselves.

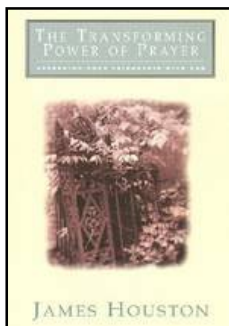
If you're looking for a "how to" prayer manual then this isn't really it. Instead Yancey writes a sensitive, challenging and deeply thoughtful book asking such questions as why pray? What difference does it make? Does prayer change God? Unanswered prayer - whose fault?



Does this book help me in my prayer life? Yes! It reminds me: that God is God - that ultimately there is still mystery at the heart of prayer. That God is good - he loves me and loves to hear my prayers. That my Father already knows everything about me - so I strive for complete honesty before him.

First and foremost I learn that "Prayer is keeping company with God", which although some may consider self-evident, was for me, transformational.

[Julie Cubitt]



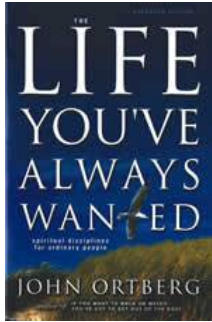
The Transforming Power of Prayer: Deepening Your Friendship with God by James Houston *Mountaineering - tough going but well worth the effort*

'Prayer is not so much getting things or changing things but about changing ourselves!' 'By prayer we are not changing history but getting our selves lined up with the God of history!' This is what James Houston means when he calls prayer a 'Transforming Friendship'.

Using this model Houston examines difficulties in prayer, biblical teaching about prayer, the experience of prayer throughout the ages and the rewards of a deepening friendship with Jesus. I am currently working my way through this book and although it is not an easy read it is certainly a rewarding one. It's a model of prayer that I find both helpful and liberating and a book that can help us experience the Transforming Friendship with Jesus that we all long for.

[Phil Phillips]

Spiritual Disciplines



The Life You've Always Wanted by John Ortberg *A gentle stroll*

I found this book very readable, one that I actually read to the end! It is written with clarity and humour, with anecdotes from personal experience. I felt challenged and inspired towards improving my spiritual growth. It would be an ideal book to read and discuss as part of a group. Ortberg defines spiritual growth as a continual transformation, which requires an attitude of steady training, rather than trying hard. The spiritual disciplines he discusses are the means by which we train ourselves to grow. He finishes the book by talking about “the life I always wanted” as being a well ordered heart, a much greater achievement than merely a well balanced life.

[Annette White]

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

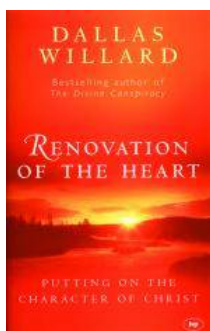
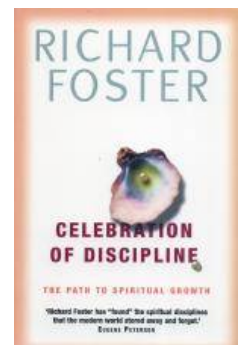
A day's hike - requiring a bit more effort and stamina!

Some books that I've read make the claim that “you will never be the same after you read this book”. Such books rarely register on my theological Richter scale. “Celebration” thankfully does not make this claim BUT if one were to put it into practice the various spiritual disciplines that are covered in great detail and from a writer who HAS put them into practice, then change would be inevitable.

For many people with a very activist approach to their Christian faith, the book will be a challenge. It may even show a way of living not thought about previously. The book claims that the “disciplines” can be lived out by all Christians irrespective of their academic ability. This is no doubt true but I think those who are not already “book” people may find it a hard read.

Some books are often an even better read the second time around. “Celebration of Discipline” would be one of those and is as near to a classic as you can get with a book only 25 years old.

[David Morey]



Renovation of the Heart by Dallas Willard

Mountaineering - tough going but well worth the effort!

This book is meaty, but well worth reading; it is full of insights into our 21st century culture. The author notes that many Christians today face a “constant inward battle with their desires and the constant outward demands of the religious culture”, which leaves no time or space for what really matters - being made more like Jesus on the inside. I agree with his diagnosis. He looks at our thoughts, feelings, choices, soul, body and relationships, and gives practical advice on how to change. If we let God renovate our hearts, he can bring light and hope to our world through us.

