Reading the Spiritual Classics: The Example of John Wesley and the Imitation of Christ

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[0:00] It's going to be on, what's his name, Thomas at Kempis, is it not? Yes, well, we look forward to it. Thank you. Thomas at Kempis, here he goes.

Thank you so much, Jim. I really feel I should be giving an introduction and letting Jim give this talk. But it's good to be back with you again at Learners' Exchange. I always feel like I'm with the godly in the land when I get to be with you, the kind of chosen, the faithful.

What I wanted to talk to you about a little bit this morning is about reading the classics. And I'm going to use John Wesley as an example, but what it means to kind of read the classics, the classics of Christian devotion down through the centuries.

And I remember when I graduated from Bible college many years ago and went to work for Youth for Christ. I was delighted to work for Youth for Christ.

We were starting a camp, Camp Cedarwood in Manitoba for junior hires, for high schoolers. And, you know, it's the kind of work you throw yourself into. It takes so much energy.

[1:09] You're working night and day. And the mission was one I believed in. We wanted to reach unchurched teenagers in Winnipeg with the gospel. I really believed in the ministry.

But, you know, what happens often, you're young, you're idealistic, you throw yourself into it, and before long you burn out, you know, and you need to learn what it means to be in there for the long haul.

And I remember a dear friend of mine, he's passed away, he's now with the Lord, Barth Campbell was our youth pastor. He was an unusual youth pastor in the sense that I went in one morning to his office in Winnipeg, and I noticed that he was having his devotions, and he wasn't reading, you know, from the One Minute Bible or from the Ideas book of games for youth groups, but he was reading Karl Barth in German.

And Barth became a very dear friend. And we used to meet every Thursday morning for breakfast and read the classics together. And he introduced me to some of the classics of Christian spirituality down through the years.

And we read Thomas the Campus together. We also read some of the works by Henri Nouwen, and we read various sort of great books of Christian devotion.

[2:25] And just quietly, patiently, Barth by my side, a good cup of coffee Thursday mornings, it felt like it helped to kind of put my soul back together. And I don't think I would be in ministry or I'd be standing here today if it wasn't for those Thursday morning breakfasts with my dear friend Barth Campbell.

So reading the classics was important to me as a young person in my 20s, beginning in Christian ministry and trying to look for sources where you can go deep spiritually and put your roots down spiritually.

I'm working on a book project right now on early evangelical devotion. And in the age of John Wesley, you know, 300 years ago, when the evangelical movement as a movement of renewal swept not just England, but the whole North Atlantic world, this renewal movement.

And I've been fascinated with this movement and been doing a lot of research in this period. Jim Houston, I started, Jim Packer's done so much work on the Puritans, and I'm sort of working one century later in this evangelical movement.

And the book project, one chapter of it, some of which I'll share with you this morning, is really just about what were the sources of the movement. So as revival and renewal broke out across the North Atlantic, I just began with a simple question is the leaders of the movement, what were they reading?

[3:44] What was on their reading list? And that led me to kind of probe different sources and to read, as it were, over their shoulder.

So I'm going to read to you just little bits of the chapter and then comment on it. And feel free to interrupt and ask questions. My students do, Regents, so you should feel free to interrupt all you want.

So modern evangelicalism as a way of being a Christian emerges at a particular time and in a particular place. It emerges with the modern world in the 17th and 18th centuries, in the North Atlantic region with particular intensity and durability in the Anglosphere, the English-speaking world.

And in a previous chapter, I tried to talk about the novelty of the movement, the ways it's quite modern, addresses people as modern women and men. And in this chapter, I'm looking at some of the antiquity and the roots of the movement.

For all that evangelical devotion appears as something modern, it was also conservative and traditional in its approach to Christian teaching. And so what were they reading when this movement coalesced?

[4:57] What were they reading? Any movement in history arises out of prior influences. There's a kind of genealogical fallacy if we ignore sources and just think things spring de novo out of nothing.

Certainly there was an appreciation for the Bible, a desire to form one's life directly on the scriptures that was foundational to the movement and has been for evangelicals since then. But there can sometimes be an ahistorical view of what it means to be an evangelical, thinking I'm simply following Jesus and reading the Bible and I'm in direct continuity with the apostles.

This, what you might call a primitivist frame of mind, produced in the 19th century a whole host of restorationist groups that thrived on the American frontier and beyond. And you see something of this among evangelicals from the beginning and it's a good impulse.

Wesley often described himself as homo unius libri, a man of one book. He's a man of the Bible, pure and simple. But when he says that, you have to be careful in how you listen to that because it's not like he didn't read any other book.

He just means comparatively, I'm a Bible Christian, I believe the Bible and I stake my life and I put my roots down here in scripture. So he was affirming the unique authority of scripture, the central place of scripture in the Christian life.

[6:21] But having said that, few men in the 18th century were more well-read and widely read than John Wesley. When he described the distinctive emphases of this new evangelical movement, he says it's a form of Christian living that is the religion of the primitive church and of the whole church in the purest ages.

So he's pushing beyond simply a naked scripture to appeal to the heir of the church fathers. He continued saying, the Methodist pattern of devotion was clearly expressed and then he mentions a whole number of the church fathers.

And he added, it would be easy to produce a cloud of witnesses testifying to the same thing, were this not a point which no one will contest who has the least acquaintance with Christian antiquity. So he appeals to the early church and then as he goes on, he appeals to the church throughout the ages.

And as he wanted to educate the Methodist laity, he actually produced a whole library of Christian classics. You know, you think of some of the Penguin classics or some of these collections of classics or classics of faith and devotion that Jim Houston edited at Regent College.

He produced what he called the Christian Library. And it was, I think, over 70 books that he kind of edited for his preachers. So whatever is going on in the evangelical movement as they return to scripture and there's a renewal of faith in the North Atlantic world, it also involves being quite deep in church history, quite deep in the great tradition of Christian writing down through the ages.

[7:56] So in order to appreciate some of this continuity with the Christian past, what I want to look at is a few of the sources on which the movement depended and especially I'm going to look at two books with you as a kind of tale of two books and see how these were read.

And then out of that, at the end of our time together, I just want to make a few points about how we can learn together about how to read the classics, how to read the classics together. So the reading lists of the early evangelicals show that they were reading a wide range of books.

But we can distinguish what they read as authorities for doctrine and what they read devotionally, practical divinity. And in the period, they would make this kind of distinction.

The calf-bound folios, the leather-bound folios, and a folio is a large book, tended to be broadly from the Reformed tradition, the Calvinist tradition. And they kind of would understand themselves be rooted there.

But the cheap octavo or duodecimal books, as it were, the little paperbacks with blue endpapers, the cheaper books, ranged much more widely in scope. This was what they called an experimental tradition, by which they didn't mean sort of science experiments, but a tradition about Christian experience.

[9:09] And there they tended to read more widely. We'll return to this idea at the end, what it meant to read widely in the experimental tradition. I have tried it in various things.

