

500WoL Reviews: 12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You

There are two types of information that cause me realize where my weaknesses lie and convict me into wanting to change: well-researched statistics and well-reasoned arguments from the Bible.

So, being a confessed smartphone addict (which I have written about [here](#)) Tony Reinke's new book *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* really impacted me through the use of both.

I had seen it recommended on Twitter several times by people I consider to be wise. And I read it quickly yet carefully. I will probably read it regularly. That is how badly I need the material.

The book is written clearly and unashamedly from a Christian worldview. And as such is able to tie numerical data and Bible together. Reinke doesn't just tell you that people check their smartphones every 4.3 minutes of their waking lives, but also that 73% of smartphone users do so before they do their spiritual disciplines. As someone who believes time with God is important yet still feels deep temptation to check my phone constantly, this speaks to me. The author weaves dozens of Scripture references throughout his profound points about how smartphones affect behavior and thinking. I do not want to think through this issue without theology because I am convinced Christians cannot truly compartmentalize their lives. Reinke makes sure Truth is the main goal and not secular thought on how we change and control our habits through goodness and effort.

The smartphone phenomenon is so new (about 10 years old now) that this book is groundbreaking to me. The smartphone addiction snuck up on me so quickly and subtly. I was not

ready for it. As with all major cultural changes, Christian leaders need to be on the front lines, thinking and researching and communicating their findings. This is definitely that.

This book is peer reviewed; the foreword is by John Piper and has endorsements by people like Russell Moore and Jackie Hill Perry. So you can be assured that even if you do not agree with it all, people who get the Bible and are on the front lines of technology and social media have expressed their appreciation for what Reinke has written.

I have made conscious decisions about how to deal with my addiction as a result of this book and you can read them in the article I linked above. I am very thankful for the inspiration to repent.

If you have a smartphone, and especially if you check it constantly, I strongly recommend this book. Every culture has their sinful vices that are so common that we basically ignore them and I am convinced that time-wasting and narcissism are legitimate threats of the social media and smartphone movements. Yet they are so common they can become invisible, much like the “gossip” prayer request.

Thanks to Tony Reinke for causing people like me to see this issue for the first time.

500 + 63 Words or Less **Reviews: The Deathly Hallows**

It took me almost a year, but I have finally finished my first reading of the 7-book Harry Potter series and it has been

quite the ride, one of the best literary adventures of my life. Over the course of my journey I have met wizards, witches, goblins, ghouls, werewolves, house elves, talking portraits, merpeople, centaurs, giants, dragons, and dementors. And this is only a portion of the beings Harry Potter has introduced me to.

While I still consider *The Half Blood Prince* the best book in the series for a variety of reasons, the *Deathly Hallows* is not far behind. It came across to me as the most realistic of the entire lot with its depiction of what a storybook "adventure" would probably be like. There would likely be a lot of wandering about and being unsure as to what to do. People would get irritated with each other, they would get bored with all the wandering around looking for something, and everyone involved would get disillusioned with the whole shebang in varying degrees and forms. Much like the adventure of life itself.

It was also a much different animal in that most of it did not take place in Hogwarts but on the aforementioned climactic adventure. In my opinion, the personal drama that goes on between the three adventurers while the adventure slowly got going is not remotely detracting. In fact, this personal drama made up some of the best parts of the book. There was a heaping helping of meaty characterization to be had there by all three of them.

And there is the other big character of the book who wasn't even around for the vast majority of it. Although he died in *The Half Blood Prince*, Dumbledore's presence is huge in the *Deathly Hallows*. In much of the book it is as though he were symbolic of the God of Scripture with Harry constantly questioning him and why he didn't explain this or that while he was alive. Whether or not Rowling really meant for this to be the case when she wrote it, I don't know, but the likeness is strong.

We also learn a lot about Dumbledore's personal backstory and that he wasn't perfect after all. Like everyone else, he had baggage, baggage that for him directed the course of the rest of his life. It is brilliant characterization of a character that had already left the world of our story.

The Deathly Hallows is a fitting culmination of all the preceding acts. And we take many a sad farewell (for the present) of Hermione, Ron, the other Weasleys, Lupin, Tonks, Mad Dog Moody, Luna, Neville, Hagrid, McGonagall, and many other unforgettable characters that have left on us a lasting impact. Oddly, though, the departure the most emotional to me, was the farewell of the Dursleys. Those Muggliest of all Muggles who treated Harry like so much trash for so long somehow managed to worm their way into my heart. I'll miss them.

That is the end of my 500WoL. Here is my personal ranking of the seven books:

1. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*
2. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*
3. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*
4. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
5. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*
6. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*
7. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

500 Words or Less Reviews:

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

It has been almost three weeks since I have finished [*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*](#). I have actually been nervous about this one and wanted to approach it with a respectable amount of honor as the most literarily well-rounded of the lot.

[*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*](#) clocks in at 652 pages, immediately setting the stage for the plot of the rest of the book during a cryptic meeting between Severus Snape and the Black sisters. It is during this encounter that Snape makes an unbreakable vow with Narcissa Malfoy in which he will be obligated to help her son, young Draco Malfoy, with a Voldemort-ordained task. The plot of the rest of the work flows from this Malfoy/Snape mission.

In essence, the book is really about Snape himself. This fact makes the mysterious naming of the book itself especially ingenious. If you have read this far into the article, you are passionate enough about the franchise to already be familiar with the story. Assuming that is the case, it is in no way a SPOILER to say that Malfoy and Snape accomplish their mission, with Snape ending Dumbledore's life in the lightning-struck tower.

