

## *Winter: A Time to Encounter Our Fathers in the Faith*

Snow in the forecast. Falling temps. Christmas songs filling the radio.  
It's that time of year again: Time to brainstorm for some "inside" ideas.  
And I have a great one for you.

If you're like me, the sight of brown and yellow leaves blowing across the yard sends you scurrying about with an ever-expanding to-do list. The arrival of autumn means snow is inevitable. And snow means those outside projects either won't get done until spring ... or will be done with cold-numbered hands.

But if the snow holds off for long enough, the to-do list shrinks sufficiently to allow a sigh of relief. It's then that my mind turns to inside ideas. With a family, there's always plenty to do. But we all need the occasional opportunity to relax.

For me, that means a good book. And over the past year, I've regained my appreciation for good biographies of Christian leaders.

Hebrews 13:7 urges us to remember those who went before us, who have taught us. "Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith."

We live in an age in which stories of those who preceded us are plentiful. Name the influential man or woman of the past, and it's quite likely you can find a biography about him or her. And from those biographies we can learn much.

So allow me offer some reading suggestions that are sure to warm your heart and excite your mind during the coming season of cold.

Among our forefathers in the Reformed churches, few stand taller than John Calvin and John Knox. I recently enjoyed fascinating biographies of each.

*Portrait of Calvin* by T.H.L. Parker is a slim volume that focuses on Calvin the Christian. While noting his accomplishments and his wisdom, Parker's passion is to uncover Calvin's *character*. What kind of a *man* was the reformer? Why did people follow him? What made him such an influential leader?

The fruit of Parker's labor is well worth reading. As he describes the life Calvin lived, we encounter Calvin the compassionate minister – a man who loved God's people and whose faith we ought to imitate.

Likewise the Scottish reformer John Knox. Although scorned as a preacher of fire and brimstone, Knox was weak and timid. In *The Mighty Weakness of John Knox*, author Douglas Bond shows how Knox sought neither the pulpit nor fame. But the Lord used him to lead Scotland to the Savior.

Bond's book emphasizes God's preference for using those who are not naturally powerful or influential – men who know their weakness and cast themselves upon Christ. It's a refreshing reminder that the power needed by the church flows from Christ, and not from mere men.

For more on the reformers, I heartily recommend *Reformation Sketches* by the Rev. Dr. W. Robert Godfrey. A URC minister and professor, Rev. Godfrey shows us some little-known sides of Luther and Calvin, and he introduces us to the less-known reformers Philip Melancthon and Peter Martyr Vermigli. He includes chapters on the Reformation in France and on the writing of the Heidelberg and the Canons of Dort. Every page offers insights.

Children will enjoy the compelling story (and brief chapters) of Thea Van Halsema's *Three Men Came to Heidelberg* and *Glorious Heretic*. Packaged in one brief book, the two works tell the compelling stories of the Heidelberg Catechism and of the Belgic Confession, giving readers of any age a new appreciation for our Reformed confessions.

Another book sure to be appreciated by readers of all ages: Richard Hannula's *Trial and Triumph*. Hannula's book offers brief sketches of influential Christians from the generation immediately following the apostles (Polycarp and Blandina) through the 20<sup>th</sup> century (C.S. Lewis and Richard Wurmbrand). Each story is compelling – and each presents a lesson about how God has used His often-unlikely servants to serve the church and glorify Himself.

Finally, *The Last Crusader* by George Grant provides insights into the life of Christopher Columbus. Sure, you know who Columbus was. But do you know *why* he wanted to sail the ocean blue in 1492? What was so important about India that would compel him to take such a dangerous journey? When you learn the answer, your appreciation for this adventurous Christian will soar.

That's just a tiny sample of the excellent Christian biographies available.

You're welcome to borrow any of the books I've mentioned. And check out what's available in our church library, where there's a whole series of books that profiles folks whom God used to accomplish amazing things in His name.

Meanwhile, if you find biographies worthy of a read, by all means, please let me know. The profit to be gained from such books is well-worth sharing!

And may the Lord teach us to delight in learning what He has done through His people, using their example to inspire us to serve Him with faith and joy.