I've written about the debt that evangelicals had to what they called the good old divinity of the Puritans, the Calvinist tradition in the Reformation. And that has to be, without question, a chief influence.

I think of the colorful parson William Grimshaw in Haworth, the madman of Haworth, as he was called. The Parson there, who discovered a volume by John Owen, the great Puritan, on justification.

He discovered it on a shelf at a friend's house. He opened the book, and he said he felt a palpable flash of heat, like the sunshine coming off a pewter.

Or John Pawson, a minister near Leeds, who found several of John Bunyan's books and other Puritan books, fell into his hands when in the travail of conversion. Or the Anglican James Harvey getting his cloudy understanding of evangelical doctrine cleaned up, cleared up by reading Marshall's Gospel, Mystery of Sanctification.

[10:22] They read these old Puritan books that, as it were, were collecting dust on the shelves. And by various means and indirect paths, Puritan teaching from the era of the English Reformation reached the evangelicals and stimulated their movement.

So having said that, they kind of have their core identity in place as Protestant Christians in the Reformed tradition. Given that kind of core identity, devotionally, they read widely.

And they read and understood their movement also in continuity with Catholic spirituality down through the ages. And I'm going to try to illustrate this with these two books, a tale of two books instead of a tale of two cities.

And the first book is Henry Scougal's Life of God in the Soul of Man published by the Scottish Episcopalian, Scottish Anglican Henry Scougal.

And I have a copy here. This is 1735. So this is the first part of the show and tell. So I'll pass this one around. And so this is written, published, I mean, John Wesley was born in 1703.

[11:27] This is 1735. Some of you have heard of his Aldersgate experience where he had a, his heart was strangely warmed. He had that conversion experience. That was three years after this book is published.

So you can kind of feel the history. I'll pass that one around. That's Henry Scougal, the first book I want to talk about. Henry Scougal, Scottish bishop, died young, but he's most remembered for this book published in 1677, the year before he died.

He was part of a circle of Scottish Anglicans, Scottish Episcopalians, that read widely continental spirituality from Europe.

And they read people like, some of these names might be familiar, Madame Guillaume. They read Thomas de Kempis, Teresa of Avila, Gaston de Renti, and several other of these writers.

And they had been called by some of the mystics of the Northeast, these Protestants who were reading this doctrine. And Henry Scougal urged the reader to experience for herself in reality, not in name only, what it means to be united with God, for one's soul to be united with God.

[12:38] And his metaphors were like those of these other writers. The divine life in the human soul was, he said, a real participation in God's nature. It is a beam of the eternal light, a drop of that infinite ocean of goodness.

What he was really concerned with is he wanted people not to be Christians in name only, not just to be doctrinally precise, not just to be outwardly observant, but what did it mean, as the title of the book says, to live the, have the life of God in the soul of man.

What did it mean to live in God's presence and walk in his presence? It was originally a letter of spiritual counsel that he wrote to Lady Gilmore. The published version makes this universal.

So the individual recipient becomes sort of universalized as any Christian seeker. In part one, he describes true religion. What is true religion? It is a union of the soul with God.

Be united with God, genuinely united. It is this real participation in the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or in the Apostle Paul's phrase, he says, it is Christ formed within us.

[13:47] From Galatians 4, verse 19, where Paul says, I continue to be in labor until Christ is formed within you. He said, that's true religion. True religion is Christ formed within us.

Briefly, he says, I do not know how the nature of religion can be more fully expressed than by calling it a divine life. And then he parses both those words. What does it mean that it's God's life?

And what does it mean that it's actually life itself? It's something vital. It's not just words, it's not just ideas, but it's a real life that we share in. In part two, he describes the excellencies of true religion and he wants to describe it in a way to help you understand how attractive and desirable this is, what you've always wanted, what you've been longing for all along.

It's what will restore the understanding, the will, the affections, the wholeness. He says, what is a little skin-deep beauty or some small degrees of goodness to satisfy a passion that was made for God?

And then finally, in part three, at the end of the book, he offers practical guidance in the duties and difficulties of this life, including instructions and meditations on prayer.

[15:00] Let me just give you a little bit of a feel for this book. Just read, read a little bit of this. Let's see here. I cannot speak of religion, he says, but I must lament that among so many pretenders to it, so few understands what it means, some placing it in the understanding, in orthodox notions and opinions, and all the account they can give of their religion is that they are of this or that persuasion or have joined themselves to one of those many sects wherein Christendom is unhappily divided.

Others place it in the outward man in a constant course of external duties and a model of performances. If they live peaceably with their neighbors, keep a temperate diet, observe the return of worship, frequent the church or their closet, and sometimes extend their hands to the relief of the poor, they think that they have sufficiently acquitted themselves.

others. And he says, others, again, put all religion in the affections. They think it's all about the feelings, rapturous heats, ecstatic devotions and so on. Think about this today.

This could be true today. Where are people thinking true religion is doctrinal precision, it's observance, being observant, or it's all to do with ecstatic experiences.

But he says, certainly true religion is quite another thing, and they that are acquainted with it will entertain far different thoughts. And this is where he goes on, he says, true religion is, indeed, a union of the soul with God.

[16:34] Real participation in the divine nature, Christ's form within us. It's a divine life. It's a living thing. It's actually to be alive with the life of God within us, to live in the presence of God.

Well, this book had a profound influence on John Wesley when he read it in Georgia in 1736. I think I've shown you in one of these learners' exchange times together, pages from his diary where you can actually see what he was doing every hour of the day, sometimes every minute of the day.

And he kept a shorthand, a very exact diary for a period. And so we know exactly when he read some of these books. We know what time of day he read them. You could go back to the calendar, you would know exactly where the sun was in the sky when he read these books that he's in the garden in Georgia of the parsonage and so on.

It had a real influence on John Wesley when he read it and on John's brother Charles, the hymn writer. Charles later gave a copy of this book to George Whitefield, the great evangelical preacher.

And when George Whitefield read it, he wrote in his journal, he said that, I never knew what true religion was until I read this excellent treatise. When he read the passage that I just read to you about a union with God, Christ formed within us, he said, when I read that, a ray of divine light was instantaneously darted in upon my soul and from that moment but not until then did I know I must be a new creature.

[18:01] Isn't that interesting to see the beginnings of revival and conversion in reading a book like this? So here's a book that is taking this continental spiritual, this European spirituality and kind of mediating it into the English context and it awakens George Whitefield who would be one of the great preachers in 1739 when John Wesley described how he differed from the majority of the clergy in the Anglican church who seemed to him dead asleep, he quoted Scugel saying that while they might see holiness as an outward thing, he believed it to be an inward thing, namely he said, quote, the life of God and the soul of man and he quotes this book directly.

This is also a book that Jonathan Edwards comments on twice in his catalogue of books that's recently been published and it becomes a very widely read book by denominational leaders in the 18th and 19th century.