One of the very best and most fascinating characterizations in the entire franchise has been embodied in the person of the relatively rarely seen Dumbledore. But Rowling makes up for that rarity here and with much magnificence. There are too many amazing Dumbledore scenes to name. And then he goes out in high style with one of the best funerals of all time with even the merpeople and the centaurs showing up to pay him homage.

The central theme of this work was very clear and extremely well exemplified: love. Love is everywhere: Tonks and Lupin, Bill and Fleur, Ron and Hermione, Harry and Ginny, and, um, Ron's passing "thing" with Lavender Brown. Ron also has an unfortunate encounter with some love potion. To cap it all off, Dumbledore talks more deeply in *Half-Blood Prince* than in previous books concerning Voldemort's one true weakness, which is his inability to love, a "fault" that would be his undoing.

Although they have been present in every book, I have found that Rowling is getting better at the long stretches of "information relation." At this point, they feel like very natural points of the dialogue instead of contrived and stilted manifestos. It worked better than ever in *HBP*. In fact, I would say that the dialogue as a whole was one of the book's most winning points. The humor was especially strong. I don't think Rowling has given me as many belly laughs in any previous work. Although the examples are legion, the best humor, in my opinion, probably came by way of the person of Luna Lovegood.

The dialogue, the honed prose, the final glories of Dumbledore, the humor, the love, etc., etc., etc, and so forth. For these reasons, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* has taken first place in the HP house of my heart.

[500WoL: The Immortal Irishman](#) [by Timothy Egan](#)

Timothy Egan's *The Immortal Irishman*, a 2016 biography of Thomas Meagher, is a gripping narrative that reads more like a novel than traditional history or biography. It's clear that

Egan did meticulous research, but unlike many historians, he is able to convey his findings in a way that compels his readers to keep turning pages. If you are looking to read up on Irish, Australian and American history, you can do it all by reading this book.

Who was Thomas Francis Meagher? That depends in what part of the world the question is asked.

In Ireland, he was a leader of the failed Rising of 1848 and creator of their tricolor flag. When thousands of Irish were starving during the time of the potato famine and British indifference, the Young Ireland movement sought freedom from British oppression. The patriot-poet Meagher was a key voice for home rule.

In Australia, Meagher was a convict, but so was nearly everyone else. Arrested by the British for his involvement in the uprising of 1848, Meagher was banished from his beloved homeland, a sentence worse than death. After his adventures in the British penal colony, Meagher dramatically escaped to a new life in America.

In America, Meagher was an immigrant. Instantly, he was a leader of the maligned Irish-catholic immigrants of New York City. They came over to escape starvation. These huddled masses overwhelmed the bottom rung of the social ladder. Through speeches in lyrical Gallic and elevated English (with sprinkles of Latin or Greek) Meagher's poetic prose spoke to the soul of his exiled compatriots.

But for what cause? Would Ireland ever be free? What about the cause of freedom in their newly adopted land? Meagher's opportunity for historic greatness (a calling he always put above wealth) came in the American Civil War. Meagher became the Brigadier General of the Union's Irish Brigade, a group recruited by Meagher from the tenements of New York. They fought bravely in such well-known battles as Bull Run,

Antietam, and Fredericksburg. In so doing, they liberated African-American Slaves and preserved the integrity of the nation they could now call theirs.

Meagher's life ended in the Wild West, as the appointed governor of the Montana Territory. Here he clashed with vigilantes and Natives alike. Here he died, according to Egan, murdered by a political enemy. While he was indeed flawed, he was, more importantly, a man of high ideals. He squandered his health and wealth for the cause of freedom and the pursuit of greatness, goals which he certainly achieved.

Egan's ability to tell this story, to connect the dots of a life over three continents, is a marvelous feat. While Egan struggles at times to capture the personality of his subject, he masterfully connects Meagher's life experiences to the larger historical situations. In so doing, the reader not only learns about the life of a man, but the times that continue to shape our time. Only 320 pages long, *The Immortal Irishman*, should be at the top of your summer reading list.

[500WoL: Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix](#)

Are you tired of these *Harry Potter* reviews yet? Are you as fed up as the poor Sirius relegated to spending his days in a dilapidated old house that he loathes? Are you as fed up as Harry was for pretty much this whole book? Well, humor me for three more journey's into the magical world of Hogwarts, will you? I'll be upfront with you about something. While I thoroughly enjoyed most of *The Order of the Phoenix*, I do consider it the least among the five *Harry Potter* books I have

now read. And I think it is a lesser work for three reasons.

First, it's too long. In my review for [The Goblet of Fire](#), I said that while I think smaller literary works are usually better because the author has honed it and taken out all or most of the fat, I do concede that long works can be great and also well-honed. The long *Goblet of Fire* is an example of this. With very few rough spots and fatty tissue, Rowling honed it to a sharp edge from beginning to end. *The Order of the Phoenix*, not so much. It was too long and too full of fat and fluff. Thus, it was a bit duller of edge. I think *Order of the Phoenix* would have been just fine and dandy with 100 to 150 less pages.

There are a couple of other lesser reasons I place this in a decided last place of these first five. Second, there is much less imaginative detail than in the preceding books. There is some, I know, but less. Loved the imaginative description of their cleaning the worn down 12 Grimmauld Place, the inherited home of Sirius Black. But there weren't as many imaginative details after this. Way too little of the ghosts, too little candy and Quidditch and magic and wonder and the fat lady. The third reason was Harry's almost continual bad attitude throughout the book. It is totally realistic for a boy of his age and in his very problematic situation in life to experience such angst, I suppose. But it doesn't add to the enjoyment when a book's main protagonist is so unlikable most of the time.