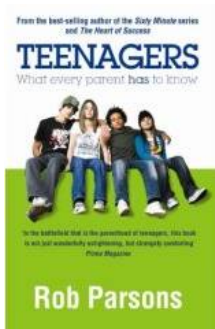
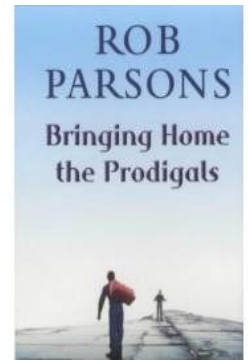
[Pippa Doxat Pratt]

Bringing Home the Prodigals by Rob Parsons

A gentle stroll

I found Rob Parsons' book very encouraging when I first read it after attending a 'Care for the Family' event. The short chapters with an informal prayer at the end of each and its gracious direction to those of us within 'the Church family' to be tolerant of differences among each other and to remember that people "watch the way we deal with each other and draw from that a view of how God deals with us". After reading it I determined to keep on praying and remember that God, my perfect Father, "has trouble with His children too".

[Bridget Alway]



Teenagers - What Every Parent Has to Know by Rob Parsons

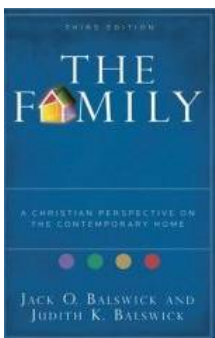
A day's hike - requiring a bit more effort and stamina!

This is a very inspiring book dealing with lots of subjects that teenagers have to cope with and that as parents we worry ourselves silly about handling. This book leads us through anecdotal experiences, amusing but to the point.

Negotiating the battlefield of the teens can be very traumatic. This book shows parents how to build a sense of value in their teens and how to support them by applying a more positive response.

Two quotes that this book comes out within the last chapter, are from two teenagers who had shown wisdom beyond their years: "...parent's know a lot more than teenagers - talking through with them is a help. It's like counselling, but cheaper". And the second quote..."Relax. Remove Pressure. Have patience. Ask questions. Show you are there for them. Love. Love. Love" I wish this book had been around when mine were all teens!

[Kim Tyler]



The Family by Jack and Judith Balswick

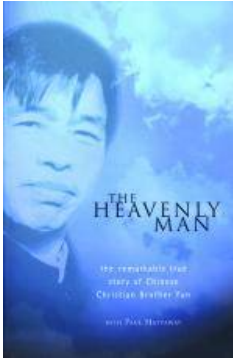
Mountaineering - tough going but well worth the effort

This established academic text is written by a husband and wife team, both senior professors at Fuller Theological Seminary, who are experienced writers and speakers. They draw on Biblical theology, social science and clinical literature, and personal experience of more than 45 years of marriage, to give a Christian view of the family.

It is very well written and easy to read but is unlikely to be read from cover to cover except by those with a special interest such as counsellors and pastors, or those delivering parenting or marriage preparation courses, for whom it will provide theoretical underpinning and a comprehensive reference resource.

[Andrew Fordyce]

Biographies



The Heavenly Man - The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun

In 1976 the Cultural Revolution was at its height in China. The Christian faith was banned and all literature destroyed. Many Christians were exiled, beaten or murdered. In the midst of this turmoil a young man found faith and began an incredible journey with God. Brother Yun tells his own story along with several other people who witnessed this remarkable story of Christian faith in China during the reign of Chairman Mao and up to the present day.

Written in a straightforward and uncomplicated style it is both challenging and uplifting, but not always comfortable. Readers are drawn into a world of violent opposition, visions and miraculous events which may seem a far cry from Western believers' experience.

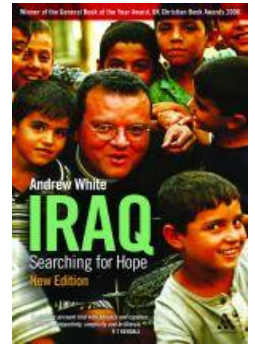
[Ros Morrison]

Iraq: Searching for Hope by Canon Andrew White

To many, 'Iraq' is a four letter word. To Canon Andrew White it is the place he loves to be above all others. It is the place where he sees God's glory in an amazing and tangible way. What was life like under Saddam? What is it really like now? Discover the pain, suffering and hardship of a vibrant church in the heart of Baghdad. Feel the love that exudes from this honest, brave and obedient servant of God.