So that's sort of interesting, right? Some of these leaders, some of the elites read this book, but what about the average person? What about the common person? What about the everyday ordinary Christian?

Would a book like this that's passing, going around somewhere here, would it have been influential for the average person wanting just to live the ordinary Christian life? Well, in 1786, there's a lay Methodist named John Lancaster who inscribed his copy of Scugel on the blank side of the title page.

In a large, uneven hand, he wrote on his copy of the book Soul of Man and added a flourish. Underneath this, he wrote his name in the year 1786 and then continued, quote, John Lancaster is my name and with the pen I write the same.

[19:50] It isn't great poetry. When I examined Lancaster's copy of Scugel for myself in the Bodleian Library, I came upon it bound with a number of other tracks.

So in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, you order up on these little slips, well now it's computerized, but on these little slips you order up a book. And sometimes you never know that it comes bound with all these other pamphlets.

And this was part of the Godwin pamphlets. And so it was kind of stitched together with all these other books. And I noticed the front and end papers of the volume were filled with Lancaster's handwriting and that of others.

Mostly with words of hymns that the readers had copied out. And you can't really see this. This is just a photocopy of all the marginalia in the book.

So just the pages and pages of the book are covered with sort of 18th century handwriting. And marginalia scattered throughout the whole book. And so interesting, these hymns.

[20:56] There were 11 hymns copied out by hand from collections from the Wesleys, Whitfield, Isaac Watts, Elizabeth Singer Rowe. And Lancaster also signed his name at the top of the very first blank leaf in the front paper squeezed above the hymns.

His name was there again a few pages further on in what bibliographies would call the verso of the fourth folio. But this time it was dated 1779, seven years earlier than his inscription on the school pamphlet.

There are signs of heavy use throughout the volume. It's well worn. It's soiled. It had nearly fallen apart from being lovingly read and re-read. It brought to mind my Grandpa Lundell's Bible, which I remember him reading hour by hour at his kitchen table and in the end had barely a sheet left stitched in place.

The material culture of the book itself, you can see, it's used, it's falling apart, it's handled, it's consumed. I came across Lancaster's volume by kind of accident.

I went to Oxford for most of one summer, I think it was 2007, to work in the Bodleian Library. And several of the volumes I was reading happened to be from these Godwin pamphlets and inbound collections.

[22:07] I placed my stack request for a copy of John Wesley's edition of Schoogle, published in 1744, and it appeared on my desk bound with these other items as part of Lancaster's volume.

It was the second piece in the volume. Right after, the first piece in the volume was the nature design and general rules of the United Societies, of the Methodists.

Wesley's Schoogle sold for four pennies. And it was one of several spiritual classics that Wesley abridged in the 1740s that part of his program, quote, to furnish poor people with cheaper, shorter, and plainer books than any I had seen.

He wanted to popularize this literature. He had a wonderful knack for condensing books. He'd sometimes edit on horseback, and as he's riding along, as it were, with a blue pencil, he'd kind of scratch out bits, and he was a brilliant editor.

And he got Schoogle's Life of God that is going around right now, he got it down to 48 pages, duodecimo. I'll explain in a minute what some of these words mean in his popular edition.

[23:15] But as I turned the pages of this devotional work in the Bodden Library, I did so with a vivid sense of reading over the shoulder of John Lancaster. At first, I assumed the volume was simply owned by John Lancaster and that he probably had several of his Methodist pamphlets bound together, sewn together sometime around 1786 when he signed his name on the Schoogle piece.

I thought that this might have been a lay Methodist named John Lancaster who started a Sunday school in a cellar at the corner of Travis Street and London Road in Manchester in 1785. That was one John Lancaster I found.

This might be true. Yet as I paged the volume again and again and read over more of the marginalia, there were in fact a total of six early readers who had added their names and dates to the book.

There was a Joseph Lancaster, an Isaac Lancaster, an Isaac Fox, a Joseph Fox, and so on. And among the end papers, there was another John Fox who wrote his name several times and added the dates 1755 and 1756 and claimed ownership.

John Fox's book Brantwaithe. Brantwaithe is a small village in West Cumbria near Whitehaven, probably one of the most important centers for Methodism in the Northwest.

[24:30] Despite its isolated location, Wesley paid 25 visits there between 1749 and 1788. It was a center of renewal. It corresponds exactly to the dates when this marginalia was written in this book.

Well, the Cumbrian Record Office has various legal records and papers related to the Fox family and a detailed family tree and we're actually able to identify all these figures who had written their names in the book.

Probably the book began among the Fox brothers in the 50s and then was passed on to John Lancaster and his family members in the 1770s. It was not a matter of one book, one reader, which we tend to think today.

Often books are read aloud, they're passed on and they're read by whole communities. The Fox and Lancaster families both poured over its pages. I'm going into some detail and kind of reconstructing the reception history, how this book kind of gets passed down because I'm fascinated at the way, what does it mean for living faith to be passed on from one generation to another?

Isn't that the question that we're asking any of us who are parents? We want to know what does it mean for a living faith to be passed on and transmitted from one generation to another? This has been the whole burden, I think, of Jim Paffer's ministry of higher catechism wanting to help pass faith on from one generation to another.

[25:56] And isn't it interesting that this faith and this living faith that among some of these continental figures in France, Madame Guillaume, Francis Fenelon, is passed on and to some of these people near Aberdeen like Henry Scougal.

Henry Scougal is passing it on to Lady Gilmore and then it passes on and it lights a fire for John Wesley, Charles Wesley, George Whitefield and it passes on to the Fox family and the Lancaster family in Cumbria watching living faith being passed on generation to generation.

The first pamphlet in this collection I said was a frayed copy of the fifth edition of John and Charles Wesley's Rules, The Nature Design and Rules for the United Societies.

This is like a constitutional document for the Wesleyan organization, Wesleyan Methodism. It begins with a narrative written by John Wesley giving an account of how the movement began as Wesley tried to give spiritual direction to a group of eight or ten people in London.

And he talked about this group and the beginnings of Methodism being organizing and pulling together a company of men having the form but seeking the power of godliness united in order to pray together receive a word of exhortation watch over one another in love that they may help each other work out their salvation.

[27:17] It was a kind of group spiritual direction. The Foxes and the Lancasters would have been a part of just such a group under just such discipline in West Cumbria and would have returned to read the directions in this pamphlet.

Given the importance of Schugel's Life of God in the spiritual biography of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield, these leaders, it's no wonder that John Lancaster and these other five readers would have valued this pamphlet in the form it came abridged by Wesley that they stitched it together with their other Methodist tracts.

One can imagine them reading passages in the family reminding one another what they had heard from Wesley, reminding one another that the aim of true religion is not that we might appear godly but that we might really become so.

I think this is a picture, a kind of cameo of how spiritual classics were read and how they reached rank and file lay people. From John Lancaster, the spiritual doctrine of Schugel, for him it was literally contextualized, it was naturalized, we might say, like when an immigrant comes to a country we describe a process of naturalization.