Despite these bad things and despite my putting it at the bottom of the list, I absolutely do not consider this a bad work or that I have wasted my time. Thoroughly enjoyed it and you will too. Saying it is the worst doesn't seem right. Instead, lets say it is the least of the best. Plus, it contains several very key elements of the overall story and centaurs, giants, lots of intriguing side plots, and the sadistic Professor Umbridge. Not to mention the string of very authentically moving moments after about page 500. I consider

these most touching moments in the series so far. But be warned: Here you're going to face dangers more ominous than O.W.L exams. So gird your minds, boys and girls, gird your minds. That is all.

The Rough Draft of Solace

In an effort to be completely transparent, this is going to be messy. I have attempted to write this article three or four times over the last few weeks and it has been a fight to get it to come together. My thoughts are scattered and confused. The end result will probably feel like a rough draft at times and I am going to have to be okay with that because no amount of effort on my part will fix certain deficiencies. One additional disclaimer before we get to the meat of the matter at hand: I'm going to be blunt. I want to be true and honest and real. I don't want to hide behind platitudes and clichés. I'll do my best.

Right now, this very moment, there are many people who are hurting. They are experiencing profound physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. Or some combination of all of them. I have friends who are dealing with frightening medical diagnoses. I have friends who are watching their marriages collapse. I have friends who have lost someone dear to them. I hate it. It's overwhelming in the most complete sense of that word. I hear these things and I have no words of comfort or wisdom to offer. I am struck mute by my lack of power. In a practical manner of speaking, there is almost nothing I can do to help any of these people.

I've watched friends deal with so much garbage, so much pain, that it makes me angry and causes my faith in a good God to

take a hit. Deep down, I know those feelings are stupid so I do my best to move past them and not allow that seed of doubt to take root in my life. But if I feel this way, safely observing it all from the outside, how much more pain, doubt, and anger do the people living their own personal hell feel? I have no idea. And I really have no right to speculate or assume to know. I can do my best to understand and empathize, but that's mostly empty rhetoric. Understanding is a long way down the road from experiencing, and I have never experienced pain and loss like so many have.

So why am I even writing this article? There are a few reasons, and none of them very flattering. First, I am not good with people. I am an introvert, awkward and uncomfortable around most people. When confronted with a damaged or hurting person, my typical reaction is avoidance or the most superficial interaction possible. And honestly, it's not because I don't care. It's because I have no idea what to say or how to act in those situations. I prefer to communicate my feelings, thoughts, and emotions in written form. Which brings me to my second reason. If you want a glimpse inside my head, I'll make it as simple as I can: My hope in writing this is that something I say here will be a help to those that are suffering. Yet even here, I ask myself why would anything I write help anyone that is experiencing life-altering pain and sorrow? I've landed on something that might answer that question. My words are impotent. My words will help no one. But if my words reflect the words of God, then they will not return void. If my words can offer even a flicker of light that points to the Great Light, then that has to be enough. It's the only reason to do this.

While I have not experienced loss like many others, my life has not been without pain and sadness. I am beyond grateful that when my family went through its most difficult time, the loss of my sister-in-law to cancer, my friends did not offer us empty platitudes and clichés. They showed up.

They cried with us. They hugged us. They laughed with us as we remembered the beautiful soul we had lost. Those things meant the world as we dealt with the pain and confusion and bone-wearying grief. I want to do that now, but I know it is impractical at best. Most people have horror stories of well-intentioned people offering empty words of comfort during times of mourning. I hope this will not be another horror story for some. Yet, if you are looking despair in the face, if your grief is so strong that you just can't cry anymore, if healing and restoration feel a million miles away, just maybe these words will help even a little.

Jesus shares your grief and weeps with you. I've always been intrigued by the events surrounding the death of Lazarus in the book of John. The sickness, the delay in travel, the death, the graveside scene, and then the triumphant and impossible resurrection. It is a fascinating vignette, one of deep truth and a few tantalizing questions. While I have heard it taught in a variety of ways, nothing has been more uncertain to me than the simple passage found in John 11:35. "Jesus wept." Did he weep because of the questions and lack of faith of Lazarus's sisters? Did he weep because he was bothered by the crowd and their weeping, however genuine? Scripture does say he was troubled by it. Or, did he weep because his friend had died? Perhaps he wept because he was moved to mourn with Mary and Martha. I choose to believe that it was all those things, yet deeper and more profound. I believe that Jesus wept because the very idea of death was so abhorrent to him. As my brother said in his beautiful article, [*Grief, Hope and Theology That Matters:*](#)

"Even more vivid is the account of Lazarus' resurrection in John 11. When confronted with the death of his own loved one, Jesus weeps alongside his family. Jesus fully participates in the grief. By verse 38, Jesus is so enraged in his grief that he does what every grieving person wishes he could do—a

miracle. It is in this account that Jesus reminds his followers that He is the resurrection and the life. He is the conqueror of death. Jesus not only hates death; He hates it even more than we do."

Jesus fully participates in our grief. What an amazing and comforting thought!

At the end of *The Silver Chair*, the fourth book in C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, after we witness the funeral of an aged King Caspian, we watch the protagonists of the story, Eustace and Jill, cry over the body of Caspian as it lays in a stream. They weep at the death of this great King and friend. The great lion Aslan weeps with them, and his grief and tears go beyond anything they feel, "each tear more precious than the Earth would be if it was a single solid diamond." And then, in an act of participatory grief, Aslan asks the children to take a thorn and plunge it deep into his paw. The blood then drips into the stream with Caspian's body and not only gives him new life but restores him to the vigor and likeness of his youth. Aslan felt the grief and loss more profoundly than the children, but then does something that we all wish we could do – he conquers death. That is the promise we can cling to in times of sorrow. Our Lord grieves with us. He hates the things that make us grieve more than we do and longs for the day when He will fully restore His creation to its rightful and intended glory.