Gain an insight into the complexity of religious and political reconciliation in the Middle East and be amazed that faith can remain strong in desperate circumstances.

[Mary Taylor]



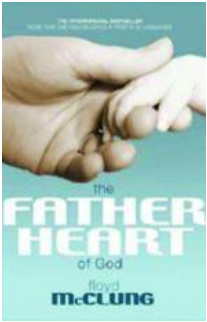
Baroness Cox - Eyewitness to a Broken World by Lela Gilbert

Baroness Cox is an amazing woman who is very brave and has seen some of the world's sufferings and the persecution of Christians. Sudanese Christians are dying of hunger and starvation. Medical aid and food are available, but because of their faith, if they apply to the authorities they have to become Muslims.

Chapters include: "Martyrs and Miracles in Indonesia" (children are grabbed from the streets in Burma and forced in to an Army) and "Nigeria will you tell the World?" Baroness Cox is doing just that and is speaking out in the House of Lords and other places. If you want to know what is going on in the world, this is the book to read. I could not put it down!

[Mary Metherral!]

The Father Heart of God



The Father Heart of God by Floyd McClung
A gentle stroll

McClung has spent his life living out the Gospel - reaching out to hurting people all over the world - including many for whom the word Father brings back terrible memories of rejection, pain and hate. He sees them as 'spiritual orphans'.

The first part of the book explains how God is a perfect Father. The second part deals with how we should respond. This is where the book really came alive for me. McClung shows how, once convinced of God's love, it is possible for 'spiritual orphans' to achieve healing and even go on to 'Father' others.

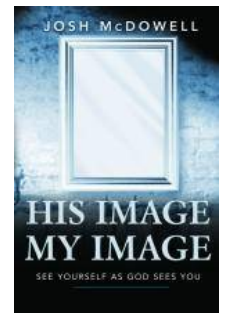
The last book was about personal growth. This one is about practising that in real life.

[Anne Haines-Nutt]

His Image, My Image by Josh McDowell
A day's hike - requiring a bit more effort and stamina!

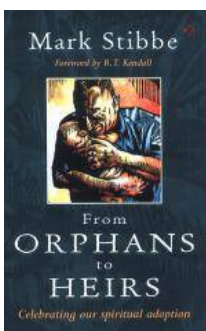
The subtitle says it all really, 'see yourself as God sees you'. But how does God see you? This book goes some way to answering this question.

Don't let the American bias put you off. Through a thoroughly Bible based dissection past image perceptions can be corrected, altered even transformed. But I think the biggest advances will be gained if the reader is ruthlessly and sometimes painfully honest with themselves. I found some parts difficult but only for those same reasons.



If that's put you off, don't be. To see yourself as God sees you, with unconditional love, is a massive plus. Recommended!

[Paul Eaton]



From Orphans to Heirs by Mark Stibbe
A day's hike - requiring a bit more effort and stamina

This is a book written with passion by a man who has experienced unconditional love from adoptive parents and has a profound desire to see others adopted into God's family through the grace of Jesus Christ and power of the Holy Spirit. The fundamental premise is the lack of attention given to one of ten doctrines that the writer sees as major planks of Christian Theology. Concern is fervently expressed that many fail to grasp the real meaning of being adopted into God's family - a doctrine that Dr Stibbe considers lost.

Initially the argument is developed almost to the point of eclipsing other Christian doctrine. However, as the book proceeds, the writer's views become balanced and a wonderful picture of the intimate relationship available to us with God our father is revealed. There is much to challenge us and compel us to study the scripture passages quoted. Some interpretations we will disagree with, others may deepen our faith and many will form the basis for debate.

The chapter which takes a fresh look at the tension between law and grace is stimulating. A quotation from Charles Spurgeon summarised for me precisely how our relationship with the Trinity can and should be. Another chapter deals with our approach to the problems of deception, rejection, legalism, fear, unforgiveness, shame and addiction in the light of our relationship with the Father. A stimulating book that seeks to lead us into a deeper relationship with our God and Father.