So it literally gets stitched to the Methodist rules and it's bracketed by, if you like, and can it be and oh, four thousand tongues to sing that he's written on the end papers.

[28:43] So he's able to, you know who you are, you're grounded, he knows we're Protestant, Reformed, Christian people, but you can then take this spiritual doctrine and it becomes naturalized and kind of stitched to the Evangelical Methodist spirituality.

Classical Christian spirituality is transmitted from another time and place, nourishes a new generation, stimulates a fresh experience of God's word. Schugel's text had transmitted these ideals of pure love, entire resignation to God that were expressed in the Catholic European tradition of some of these writers I've mentioned and these ideals become the tap roots of an Evangelical spirituality and represent a kind of democratization of some of that tradition.

I don't want to overstate the influence of this tradition, this is just one book, one story, one book I'm telling, but it, and some of the sources that were drawn upon, Madame Guillain and others were also read critically by the Evangelicals.

They tended to really like, especially Catholic books that were condemned by the Vatican. There's kind of, you know, those had a particular appeal. And, but it's interesting to me, isn't it, how, part of what the, how do you read classics?

You read for life. Life seeks life. And that's what was happening again and again in the 17th and 18th century. And there are a number of figures on the continent, Gerhard Ter Stegen, there's people like Wesley, and they took stuff that they found.

[30:26] They kind of, you know, you filter out whatever it is that you disagree with. But what they, when they saw life, they thought, that's what I want because what I really want is not just, not just to be doctrinally precise, I want to be accurate, I want to be orthodox, but what I really want is life.

And so life itself was a kind of principle by which they went back and then extracted this stuff. So that was, that's one, I'm just looking at my notes here and Reg Ward became a good friend, he's a Methodist historian who's written about some of this, he passed away recently.

Mark Nolan, I wrote an obit for him last year. But he says, he describes this as continental mysticism, right? But in saying that they were careful in terms of what they took from this mystical tradition, he said, mysticism was pardonable provided the subject did not inhale.

Only Reg could get away with that sort of thing in a Cambridge University Press book. But anyways, that's one book, biography if you like, one kind of, I said it's a tale of two books, that's one book I wanted to talk about.

Where's Bill? When did we go to? What's the time? Yeah. You're doing very well, you're just about a quarter way through. Okay. Just wave at me, would you?

[31:48] Okay. So, Skoogal, can I just stop there? I've been nattering on here. Any questions about Skoogal or about what I've said so far? I'm going to give you another book biography, we're going to talk about Thomas the Campus as I'm just kind of going into the reading list of some of these early evangelicals.

Any questions or comments? Yeah. Talking about passing on the faith and so on, a concern of many of my friends in my generation is that their children did not follow them into the church.

And the examples that you've given us show the spiritual heirs in a sense of these people. How did they do with their own kids? Wesley was really worried that this whole movement would be, there's a Latin phrase he used, but the work of one generation.

The Methodism would just be the work of one generation and that was it. And he felt like the key was to focus on the rising generation and the key was to focus on education.

And so that's one of the things he talked about. But this movement did, it absolutely did endure, it had a durability and it could have been a flash in the pan, it could have been just, you know, from about 17, let's say 35 to 1745, across the North Atlantic people felt like they were walking in a cloud of wonders.

[33:15] This was a kind of period of renewal and God was renewing the church. Maybe this was even apocalyptic, this was a kind of end times thing. And so it could have just died out and been gone, but somehow it has endured for 300 years.

this tradition has endured. And again and again, people experience renewal, experience conversion, experience the gospel. And increasingly, that is that question, I mean, as a parent, when we think of our own young people, of Ecclesia, and of the youth group, the problem in so many Ankin churches is the pyramid.

You begin at the big Sunday school, and then you get less and less in junior high, less in high school until finally there's only one or two college students. And what we've seen by God's grace in our own church is we've seen it begin to go this way, you know, and we want to see faith live in another generation.

education. And so, I mean, Wesley thought a big part of it was education, and certainly a big part of it was also, I think, this focus upon life, on life, you know, that it's a matter of passing on a living faith, that they're able to see that faith lives in, like Paul said about Timothy having seen faith live in your grandmother and your mother and now in you, three generations.

And this focus upon life, I think, is part of it. Let's talk a little bit about imitation of Christ.

[34:55] You can maybe save up some of your other questions. If you want to, often when I'm reading a spiritual classic, I try to ask myself, how does this help me back into the scriptures in a fresh way?

How does this writer, is there a grounding text that this helps take me back to scripture with fresh eyes? For Schugel, I would say it's Galatians 4.19, Christ formed in you.

He helps me understand that passage better. What does it mean that Christ is formed in you? Or Colossians 1.27, Christ in you, the hope of glory. What does it mean to live in the presence of God, to live united with Christ?

Schugel helps me with that. The imitation of Christ, I would say, this book by Kempis, it might be more 1 Peter 1.5, just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

Or maybe Luke 9.23, whoever wants to be my disciple, he must deny himself and take his cross daily and follow me. In the front matter to Wesley's edition of Schugel, in 1744, there's a two-page advertisement of books published by the Reverend Mr. John and Charles Wesley, and it includes 42 items that were likewise offered, like Schugel, in these inexpensive editions.

[36:11] Many of them were, like the Schugel book, abridged. Abridged reprints of classics. Wesley reprinted the book by a high church Anglican, William Law, A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, or one by a pietist at Halle, August Hermann Franca, called Nicodemus, or A Treatise on the Fear of Man.

He reprinted John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. He reprinted a book by the Moravian founder, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. He reprinted one of Jonathan Edwards' tracks from New England.

Lots and lots of literature he's putting out there for people, abridging it, making it simpler for people to read. Lots of spiritual life available to foster lay people, the life of lay people like John Lancaster.

He also reprinted various Catholic writers. But the one who influenced him more than anybody else, and I think influenced most of the other early evangelical leaders, was this Thomas Akempis.

In George Whitefield's conversion narrative, he described a period just before his breakthrough to faith, and he mentions reading Thomas Akempis, saying, it was a great help and furtherance to me.

[37:23] It got me along. The Oxford Methodist, the future Moravian evangelist Benjamin Ingham, began reading Akempis in 1733 at Oxford, and once he was finished himself, he began to read the book aloud with another student in Oxford.

John Newton, that Jim mentioned earlier, the erstwhile slave trader, and later a hymn writer, an Anglican clergyman, he read Akempis just before his conversion, too. This book is another one.

I'm looking for reading lists, right? I'm going, this one is on everybody's reading list. It just comes up again and again. So what's with that? Thomas Akempis. Well, traditionally, the book we call The Imitation of Christ is ascribed to Thomas Akempis.

There's some debate about that, but it was probably completed around 1441. This is a late medieval text collected into four books. Book one and two are thematically arranged councils.