Jesus bears your burdens and pain. The first time I read *The Lord of the Rings*, during my freshman year in college, I cried when Sam and Frodo, the two brave hobbits who had journeyed far to destroy the ring of power, reach the very doorstep of Mount Doom, the only place the ring could be destroyed, and Frodo is finally overwhelmed with exhaustion. His quest has left him a shell; broken and empty. He falls to the ground, unable to take another step; the weight of the ring, both physical and spiritual, is pulling him down,

forcing him to give up. That is when Sam, Frodo's gardener and best friend, resolves to help. He realizes he cannot carry the ring; it is not his burden to bear. The ring was entrusted to Frodo to carry and to destroy. Sam knows this and in his simple and unassuming wisdom, he chooses to do something even better. An act of such profound love and friendship, there is little in the world of literature that is its equal. Samwise Gamgee, though his body has been decimated after mile upon mile of travel, looks at his friend and cries out, "Come, Mr. Frodo! I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you."

Sam does for Frodo that which Frodo cannot do for himself. How much greater is that imbalance in our relationship with God? There are innumerable times in our lives when we find ourselves paralyzed with grief, fear, or pain. In those times, we go through the motions, yet our lives are merely a pantomime. Our steps are leaden and without aim. Our souls are frozen in time, unable to feel or move or trust again. It is in those times that we have the promises of God to cling to:

- Psalm 55:22 – "Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you."
- 2 Corinthians 12:9 – "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."
- Psalm 37:24 – "Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand."

Moving beyond the written promises of Scripture, we have the very life of Jesus as a promise. He meets us exactly where we need Him. When His disciples were terrified and confused after His death, not only does He comfort them with words of peace and His presence, a few days later, he meets them on the shore of the sea and cooks them a meal. He feeds them – something so tactile and so familiar. It is just one more beautiful picture of selflessness and tender love for His disciples to cling to when they face persecution and death in the years to come. Our Lord will bear our burdens, sustain us, and He will hold us up by His hand and by His grace. As

believers, we are called to do the same. Galatians 6:2 tells us to “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” When someone you love is hurting and bearing a burden that is too heavy, remember the words and actions of Jesus. If we are indeed His hands and feet, we can carry our wounded friends even if we cannot carry their wounds.

Finally, **Jesus rejoices over you.** I want the words of Scripture to do most of the talking for this point. In one of the most beautiful passages in the Old Testament, we find these words of hope and encouragement: “For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.” The creator of the universe takes delight in you with gladness. The savior of the world rejoices over you with joyful songs. Or, as the New American Standard Bible puts it, “He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.” What verbal expression can be more demonstrative and powerful than a shout of joy? Our God is so filled with love for you, that He shouts for joy. What a thought! In your time of deep pain and loneliness, it might be hard to feel this. It might be hard to hold on to this truth, but know, in the deepest part of your soul, that it is Truth. Our mighty Savior longs to calm your fears with His love. Even now, He is delighting in you. Even now, He is joyfully shouting and singing over you.

It is my hope that this doesn’t just add to the noise. If nothing else, I hope that my words get out of the way and that the truth of Scripture speaks clearly in your life. For those of you that have friends that are hurting, you know what to do. Be with them. Grieve with them. Weep with them. Carry them while they cannot move. Be their champion by singing over them, rejoicing over them, and shouting over them. For those

that are hurting, I hope that the people closest to you are fulfilling their roles by being Jesus in your time of need. Just know, Jesus shares your grief and weeps with you, He will gladly bear your burdens, and He rejoices over you with shouts and songs. If you can do nothing else, hold on to that.

J.K. Rowling, Chekhov's Gun and the Joys of Rereading

"Remove everything that has no relevance to the story. If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off. If it's not going to be fired, it shouldn't be hanging there.[1.Valentine T. Bill (1987), Chekhov: The Silent Voice of Freedom, Philosophical Library]" (Anton Chekhov)

(Editor's note: Major spoilers are included in this article. You have been warned.)

The only thing I have found more enjoyable than reading through the *Harry Potter* series is reading through it many times.

My reasons for reading it twice a year or so (with the intention of continuing to do so a minimum of once a year until I die) are legion and normal. I get just as many chills the fifth time I read Harry call for his Firebolt during the first task of the Triwizard Tournament as I did the first time I read it. I got just as emotional during Dobby's death and

during Snape's final pensieve memories the last time I read as the first time.

Some things are better when I reread, such as the final battle between Harry and Voldemort, which is so rich in detail it had my head spinning the first time. I needed several times to grasp it all. Sometimes I just miss details until I reread, as I didn't note until about my third reading that Ron put his socks on Dobby's feet before they buried him, a detail so touching and impacting I cannot believe I missed it the first times.

But on that note, there is one thing that stands out about *Harry Potter* than causes me to adore rereading beyond the typical reasons. They call it "Chekhov's Gun" and J.K. Rowling was a master at introducing seemingly minor plot devices in passing that turn out to be hugely significant hundreds and sometimes thousands of pages later. Some were major their first appearance but even then their magnitude after the gun goes off blows me away as I reread.

I am pretty much the opposite of someone like Sherlock Holmes; I don't notice detail immediately and that actually helps to get lost in stories while reading and watching TV and movies. Plot twists and fired guns catch me completely off guard. Which is a glorious feeling. And Rowling was a magician at these things for over 4000 pages. I remember during my first reading my wife told me: "Rowling doesn't introduce anything by accident. It all has a purpose."