[Mike John]

...to be a Pilgrim



A Pilgrims Progress by John Bunyan

A day's hike - requiring a bit more effort and stamina

I love the Olympic and the Para-Olympic Games, marvelling at the endeavours of each competitor to realise their dreams. The analogy of sport was not lost to Paul as he wrote about keeping one's sight upon the target of reaching heaven. John Bunyan also used a good allegory in his "A Pilgrim's Progress" to remind his readers to keep focussed on this ultimate goal. In his story I found it easy to travel with Christian, during his quest, and was struck by the following, perhaps blatantly obvious, thoughts:

- i. That everyone's life-journey is unique.
- ii. That there are many different obstacles that can disrupt our journey,
- iii. That God's grace, protection and forgiveness are always present.

Pilgrim's progress' is certainly an enjoyable parable, and one that should get you questioning whether you are on the 'right track'. Do try though to get a modern-day version of the tale, as it's easier to read.

[Martin Dean]

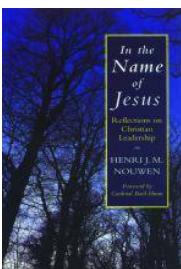
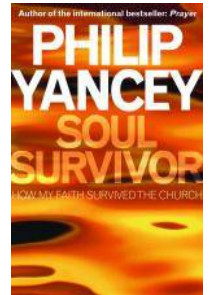
Soul Survivor by Philip Yancey

A day's hike - requiring a bit more effort and stamina

Philip Yancey has spent most of his life trying to recover from the damaging effects his childhood church and Bible College had on his faith, Yancey has managed to tap into the experiences of twelve prominent people such as Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Chesterton to help heal his faith.

Having held the naive idea that great Christians are all "good, perfect" people it is refreshing to read in Yancey's book how these 12 individuals struggle with many Christian issues just as we do and in many cases they are far from "perfect".

[Elaine Britt]



In the Name of Jesus by Henri Nouwen

A gentle stroll

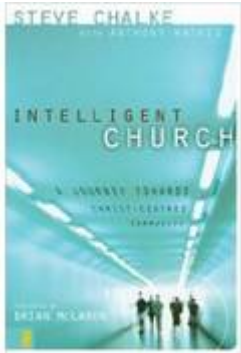
This is a short book in large print but with some powerful and challenging ideas. Henri Nouwen is a beloved author best known for "The Wounded Healer".

After twenty years as a teacher in pastoral psychology, theology, and Christian spirituality, he was confronted with the quality of his relationship to God and responded to the call, 'go and live among the poor in spirit and they will heal you' by joining a community of people with learning difficulties. It was a hard and painful move, but provided thoughts on Christian leadership. Being unable to use his skills and expertise to obtain affection and affirmation was enlightening, forcing him to discover his true identity. He concluded that the Christian leader is one who offers nothing but his own vulnerable self, open to give and receive love.

The book has many attractions and is a reminder of the basis of our walk with Jesus; the call to contemplative prayer and mysticism is not to be undertaken lightly.

[Michael Brown]

Transforming Community



Intelligent Church by Steve Chalke

How can the church connect a biblical understanding of God with 21st century culture? Steve Chalke answers this question in a book which is dynamic and purposeful. He begins chapters by discussing an area of theology, such as the incarnation or the trinity. He then explains how an intelligent church should embody characteristics which stem from these concepts, such as diversity, honesty or inclusiveness. At the end of each chapter is a 'Yes but How' section which gives suggestions about how these ideas can be applied practically. This book is insightful and inspiring, and I would recommend it as a brilliant way to think about the relevance and purpose of the church in today's world.

[Simon Wardle]

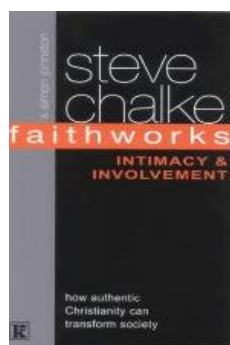
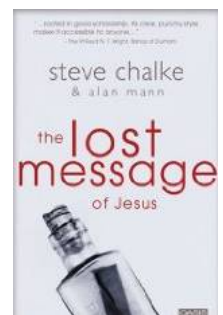
The Lost Message of Jesus by Steve Chalke and Alan Mann

At the heart of this book is the message of hope the Church can offer the world. The message that God's Kingdom is here, that it's open to absolutely everyone through Jesus and that it's good.