It reads almost a little bit like the book of Proverbs. You just have sort of, it's a kind of advice with lots of sayings and advice. And then books three and four are a dialogue between Christ and the believer, between Christ and the soul.

[38:28] And it's almost like the book moves from the outside to the inside, from our outward life to our interior life. Book one speaks of self-denial, turning away from the world, from vanity and temptation.

Book two counsels the reader to turn inward, for the kingdom of God is within. Book three explores our union with Christ in secret. And book four continues this dialogue in the context of preparing for Holy Communion.

The treatise is fundamentally ascetical. That is, it has to do with discipline and a disciplined Christian life and what it means to deny ourselves, to turn away from the world insofar as the world is an object of our devotion and to make God alone our supreme and final end in life.

It deeply, deeply draws on St. Augustine and echoes many passages in his works. Well, here's another book that comes under the editorial eye of John Wesley that he abridges, that he extracts as he says.

He published two editions, one in 1735 and one in 1741. What happened in between those two dates? His conversion.

[39:38] 1738, he experienced his evangelical conversion, his so-called Aldersgate experience. While somebody was reading from Luther's preface to the commentary on Romans, he said he felt his heart strangely warmed, felt that he did trust in Christ.

Somebody said, blessed assurance, Jesus is mine, I had an experience a quarter to nine. He had this conversion experience.

In 1735, though, three years earlier, he published an edition of The Imitation. I meant to bring a copy of this along. We have one in the Regent Library, a 1735 edition, one of the first books he published.

And you look at it, again, the material culture of the book. It's probably Imperial Octavo. It's about that tall. It's calf-bound. It's leather. It has gold stamping on it.

It has six engravings, pictures, kind of wood, not wood cuts, but engravings. It has some red lettering. It would be probably the kind of a volume for a gentleman clergyman, right?

[40:52] In terms of the kind of the material book, you know. It's scholarly. It's pious, but scholarly. That's what he publishes during his Oxford period when he is seeking holiness, but hasn't yet broken through to peace and assurance and his whole evangelical mission in life.

In 1741, the evangelical revival is underway. He is preaching all around England. In his lifetime, he's going to spend 250,000 miles on horseback.

Quarter million miles on horseback. He has an energy that's come through his conversion experience. So there's a quest for holiness early in his life, and then there's a breakthrough.

It's like, at first it's holiness without the Holy Spirit, and then it's holiness with the Holy Spirit. And he seeks holiness, but he's had a breakthrough to assurance and faith and to forgiveness.

One edition before, one afterwards. What does the edition look like that he published in 1741? Looks like this. Okay?

[42:01] The 1741 edition was Trisisimo Secundo. What does that mean? If you took a big printer's page, a kind of folio page, and fold it once.

I think once is folio, right, Jim? It's once folio. And then, so that's printed one, two, three, four pages, right? And that forms a choir that gets stitched together, right?

If you print it four up on either side, and then fold it like that, that becomes quarto, right? That becomes quarto. And so that becomes a choir. They get sewn together, and you trim the edges, right?

And then if you do, you can do octavo, duodecimo, and so on, until it's 32 times. And that's Trisisimo Secundo, right?

This one is actually 64 mole. So what you're seeing is a desire to popularize and pass this on to another generation, right? Pass this living faith on to another generation.

[43:04] There are some books in the Bodleian I've read, I was in the Bodleian last week, where I've had to slip the pages. And I go to the upper reading room desk, and I ask them for their letter opener, and slip the pages.

What does that mean? It means when you've got the choirs that are bound together, and they've been bound unevenly, when they went to trim it, they missed some, right? So you've got some pages that are still the fold, and you have to slip the pages.

What does that tell you? Who's the first person to read this book? Right? This particular book. Whereas this edition that I called up in the Bodleian to read was completely falling apart.

And many of these books, they call them ghost books, because we know that they existed, but there are no longer any extant editions available today. Because the more popular the book is, the less likely it is to have survived.

Right? And so, what a difference 1738 makes. Westy's Evangelical Mission. This is the sort of book that he designs that a female domestic servant in Bristol might have it in her petticoat and pull it out and be able to read a little bit during the day and put it back again.

[44:22] A wade nakem, a go-along, a book you can take along with you. And so, like we saw, Piety passed on all the way down to John Lancaster. Here now we see a living faith that there's stuff from Augustine that's there on campus.

It gets passed on to Wesley. It's going to be passed on to another generation. So, Wesley didn't repudiate Thomas the Campus, even though Thomas the Campus can be pretty severe.

When Barth Campbell and I read this book in my 20s, I just thought, Barth, I just don't get it. Like, this is hard stuff. Like, he says things like, it's never fun to die. And I just got so dour and there's so much, you know.

But, you know, you stick with it and you wrestle. And there's some stuff you may have to sort of edit a little bit. And Wesley, though he went through an evangelical conversion, he didn't toss out this Catholic writer as just being legalistic.

In fact, he carried a Latin copy around with him all his life. And as late as 1789, two years before his death, he was recommending the book to his nephew. He required that every Methodist society be duly supplied with books, he said, quote, especially Kempis.

[45:36] His 1735 edition was only the third book he ever published. And the 1741 edition, as I say, went through enormous number of reprintings, 18 reprintings during his lifetime.

And again, in terms of the material book, it's sold for four to six pence each. It's sold cheaply and often actually given away.

The copy I looked at in the library was shabby from use, the spine broken, the stitching unraveling, the pages heavily stained. How different from those ones where I had to cut the pages to read them.

As I handled Wesley's edition of the Imitation, this little one, I found myself thinking again of earlier readers, these working class people turning these pages with calloused hands, absorbing the piety of the 14th century Devotio Moderna, Thomas the Campos' movement, not now in cloister walls like the Vindersheim canons, but as artisans, craftsmen, domestic servants, Sunday school teachers, custom and excise officers in West Cumbria and so on.

These men and women who read this volume before I did, they trusted these words because this small book is placed into their hands by a Methodist lay preacher or a band leader or by John Wesley himself.

[46:57] Hand-placed. His four-page preface to this book is a series of very precise instructions on spiritual reading, how to read spiritual books.

He says, not cursorily, not hastily, but leisurely, seriously, and with great attention. How do you read a classic? You read it with great attention, with great seriousness.

Hand-placed. I've had, as a student at Regent College, it made an enormous impact on me when I handed in a paper for a class to Jim Houston and he writes his phone number on the bottom of the page.

He says, why don't you come over for tea? And we'll chat about this. And then out of his library he goes and takes a book off the shelf and he says, I think this book would be helpful for you.

Hand-placed. It's one of Jim's gifts over the years. It's almost like a diagnosing physician. He can kind of figure you out spiritually and give you the right book at the right time. Wesley did that.

[47:57] I said there's lots of show and tell this morning. I was at Heian-Wai. Have any of you been to Heian-Wai? The village of books. I've used books. A thousand people, a million books on the Welsh border.