And while her plot twists are already legendary, and as they are so well covered, I want to focus on these Chekhov's Guns, which is trope of a different color. There are many and I'll mention several but not nearly all. These are more or less my favorites after having been through the series several times (note I may have some minor details wrong on these and if I do I welcome correction):

The Vanishing Cabinet(s)

First mentioned in Book 2 when Harry hid in the one in Borgin and Burkes after he ended up in Knockturn Alley by mistake. The Hogwarts twin is mentioned that same book when Harry is in Filch's office for getting in trouble for spreading mud on the floor. They become a bigger yet still minor part of Book 5 when the Weasley twins trap Slytherin Montague in the one at school, where as a result he realizes there are two and that they connect. And that becomes the basis for how Draco uses them to help kill Dumbledore in Book 6. Amazing.

The Necklace at Borgin and Burkes

In the very same scene on page 52 of *Chamber*, Draco notices the poisonous necklace that he eventually uses in Book 6 to try to kill Dumbledore, but instead nearly kills Katie Bell.

The Hand of Glory

Yet again first mentioned in Book 2 when Draco sees it in B&B (how insignificant these details—in such a short scene—seem at the time!) Then, early on in Book 6, Ron mentions that Draco has a HoG. And it becomes a crucial part of how he foils Harry's friends from stopping him in the climactic scene.

The Tiara on the Mannequin

This one and the next one win for "Most random, easy-to-overlook-while-reading detail that becomes monumental later on". In Book 6 when Snape has Harry trapped for using the Half Blood Prince's potions book, Harry hides in in the Room of

Hidden things and marks its location by noting it is next to a bust with a wig and tiara. Finding that Tiara is as crucial to anything in Book 7, as it was a horcrux.

[Not quite as cool but still on topic is that halfway through Book 7 Luna casually mentions the “lost diadem of Ravenclaw” in passing and her father was wearing a (sort of) replica.]

The Locket at 12 Grimmauld Place

The mention of the locket is so brief in Book 5 when they are cleaning the Order’s Headquarters that I’ve twice read the book looking for its mention and still missed it. It’s so brief and camouflaged by a million other details on the page that only the most brilliant, hyper observant people likely remembered it the first time through when Hermione recalls it in Book 7. What a gun to go off in the last book! Covering pages and pages and chapters and chapters of finding the locket, stealing it back, carrying it around and then finally destroying it. And think of all that happens in those pages: the break into the Ministry, Ron leaving, Ron coming back, the doe, the sword, etc.

Dumbledore’s Broken Nose

3,500 pages or so between gun appearance (the very first appearance of Dumbledore in the first book mentions his nose) and gun going off (Rita Skeeter publishes that Aberforth punched Albus coffinside at Ariana’s funeral). Incredible!

Aberforth and Goats

Not as crucial to the plot but quite hilarious: In *Goblet* Dumbledore references his brother getting in trouble

for illegal charms on a goat. In the next book, Harry notices that the Hog's Head smells like goats (and that the barkeep looks strangely familiar). In the final book, we find out Aberforth is the barman for the Hog's Head. So clever!

Dumbledore's Prophecy About Wormtail

As Harry bemoans letting Wormtail go free at the end of Book 3, Dumbledore assures him one day he will be grateful he did so. And in Book 7, thousands of pages later, Wormtail's mercy in return helps them escape certain death.

Dumbledore and Snape's Argument

In Book 6 Hagrid lets it slip that they were arguing so Harry thinks it's a reason to not trust Snape. Book 7 clears up that they argued about whether Snape would kill Dumbledore.

Dumbledore references the Room of Requirement

In Book 4 at the Yule Ball, Dumbledore casually claims he found a secret room to use the bathroom when he needed it most. In Books 5 and 7 that very room, the "Come and Go Room" (or "Room of Requirement"), becomes the room for the Hogwarts anti-Voldemort movement. Thank you, Dobby. And sadly, in Book 6 it is used to plot the eventual death of Dumbledore.

The Diary

This is a huge gun shown in Book 2 (marvel at the moment towards the beginning of the book when they are going to King's Cross and Ginny forgets the diary at home and they have to go back and get it) that goes off at the end of that book.

But even more impressively, it goes off again in as it ends up being deemed a horcrux in Book 6.

Marvelo Gaunt's Ring

Another major gun first mentioned in Book 6 in a pensieve memory, it is so significant that it turns out to be a Hallow *and* a Horcrux by Book 7.

Dumbledore and the Mirror of Erised

No, Dumbledore doesn't see socks, as he tells Harry in Book 1; Harry surmises correctly all the way at the end of Book 7 at the Hog's Head what Dumbledore really sees, as Aberforth unloads truths about the Dumbledores that even Rita Skeeter could not dig up.

Harry's Scar Prickling

This one is very early, less than halfway through the very first book and of course we think it has to do with Snape. But we learn quickly that it does not. And it goes off over and over, Rowling adding layer upon layer to why Harry and Voldemort are connected. So while not as obscure as many others, I mention it because amazingly, the final firing of the gun (and the richest detail) isn't until the penultimate chapter, at King's Cross in Book 7. We find out that Harry was the horcrux Voldemort never intended to make. This makes reading about the first prickling of his scar in the Great Hall his first day in Book 1 so much more meaningful. And speaking of this...

Dumbledore Tells Harry (Essentially) That He is a Horcrux...in Book Two

This is probably my favorite of all. Read this dialogue, with the end of Book 7 in mind:

“You can speak Parseltongue, Harry,” said Dumbledore calmly, “because Lord Voldemort can speak Parseltongue. Unless I’m much mistaken, he transferred some of his own powers to you the night he gave you that scar. Not something he intended to do I’m sure.”