The book explores how Jesus' life exemplified His message of hope that we need to both grasp for ourselves and hold out to others. Not a message of judgement, criticism, fear and pressure to conform but a message that speaks of shalom - *"contentment, health, justice, liberation, fulfilment, freedom and hope, the equipping of a person so they can cope with life's sufferings and sorrows while basking in the beauty and the joy that it brings."*

The book raised some uncomfortable questions for me - about how effectively I communicate this message, about my own feelings towards the marginalised in my community, about how much people would need to conform in order to fit into church and about how there can only be two directions of travel in my discipleship journey - towards Jesus or away from Him.

[Julie Cubitt]



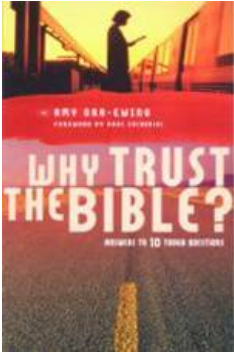
Faithworks - Intimacy and Involvement by Steve Chalke

This book is about how Christian faith should be involved in the community and society nowadays. This is explained with reference to Old and New Testaments in the Bible.

Basically, these days it is easy to become either isolated from culture or seduced by it. Either way genuine Christian faith or spirituality is lost. Thus this book reminds us, with the examples of Jesus, what a real faith is, how we should live by faith and how we can put it into practice in the community we are living in.

[Alex Kwan]

The Bible



Why Trust the Bible by Amy Orr Ewing

This Book was short listed for the 2006 UK Christian Book Awards.

By the time she was six, Amy Orr-Ewing had read the Bible from cover to cover. She went on to study it in great depth and in this book she defends the Bible and compares it to the holy books of other religions.

She challenges preconceptions about the Bible and isn't afraid to address controversial issues, like homosexuality, warfare and the role of women.

The book gives clear answers to the questions people ask today about the Bible and reminds us that we have a loving God who longs for us to know Him more.

[Pippa Doxat-Pratt]

The Bible Jesus Read by Philip Yancey

“... the Old Testament - A set of writings as mystifying, infuriating, and strangely satisfying as life itself.”

“There is, in a word, nothing comfortable about the Bible - until we manage to get so used to it that we make it comfortable for ourselves Have we ceased to question the book, and be questioned by it? Have we ceased to fight it? Then perhaps our reading is no longer serious.”

It is arguable that our reading of the Bible should never be less than serious for our knowledge of God and the precious salvation offered by His Son depends upon it.

Yancey asks, “Is the Old Testament worth the effort?”

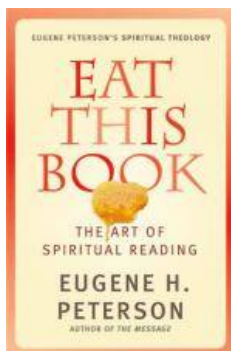
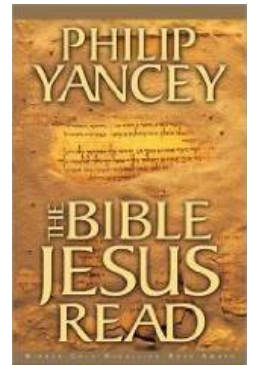
He then proceeds to answer his own question in the succeeding chapters - culminating in “Advance echoes of a final answer.”

Our keeping of covenant promises has always been inadequate - and always will be so, we are predestined to failure and the Old Testament underscores this, but also brings up the faint shadow on our radar screen of an answer.

There is only one answer and we have it in the palm of our hands, given amongst unbelievable cruelty and pain and recorded blow by blow so that if we look for it we can find this answer and through it, find ourselves.

Please read this book, it is urgent and unequivocal.

[Geoff Mitchell]



Eat This Book by Eugene Peterson

As you might expect, the author is passionate about Bible reading.

Taking his title from various Scriptures (notably John 6: 4-8 and Revelation 10:9-10) he decries the widespread modern practice of taking personal experience as the authority for living, instead of the Word of God. But reading is not enough. We may read for interest, analysis, information, inspiration, learning. God's Word, however, is not simply text: it is God revealing himself - and much of that through metaphor.

So 'eating' is likened to a dog's action with a bone: gnawing, sucking, licking, worrying, loving, burying. Through hearing, meditation ('the prayerful employ of imagination') prayer and contemplation ('living it out in the real world') we, and the consumed Word, are to become inseparable; the text in our muscles, bones, lungs and heart; each a part of the other. Inevitably, Eat This Book is not a quick read.

[Merrilyn Williams]