And Richard Booth in 1962, I think, established Booth Books. There's now 35 used bookstores there. The streets are lined with books. And they have honesty boxes where you put in 25p for a hardback or 10p for a paperback.

I mean, it's like going to heaven. You've been there? Yeah. Heian-Wai. Heian-Wai in Wales. And I was at, I think it was Castle Books or Booth Books, and in the basement I saw that they had a few 18th century books.

And I found this one, and it's been separated from the rest. There are nine. This is published during Wesley's lifetime, and it's some of Wesley's sermons. And it was part of a collection of nine volumes of sermons.

I thought, oh, what a shame that it's separated from the rest. But 10 pounds, so 16 bucks. I figure I could afford that, right? And so when I got it home, there's an inscription that my friend Cal and I were looking at this morning.

[49:08] These nine volumes of sermons were given by the Reverend John Wesley to my uncle, the late Reverend John King. I now give them to my daughter, Rachel, and then we can't make out quite the rest of it.

Three generations, right? Passing on living faith, hand-placing the book from Wesley to, what did I say, John King to his daughter.

Passing on living faith. I'll let you see if you can make out the rest of the inscription, the bits that we couldn't figure out there. So this happens with books like Thomas the Campus. The miniature volume, I say, could be put in the pocket of a petticoat, taken from one's bedchamber as a devotional companion, pulled out in spare moments in the course of the day.

On February the 20th, 1758, the lay preacher Thomas Walsh did exactly this. Took his copy of Wesley's invitation with him in the coach on the way to Bristol.

He had three other travelers who were in the coach with him, but he says, I was able to read undisturbed and find great tranquility of mine. Late in life, he was still remembered for quoting dictums and bits from this book about the need for absolute humility in all things.

[50:22] Some years ago, I read dozens of manuscript autobiographies of early Methodist lay people, and I can easily imagine a barely literate Methodist sister, such as Elizabeth Hinson, one of the people who wrote in this collection.

I could imagine her handling a book like this and reading from book one of The Imitation as she walked a class meeting. She might read the words of Thomas the Campus that had meant so much to Wesley, Do what lies in your power, and God will assist your goodwill.

And she would receive these as an exhortation to strive for holiness. This was the quad-nc-s doctrine of the brethren of the common life. Do what in you lies.

And it's naturalized again, taken as basic Methodist spirituality. She might read, Love all for Jesus, but Jesus for himself, and find herself inspired at several removes and all unwittingly, but what is in fact the spiritual doctrine of Augustine in his teaching on use and enjoyment in his book on Christian doctrine, that God is to be enjoyed and loved for his own sake, and everything else is to be used for the sake of God.

Augustine had been an important spiritual guide for Thomas the Campus. This doctrine comes from Campus to Wesley. It's passed on, as I'm imagining now, to Elizabeth Hinson, and other Methodists of her class meeting.

[51:44] When I wrote that, I had to imagine a reader, because I didn't have a John Lancaster, but I found a reader. Let's see if this fires up again here. Oops.

Kind of jaundiced. There we go. Let me just go back here. Okay. Last January, I had a hunt.

There were some manuscripts in a house west of Oxford in the Cotswolds near Chalbury. There's a little village called Pudlicut, which has about two houses. You can go in, went in on Google Earth, and kind of found the place.

And there's a woman named Vanessa Bolton that I finally got in touch with, and I wrote to her, and I said, I think you may have some manuscripts, and she invited me to come over and read them. This is the 18th century great house.

It's a beautiful setting. It's in Cotswolds, sheep country, by, I think it's the river, the stream Evenlood. And she brought this trunk down out of the attic, and it's filled with manuscripts, including, what I was interested in is a young woman named Ann Bolton.

[52:47] Wesley met her when she was about 20, and he was 60. And they began a correspondence. They met in about 1764. They began a correspondence that lasted for 25 years.

And I've written an article in which we trace this relationship of spiritual direction that they wrote back and forth almost every month for 25 years. More letters extant between the two of them than between John and his brother Charles.

Right? We can trace the whole correspondence. But in this trunk is letters, and diaries, and books, and so on from Ann Bolton. So Ann Bolton was John Wesley's correspondent.

Vanessa Bolton, the woman I met, is kind of lineal descendant. And we got on great. By the end of the week, I was teaching her granddaughter to ride her bike down the hallways in the house.

And it was great fun. Look at these manuscripts. This is the dining room where I was working trying to sort out all these papers. And there were, I think, 41 original John Wesley letters in this trunk.

[53:51] And this is one, 1769, My Dear Sister, writing to Ann Bolton. John Wesley had a, I mean, John Wesley's nothing about discipline. You can even see it, it's handwriting. It's just meticulous.

It always keeps to the nice even line. And this is an example of one of the letters with all the post marks. You can see exactly where it traveled and what posts went through.

Lovely example of the seal, Wesley's seal, Nukia Pachis. What's the Latin, Jim? Say it. Nukia Pachis. I think it's tidings of peace.

Does that sound right? Messenger of peace? Yes, yes. That is what it means. Okay. And so it's a dove with an olive branch. Tiding is a peace. It's Wesley's seal.

Isn't it lovely? Always a little bit of the letter would tear when you open it because of the seal. And at the end, we were able to archive and make an archive of all the stuff.

[54:49] But what I wanted to show you, this is Ann Bolton's diary. And here's a section of her diary. Let me see if I can find it here. Ann Bolton lives with her brother Edward in town in Whitney.

Probably first encountered Wesley there in 1764. She's 20, Wesley's 60, and they write back and forth for 25 years. This diary is kept off and on for about 30 years.

On Wednesday, May 23rd, 1770, she commented on reading Thomas at campus with her younger brother. was blessed as we were riding to Honeyborn between 5 and 6 in the morning.

Brother Tommy read the 18th chapter in the campus. She says, Ann is in her late 20s right now and Tommy is probably in his late teens. And it was likely chapter 18 of book 3 in Thomas at campus that they read of four things that bring much peace.

In this section, Christ speaks to the Christian soul saying that peace and liberty are found in endeavoring to do the will of another rather than one's own. Peace and liberty are found in choosing to have less rather than more.

[56:04] Peace and liberty are found in seeking the lowest place. Peace and liberty are found in continually wishing and praying for the will of God to be wholly fulfilled in one's soul. The chapter concludes with the aspiration of the Christian soul.

Join me unto thee a prayer. Join me unto thee in an inseparable band of love. For thou alone dost satisfy him that loveth thee and without thee all things are frivolous.

This prayer for the grace of union with Christ expressed in the direct and personal dialogue of prayer again captures the affirmation in Augustine that the love of God is superior and exceeds all other loves.

Love is only rightly ordered when God is loved most of all. But here this piety from Augustine through Kempis through Westie is taken up by a brother and sister in their youth on an early morning walk or ride between five and six in the morning in the Cotswolds.