“Voldemort put a bit of himself in me?” Harry said, thunderstruck.

“It certainly seems so.”

Mind. Blown.

Did I miss some you consider your favorites? Let us know below!

“Reclaiming the Lost Art of Biblical Meditation”: A

Review

“I wish I could single-handedly revive the art of Scripture memorization in our homes and our churches. There’s no greater legacy to bequeath to our children than a storehouse of memory verses to draw upon their whole lives through.” (Robert J. Morgan)

The Title Made Me Feel Bad (In a Good Way)

I can’t recall a time in my life when a book title convicted me like this one did. If there is one thing I know I should do but don’t do often enough, it’s biblical meditation. So I got this book as quickly as I could and read it carefully.

I’ll go ahead and abandon any pretense that this “review” will offer any substantial critique of what Dr. Morgan writes here. I think it is dangerous to put people on pedestals where they cannot be critiqued, but my main goal here is to try to influence people to read this book because the content is so important. Any criticisms I have are extremely superficial and will succumb to the weight of the Dr. Morgan’s central message.

Evangelical Crusades and Hannibal Lector Bring it Home

The content portion of the book is a tidy 123 pages and I knocked it out in a couple of days in probably less than three hours total. It reads simply enough that I would think an average 9-year old could understand it. But that is not an insult because it’s chock full of extremely helpful advice, Scripture references and practical illustrations that I hope not only inspire me but also guide me at 39 years old to make Scripture meditation a bigger part of my life. I’ve been a

pastor for 15 years. I have attended two exceptional Bible Colleges. I have memorized and meditated on Scripture before. But as I alluded to above, I have never made it a habit and such an integral part of my life as you can tell Dr. Morgan has.

Anyone who knows Dr. Morgan or has sat under his preaching knows that you can count on two things with everything he teaches: First, he will incorporate a ton of Bible. I remember once when I was at a service at Donelson, Dr. Morgan's church in Nashville, his ministry cohort Jeff Nichols joked from the stage that when he takes notes on Rob's sermons he can count on there being like 17 well thought-out Scripture references in support of each point. Secondly, he will show you how diversely read he is by citing an insane amount of biographical information and quotes from people from centuries ago and people from today. Just look at the footnotes in the back of this book and marvel not only of his use of Billy Graham and J.I. Packer, but also Anthony Hopkins and Stephen King. And also his use of people I do not know but that he knows personally and had invaluable wisdom to offer for this book.

And what he does by quoting the sacred and the secular is build a very simple yet very powerful case for how valuable meditation is for learning and behavior. The amount of times the Bible refers to meditation, even if it doesn't use that word, is legion. Old Testament, New Testament, historical books, psalms, prophets, gospels, letters...every section has significant contributions here and that makes this material impossible to ignore.

We Don't Meditate Because We Are Good; We Meditate **Because We're Not**

I confess I appreciate as well how Dr. Morgan weaves in at

times his own personal weaknesses and struggles that have led him to be a better meditator. It is easy for someone like me to look at his lengthy pastoral and preaching ministry and to idealize it. But he does not allow for that. He no doubt practices biblical meditation as well as anyone I know and has earned the right to write this book, but he allows us to see that meditation exists in large part because we are so flawed and weak. We must meditate because we know God so poorly on our own. Our minds are so bent to evil and darkness, worry and anxiety, that meditation is as much like medicine for the sinful soul as it is exercise for the mind. I daresay that is what separates Christian meditation from things like Zen Buddhism. The book is definitely written humbly and not haughtily and I am positive that when a person meditates constantly on the Bible, teaching others to do well will likely be from a place of humility. That's how the Bible works in teaching us about how we relate to God.

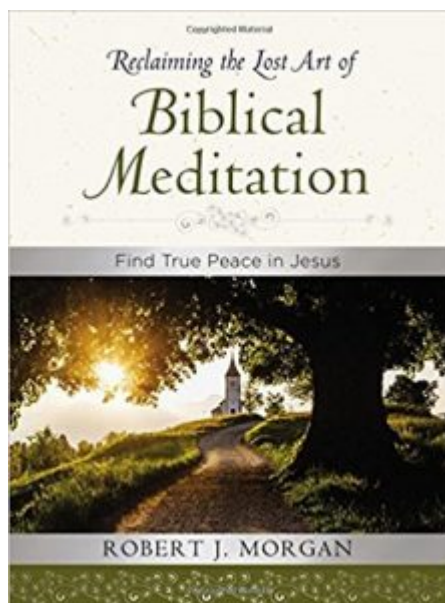
The 'tips' interspersed are so practical, yet not often practiced. At least by me. I am praying that will change. Sticky notes will be easy. Sharing my meditation with people I come across during the day will be hard. But I will try both, and many other things he advises.

Dr. Morgan lists several times we should meditate—when we wake up in the morning, when we wake up in the middle of the night, when we are lonely, when we are on a plane, when we drive, etc. Basically, we can mediate constantly. At that point the conviction of the book title came and hit me full in the face. I meditate so infrequently. I am too easily distracted. I have little doubt the content of the book, notably the Scriptures within, will change my course on this. I pray that it lasts til I die and is not a short lived emotional response.

Buy It. Read It. Do It.

I hope this book helps millions as it has helped my thinking (and, in theory, my behavior). I am challenged to put the phone down more and to focus my thoughts on Scripture and the nature of God more often. I know that Biblical meditation is not a quick fix to all anxiety and depression and crises. But it is a way to know God better and to allow him to change us even if he does not change our circumstances. These things will always be better for us than having everything “fixed”. If we are to know him in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering and if we are to take every thought captive, we must meditate. Dr. Morgan’s book is an extremely beneficial resource to challenge and guide even older Christians in this discipline.