And among, in that chest was also a copy of Kempis was in that same chest. It measures four inches by one and a half inches and it is inscribed from Anne Bolton to her nephew as a gift.

[57:20] It completes the reception history again all the way down through two generations of Methodist lay people. I think that's the last slide I have there. Yeah. So I'll leave that.

So isn't it wonderful to see this piety being passed on being popularized? Again, a transmission of classical Christian spirituality to the early evangelicals. I'll pass that around. If Skoogle represented this concern if you like for the mystical tradition what does it mean to live in the presence of God and live our lives in union with Christ?

This treatise represents the importance of living a disciplined Christian life taking seriously the call to renounce the world and following Christ. In 18th century Whitney and Anne and Tommy Bolton Reed Campus and their faith is enlivened as earnest Methodists just like John Lancaster had read Skoogle and was inspired to seek after holiness.

The reception and the popularization of these texts bears witness to a literary culture that schooled the followers of Wesley in evangelical devotion. These are two examples of the way the tap roots of what it meant to be evangelical what it meant to follow Christ went deep down into deep traditions of Christian spirituality even as there was renewal under modern conditions in the 18th century.

So that that far campus. So two books how much can you generalize from two books? Let me just make a couple suggestions of what it might mean for us today to read classics with these examples kind of fresh in our mind.

[58:59] And I have four points about how to read the classics. Sort of observations from this. The first is to read with desire.

To read with desire. Life seeks life. And I'm trying to think of a metaphor for each of these. I think this is like water seeking the ocean.

You know? That water will always follow gravity and you know different tributary streams will kind of find their way. And water there will be a main current. You know? The water is continually seeking its own level.

And thinking of water as an image of life here. And I was at a conference with Jim in Birmingham, Alabama celebrating his 80th birthday. And Jim used the wonderful metaphor for evangelical religion as being like the main current of the Mississippi River.

It's flowing. You know? That it's about life. And it's a form of convertedness. It's a form of life. And you have the kind of banks of the current that's like the creeds and the councils. But the real thing is the life.

[60:04] There might be eddies and brackish waters and swampy stuff. You know? And so on. But the main thing is life. And so the first thing is read for your life. Read like your life depends on it.

If you read Wesley's introduction to spiritual reading that's the way he says you read. I have no doubt that Anne and Tommy as they read Thomas the Campus walking to Honeyborn between 5 and 6 in the morning they were not reading for curiosity.

They were reading for life itself. Like their lives depended on what they were reading. I read a lot of these books each year with my students in a course called The Classics of Christian Spirituality.

It's the Book of Week Club. Read a book a week. And so when we read Campus and then met together I shared some of this with them and I asked them if they thought that they read with as much spiritual desire and intensity as Anne and Tommy did.

Have you joined that community of readers? Are you reading that way? So the first thing is to read with desire. And in this sense why not just here's what Thomas Kempis says about this.

[61:10] In the Holy Scriptures truth is to be looked for rather than fair phrases. All sacred scriptures should be read in the spirit in which they were written. In them therefore we should seek food for our souls rather than subtleties of speech.

And we should as readily read simple and devout books classics as those that are lofty and profound. Do not be influenced by the importance of the writer whether his learning be great or small but let the love of pure truth draw you as you read.

Do not inquire who said this but pay attention to what is said. Men pass away but the word of the Lord endures forever. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Enjoy the accompaniment. You see I think Ann and Tommy didn't have to deal with this, right?

They didn't have their Blackberry buzzing. They didn't have their iPhone whistling. All right. Read with desire. Are you ready to read with desire?

[62:13] Read with hunger? Secondly, read with the whole church. Read with the whole church. The way I think of these old books is like enlarging your Bible study.

You know when you meet with your Bible study group and you look at the passage of scripture together and people start talking about what they're seeing and it's like your consciousness is enlarged and it's really helpful and they see things you didn't see and it's helpful to you to have other people to study the Bible with.

Well, how fantastic if your Bible study can include dead people, can include Luther and Calvin and Augustine and Gregory the Great and Thomas of Kempis.

So the way I think of this is read with the whole church. As you read the classics you also get a perspective that comes from outside your own period and can help you correct the things that are written in letters too large for you to read in your own world and your own culture.

C.S. Lewis talked about this is letting the clean sea breeze of the centuries blow through your mind. He says it's about getting on that level viaduct that runs across the ages that looks so low from the mountains so high from the valleys.

[63:20] A kind of level viaduct. I wonder if that means I should be done. Is that what that means? The various sounds going off. So read with the whole church. Let the clean sea breeze of the centuries blow through your mind and be a kind of self-correcting discipline.

And thirdly, read with discernment. This is the kind of what I called a naturalization and watching if you know who you are and you're grounded in your faith, formed in your faith, you can read more broadly and more widely and you can read sources and kind of edit them and take what's most helpful.

John Newton, this is what he said. He said, if persons such as Fenelon, Pascal, Quenelle, Nicole, a number of continental Catholic writers, this is in the 18th century when there's a lot of anti-Catholicism around, there's fear of the young pretender, there's all this kind of stuff.

And yet, all these Catholic writers, he says, if they weren't true Christians, where shall we find any who deserve the name? In the writings of these great men, notwithstanding incidental errors, I meet with such strains of experimental godliness, experienced, they've experienced godliness, such deep knowledge of the workings of the Spirit of God in the heart of man, such masterly explications of many important passages of Scripture as might do honour to the most enlightened Protestant.

Protestant. He gives them honorary Protestant membership. And he kind of edits out what he sees as their Popish errors. You know? And so on. But I think there's a kind of model there.

[64:47] I think it's not a matter of a smorgasbord where you just graze and say, oh, take a little of this and a little of this and you're just kind of, it's just eclecticism. But it's a matter, if you're grounded in your faith, read widely and read with discernment and where you find life, take it and hang on to it.

And my third point, or fourth point, in how to read the classics is talk to Bill Reimer. Is go to the Regent Bookstore and ask Bill to help you.

There's a great Anglican tradition of Lent reading, of finding a classic book, a classic text, maybe a campus, maybe a school. Talk to Bill and maybe during Lent next year for a season, read these books and read them slowly, carefully with attention.

Read for Life. If you're looking for a book, talk to Jim Packer, talk to one of the clergy and say, can you recommend a book for me for Lent this year or a book that I might read over the next couple of months.

It might require, older books require a little bit of study and you might have to Google a few things, you might have to look up a few things because they aren't immediately accessible as bedtime reading.

[65:57] You have to study a little bit, read the introductions, but then there's a world of nourishment, I think, for us as there was for them at the beginning of the evangelical movement in the 18th century.

All right. Thank you. Thank you. Bruce?

Bruce? Yeah. That letter that the young lady wrote about her four or five o'clock walk in the morning, she very quickly isolated her spiritual problem in that letter, ineffective.

Frivolous or, yeah, she complained that she was too shallow. Yeah. So the key was she recognized her own drowsy, probably, state.

Yeah. It is five or six in the morning if it would be a little drowsy. But that's key, isn't it? Yeah. Yeah. That's key. Yeah. Reading with a desire for kind of self-knowledge and understanding and experience.

[67:06] And to write it down if it comes to sort of a prayer. Yeah. There's your confession being what works out right there. Yeah. Her diary is largely, as you can see, disbound, and it's about 200 pieces.

And one of our former students from Regent, one of my former students is in Oxford now, and I passed all this on to her, and she's doing her doctorate out of that. And she's Dutch and very organized and has already got the whole thing, all 200 pieces, put back together and figured out the whole diary.

She's absolutely amazing. Betty, did you? Yeah. My family was primitive and I found a little book called Washed, White, and the Snow.

I don't know if you ever came to the school. No, I haven't. Yeah. It was my father at the Sunday School. Yeah. Yeah. It was a wonderful title because it's scripted. Isn't that great? Yeah.

We, a class last year that I taught on the Thomas' campus, everybody brought their copies, and there was a young Catholic woman that had her copy that was given at confirmation.

[68:08] There was a Baptist fellow, a Southern Baptist, who had his copy that had been given to him by his, and everybody had a copy of campus. A lot of them hadn't read it, but they all had copies. And we actually did a thing where it was kind of fun where I brought in the 1735 Wesley, the 1741 Wesley.

We had a Penguin Classics edition, a couple other editions, and I had a version on my iPad. And we passed these around. We just talked, how do you read a book differently in these different material forms?

And one of the things, of course, about some of these books is when they're valuable or they're hand-placed, you know, you read them differently than when it's sort of ephemeral and, you know, and easily dissolvable, like in digital media, I think.

Yeah? Sorry for the interruption. No, not at all. That's fine. Anyways, what happens to that chest and all the work you put into sorting that out?

It's the possession of the Bolton family, and I encourage them to put it into public archives and give them a couple suggestions, but we'll see what they do. But they've been very gracious to Cindy, and she's been going out there and working there, and they've allowed her access to all that.

[69:21] But the first thing we did is we tried to organize it all archivally and organize it properly because there was mixed into it where, you know, one of their grandkids had a crayon drawing, you know, to auntie, so that I pulled out and said, Vanessa, you might want this.

And so hopefully it gets preserved. And I think they were aware of the danger of fire and water damage and so on, that they felt embarrassed that they hadn't taken better care of some of these materials. But it'll eventually end up in the public archive, I expect.

read for life.

Read with desire. Read broadly. Read with the whole church. read with discernment and talk to Bill Reimer four points it's a great introduction he talks about plain truth for plain people and that kind of introduction to his sermons yeah that point about read with desire and read for life makes me think of a couple of things one is that hymn that we sing praise my soul the king of heaven and it's almost like I'm telling myself here I am but then there's my body and my soul and my body usually takes the lead or wants to be lord but I have to tell my soul praise my soul the king of heaven so that's kind of like what that is so you've got the little kernel of the desire and pan into plain make me think of Louis remember when he's talking about desire more he's talking about we people get all messed up in their desires we desire too little and not enough we fool around with drink and sex and he talks about it's almost like the kid in the slums who's playing with mud pies

I can't imagine what it's like to have a holiday to see yeah exactly and uh that's the same it's just brutal to always always have to just but it's true you just have to continue to beat yourself and say come on have big desire desire for God eager for thee I ask and pant so strong the principle divine carries me out with sweet constraint till all my hallowed soul is thine plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea and lost in thine immensity Charles Wesley you know there's so much desire in this literature and it is it's it's again it's you know Augustine's teaching in each case you know that our desires are to be fixed when our desires are fixed on heaven when they're fixed on God our desires can never be strong enough you know can never be strong enough and it's wonderful that it was like 11 hymns that were copied out in the end papers like because hymnody often expresses these aspirations so they were reading for life Harvey I stand corrected but I believe our our old friend

[72:39] Jim Saladin right now is doing some doctor work comparing what Greg Ramnesa with Jonathan Edwards their parallel or not parallel understanding of this participation in the divine nature stuff from 2 Peter is that doctrine making a comeback in evangelical circles I suspect it is Judy Canlis her work is there a revival of evangelical mysticism going on I think so and I think doctrinally there's theological education there are certain words in a sense that become quite popular and right now if I had a nickel for every time I hear the word participation around regent you know I'd at least be able to buy lunch and so I think there's something and maybe I actually worry sometimes about an over over correction about extremes so let's say there was a generation when the emphasis was upon decision Billy Graham's decision magazine making a decision for Christ you know and a call to exhort your will and to make a decision and now maybe there's a bit of a reaction and saying you know what we participate in Christ and it's a call to recognize that we are called to we are incorporate we participate it's not just a heroic act of our own will where we retain our own autonomy and so you see the language of participation a language of mysticism you see that kind of language and I think what I appreciate about some of these sources like we're looking at today is they seem to be able to hold those two things together they seem to be able to talk about a genuine sharing into the divine life but call people to repentance and call them to make a decision and call them to a kind of serious engagement of their wills so but yeah

I think absolutely you see that yeah in all the books you mentioned and many others some of it is Barthian in terms of Karl Barth and the focus on participation some of it is a literature mystical literature that's being appreciated and I think there's something in the cultural moment there too yeah yeah if you could comment if it's something that's something that I've been thinking about for a little while we talk about the revivalism today we usually refer to non-revivalism that we do so know of it's a little gathering that they dim the light get your emotionally jacked yeah alter calm and whatnot reading doesn't really come along reading doesn't fit the equation and what makes it worse if you go to Christian one of the Christian bookstores yeah you find shelves full of and and classics that we treasure so much don't see them anymore in shelves and I just wanted to throw that out and comment on what could be done what should be done

I think I think Jason what yeah I mean you can I like the little Wittenberg door cartoon this guy's really excited and he says I just accepted Keith Green at a Jesus concert and you kind of go it's just like it's lots of excitement you know and but where there's life give me life any day over something that's completely dead give me life I can work with it we can work with it we can go deep we can start to read together we can where there's life there's hope you know and Jim Packer got away with saying that he thought that American Evangelicalism was sort of 3,000 miles wide and half an inch deep and his ministry has been I call it a Robin Hood ministry take from the rich and give to the poor and to take and ground people and have where there's life popular Evangelicalism charismatic whatever form where there's life let's then push into depth and let's go up let's go deep and let's and through reading through discipleship and so on so I think it's possible in a sense to disparage some of this popular piety or to see it as retrograde in one form or another but I would sort of take the take it from a different point of view and say let's where there's life that's a great starting point let's go as deep as we can yeah yeah so the message is the message is when you're doing your devotions write in the margins and pass it on it's a blessing to others well thanks a lot

Bruce great stuff thank you thanks good to be with you it's good to read someone's devotions thank you thank you thank you thank you