Buy the book by clicking the picture below:

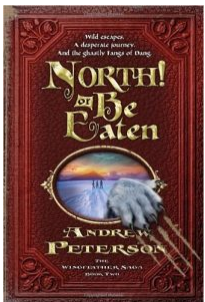


Reading Ever On: March 2017

Here are the books we read last month and what we thought of them...

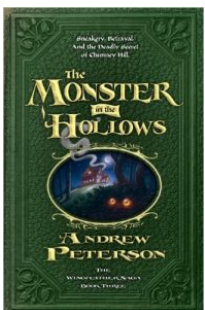
Gowdy Cannon

***North! Or Be Eaten* (Wingfeather Saga Book 2) by Andrew Peterson**



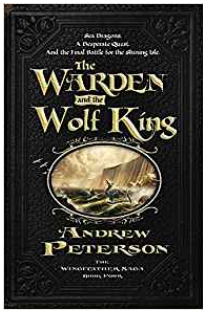
I wrote about the first book in this series last month and I finished the other three in March. They are excellent and get better with each volume. They will be added to my rotation of favorite fantasy series, of which I read at least a little every day. This one has my favorite scene of the Wingfeather Saga, when Janner faces a situation so dark and discouraging it was like Andrew Peterson read my journal from my worst days and made it into a fantasy plot. This book is hard to put down start to finish.

***The Monster In The Hollows* (Wingfeather Saga Book 3) by Andrew Peterson**



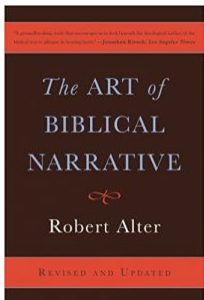
The action-packed adventure continues in the third installment and it gets really good with the three main character siblings starting at a new school. Having done this before in my personal life, I was enthralled. And the climax, centering around the book title, is wild and unpredictable. I am ready to read this again.

The Warden and the Wolf King (Wingfeather Saga Book 4) **by Andrew Peterson**



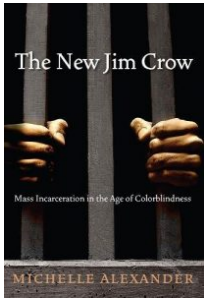
Peterson set the bar high in the first three and the pay off in this concluding volume (much longer than the other books) is worth it. There are secondary characters developed in an alternating scene (this happens in prior books but not as in depth as this one). I admit I didn't appreciate this as much as I could have if I had loved those characters as much as the main ones, but the overall story and ending is emotional and satisfying. I recommend this series to anyone who loves Narnia, Hogwarts or Middle Earth or even if you do not.

The Art of Biblical Narrative by Robert Alter



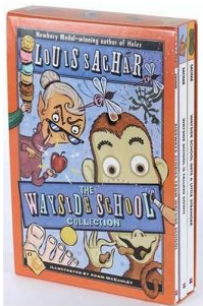
Written by a Jew and rather short for a volume on biblical interpretation (183 pages, since it focuses on one genre of the Bible), the thinking in this book is levels beyond what I am capable of and I thoroughly benefited as a result. A professor at Moody recommended it to me years ago as a book way out of the common Christian sphere on the topic and this was at least my third reading. Highly recommended for hermeneutics junkies and anyone interested in how to get into the world behind the Bible text to get its meaning. If nothing else, I would read it just to see how the author explains why the Genesis 38 story of Judah and Tamar interrupts the Joseph narrative.

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander



I'm nothing if not teachable so I read this in an attempt to try to understand the thoughts behind many who maintain that there is still a significant amount of racial injustice in the US, notably in the judicial system. As a white male I want to read what people who think differently than me have to say but also to filter it critically.

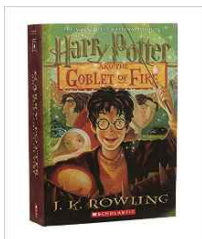
***The Wayside School Series* by Louis Sachar**



Weird and random is my wheelhouse and so this trilogy of children's books has been my absolute favorite since the late 80s when they first came out. You have a boy who counts with the wrong numbers but always gets the right answer. You have a girl who loves dead rats. You don't have a 19th story to your building (the builder said he was very sorry). The original, *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*, was so popular Sachar wrote the sequels due to an avalanche of fan demand. I wish he'd never stopped. *Wayside School Is Falling Down* and *Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger* take the character development of the first book and add in zany and nonsensical plots that make me laugh and leave me giddy. Perfect reading for small kids who love silliness and for adults who are under great stress (hand raised for me these days buying my first house), I will be reading these til I die. I can't wait to read them to my kids.

Ben Plunkett

***Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* by J. K. Rowling**

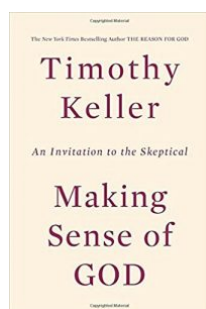


Just a few days ago I reviewed Goblet of Fire, which you can see [here](#). I will dispense with regurgitating everything I said, but I will warn you once again that you should be prepared for a big book. But that will very likely mean nothing even if you are, like me, normally a very, very slow reader. What would usually take me several months to read, only took me a little over one. And I promise you won't regret the adventure. There is a nearly seamless flow and flawless writing from section to section. The only flaw in this book is Rowling's traditional information vomitation courtesy of our big baddy Lord Voldemort.

If you haven't read [The Sorcerer's Stone](#), [The Chamber of Secrets](#), and [The Prisoner of Azkaban](#) yet, you will want to read those classics first before delving into this masterpiece.

Mike Lytle

***Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* by Tim Keller**



I am not a Calvinist, but I firmly believe I am predestined to enjoy anything that Keller writes. Whether he is discussing prayer, dealing with pain and suffering, or the importance of work in our lives I always find his books thought provoking and convicting. That being said, I especially like the way he handles apologetics. His newest book, Making Sense of God tackles many common objections that religious skeptics have and explains how rational and reasonable the Christian faith really is. Keller doesn't belittle those he disagrees with and always presents his arguments in a calm,

measured tone. I also appreciate how he is more focused on the big picture than trying to prove each and every small point. This is a good read for believers and skeptics alike.

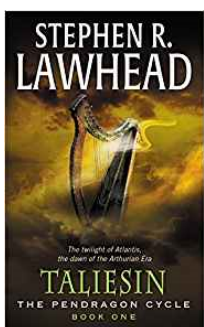
Phill Lytle

***The Bands of Mourning: A Mistborn Novel* by Brandon Sanderson**



This is the third installment of a four book series. It's the second series set in the Mistborn world. At this point, Sanderson is working at a level most authors would envy. His writing is at turns exciting, intense, funny, emotional, and always interesting. With great characters and a wonderfully complex plot, *The Bands of Mourning* is further evidence that Sanderson is at the top of his game and he isn't going anywhere any time soon.

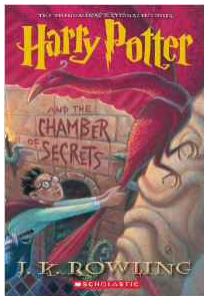
***Taliesin (The Pendragon Cycle, Book 1)* by Stephen R. Lawhead**



The Pendragon Cycle is Lawhead's unique take on the Arthurian legends. He weaves the myth of Atlantis with Fifth and Sixth century Britain to create a world that is both believable and fantastic all at the same time. The story is engaging and vibrant. The themes are rich and complex. The characters are bigger than life yet completely relatable. I've read this series at least seven times and I never tire of venturing back into the world of bards and warriors, princesses and prophets, priests and kings.

Nathan Patton

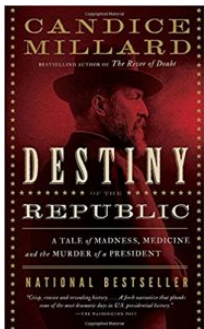
***Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* by J. K. Rowling**



I am continuing to read this series with my sons (their first time, my billionth), and they are continuing to enjoy it immensely.

Check out fellow REO contributor Ben Plunkett's review of this book [here](#).

***Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President* by Candice Millard**



I didn't really know anything about James Garfield, other than that he was a president of the United States and was assassinated, before reading this fascinating book. Not only does the author tell Garfield's history, but she also includes a biography of his murderer, Charles J. Guiteau, and a selective biography of inventor Alexander Graham Bell who worked tirelessly to help save Garfield's life. In addition to the political history, this book also explains much of the scientific and medical history of that time and how the medical practices of that time especially may have contributed to Garfield's death.

The story of James Garfield the man was absolutely captivating. He could have been one of the greatest leaders of our country rather than being remembered only for having died while in office.

I hope to find a good biography on Alexander Graham Bell to read soon.

500 Words or Less Reviews: Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire

The Harry Potter books have been climbing in page length ever since *The Sorcerer's Stone*. The biggest gulf is between *The Prisoner of Azkaban* and the present book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Like the massive fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (which I will review at a later date), the 734-page *The Goblet of Fire* is a veritable Monster Book of Monsters. I freely admit that I am a very slow reader and that it would normally take me six months to read a book this size. It says a heaping helping about it that I finished it in just over a month.

I'll go ahead and say it: The first 145 pages are a masterpiece, with the Weasley's reigning supreme. I could have spent the entire book with that family—especially Mr. Weasley. His encounter with the Dursley's in the fourth chapter (“Back to the Burrow”) is one of the funniest incidences...ever. But this is not the only reason these pages are awesome. There is a nearly seamless flow and flawless writing from section to section: The dark opening with Voldemort and Pettigrew; the Dursley and Weasley encounter; the International Quidditch Cup; and the debacle with and introduction to the Death Eaters. Yeah, for this bit Rowling surely summoned the superhuman writing powers.

But like Superman, Rowling has her kryptonite: tedious information relation. What makes it especially ridiculous in *Goblet of Fire* is that it is done this time by Lord Voldemort,

making him come across like the stereotypical villain who has to reveal his whole long story so the hero has time to foil his plans. That is pretty much exactly what happens here. While I loved the scene, it was kind of ruined with Voldemort makes his tedious rant: "First I blah, blah, blah" then I "blah, blah, blah" then "This really long thing happened" and "blah, blah, blah, etc., Mwahahahaha!" All of this leaving Harry ample time to formulate and carries out his escape plan.

I more often go in for the view that with works of writing less is more. The writers of smaller works have successfully honed their craft, cutting out all fat of any kind. This certainly does not mean that a longer work *can't* be great. *The Goblet of Fire* is a perfect example of this happening. Rowling is one of those authors who absolutely needs room to spread her creative wings and shows that more can really be more. The abundance of space here not only allows her to completely flesh out the central Triwizard Tournament plot but also to flesh out more amazing side plots than you can shake a stick (or wand) at.

But like all of the preceding books, the fault I mentioned was still far, far outweighed by the greatness. In part because of the first 145 pages, but also *almost* every single paragraph, character, and plotline of the following 589 following pages, this is definitely my favorite of these first four classics.