

C H A P T E R 5

THE MAN'S LIBRARY

How Wise Fathers Use Books to Disciple Future Generations

The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments. —2 Timothy 4:13

My father has never been a wealthy man by the financial standards of the world, but he gave me many rich treasures: He gave me life. He gave me an education to which he contributed substantially through personal discipleship. He gave me his hard-earned good name. He gave me a love for the Word of God and a child-like acceptance of the truth of that Word. He gave me

many challenging, inspiring, and wonderful experiences that helped to define my view of manhood.

And my father gave me one physical possession that intersected with each of the above—he gave me a library, a library that he built over many decades, and which was hand selected by my father for me.

But it all began when my father taught me the joy of reading and the blessing of being a son in his father’s library.

As a boy, my father’s library was always a thing of awe and beauty. I loved the rich mahogany-stained shelves of the sacred inner sanctuary called “Dad’s Study,” but more importantly, I viewed the old square room as a time vault into the unfolding history of my father. The shelves of the library were not only thick with books, but phenomenal artifacts from Dad’s world travels. The books themselves came in every shape and size, with dust jackets and without, in multi-volume collections, and as single volumes—but the vast majority were quality hardbacks. The various seasons of my father’s life—from his childhood at the Boston Latin School, to his undergraduate work at Harvard, to his various epochs of service on behalf of Christ and country—seemed to be chronicled for every family member to see through the many books which he had acquired over a lifetime of adventure, experience, and intensive reading.

Often, the information contained in the pages of these books was less important to me than the story of what these books represented to my father at the time he purchased them. I found clues handwritten in the margins; clues which pointed to priorities, challenges, struggles, epiphanies, and victories which he may have experienced at the time that the books were first opened and read by him. In some cases, as with his copy of R.J. Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law*, a flip to the back cover revealed notations of the date when he completed the first, second, and even third reading of the same valued book.

The mere presence of my father's library taught me to respect and love important books. And it increased my respect for my father as a man. My father had chosen not to invest his limited and precious resources in sports paraphernalia or entertainment, but in documents, literature, and resources that filled our home with knowledge. In my father's library, I met and grew to love the men that my father respected. There were shelves dedicated to the writings of the great Alexander Solzhenitsyn, to the life and legacy of George Washington, and to great reformers and heroes of Christianity. In my father's library, I met Shakespeare, Tacitus, and Blackstone. They were all there, and I knew that if they were important to my father, they needed to be important to me.

I watched him rise early in the morning and read. For many years my father's daily reading regimen included close to a half-dozen newspapers, journals, books, and, of course, the Bible. This took place early in the morning in his library and sometimes lasted two hours or more. Dad would sit in his great leather chair, with piles of magazines and newspapers around him, and unopened cartons of books—fresh arrivals from the various book clubs to which he belonged—accumulating on the floor and tables beside him.

Many of those books were designated for his children—and their future libraries. Dad was always thinking ahead. He was committed to sending us out someday with substantial libraries of our own. The Phillips children rarely received toys on birthdays and holidays—we were given books, and lots of them. And more than a few of these volumes were rather ambitious in substance and content—like giving me college-level texts on *The History of the Greek City States*, or Xenophon's *Persian Expedition* when I was still in grade school. I may not have read Xenophon as an eight-year-old, but I eventually got around to most of these books. By the time I left my father's home to begin the process of establishing my own household, those many years during which Dad invested in his son's future library had created a sizeable literary

nest-egg. Thanks to Dad, I was able to bring thousands of substantial books into my marriage—many of them signed and dated by my father.

The library my father began building for me when I was only six continues to grow as he adds to it year after year. For my fortieth birthday, I received a gift box with forty individually wrapped books on subjects as diverse as economics, theology, and foreign policy, each book hand selected for the occasion by my father.

What Makes a Great Library?

*Knowing I lov'd my books, he furnish'd me,
From mine own library with volumes that
I prize above my dukedom.
—Shakespeare, The Tempest*

The greatest men I have known have had great libraries. They love their libraries because it is there that they go to consult with their mentors. The noted evangelist and preacher, Samuel Davies, put it this way: “The venerable dead are waiting in my library to entertain me and relieve me from the nonsense of surviving mortals.”

To this day, when visiting a friend's home, I love to

be invited to look at his library. I can tell so much about the man by looking at the books he has collected, how he prioritizes them, and whether they are unopened museum pieces, or well-worn, dog-eared tools of dominion.

But libraries don't have to be massive to be significant. A great library may be a carefully selected library, a wisely organized library, or a library that simply accomplishes a specific purpose of its designer. Some great libraries are gloriously cluttered and filled with mysterious treasures to be rediscovered. Others are meticulously organized. Still others are a combination of the two. But one thing all great libraries have in common is old books. The books must be old, because most things worth reading were written prior to the advent of the twentieth century, and many of the best things to read are out of print, which means nothing but an original edition will do. There are many exceptions to this rule, but it is fair to say that most men who appreciate the importance of building a man's library want to stock it with old books.

Then, of course, there is the issue of aesthetics. Even if certain old books came back into print, the aesthetic of reading an old edition remains one of the allures of the man's library. It is not just the superior bindings, paper, and design of pre-twentieth century books, but the sensation of holding a literary artifact that was likely handled and

read by men from other centuries. It is the look of the book, the thickness of the paper, and the very smell of the document that makes an old book so attractive to those men who aspire to build a man's library for the future generations.

Whether the books are old or new, the man's library should be dominated by well-bound hardbacks as these are the only books that will stand the test of time. These books should be cared for and well preserved, but at the end of the day, books are not objects of worship; they are tools. They should be handled, read, and shared with others. Since great books and important libraries should be passed from one generation to the next, I favor men writing in the margins of their books. Many of the Founding Fathers did the same, and for good reason. Marking a book personalizes it and allows the reader to leave a memorial of his thoughts at the time, as well as a reference guide from which he can draw ideas for teaching, writing, or speaking. History records that both the sons of several notable Founders, as well as future generations of Americans, were able to benefit from the fact that the more ancient fathers left clues to their true, unpublished thoughts through the penciled commentary found in the margins of the volumes which lined their shelves.

In Search of the Man's Library

The love of learning, the sequestered nooks,

And all the sweet serenity of books.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

My two favorite “man libraries” were both created by national leaders to honor their fathers. The first is the King George III library, presently housed in the British Museum in London. Stunning in its beauty and scope, this is the type of library that most of us will only dream of. One part ultra-rare antiquities and another part beautifully-preserved first editions, the King George III library may be the closest thing we will get to a modern-day equivalent of the lost library of Alexandria. Spacious, warm, and accessible, this one-room library was built to preserve and present the great works of the past and present world. On one shelf, you can find Joseph Story’s *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States of America*, and on another, beautiful editions of Chaucer, Milton, and Bunyan. On a third, one can find actual stone-carved documents from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, and on a fourth, original carvings of laws from the days of Sargon II.

The second library is found in Quincy, Massachusetts.

As a physical expression of appreciation for the literary legacy of one generation for the next, few family libraries compare with the one built by Charles Francis Adams for his father, John Quincy Adams, the Sixth President of the United States. The President left a clause in his will requesting that his son build the library. Charles Francis not only honored his father by following his father's directions and specifications for a physical library building, but he also honored the intent of his father by using the library to write important books. In fact, he trained his sons, Brooks and Henry, to do the same, the latter of whom finished his famous nine-volume *History of the United States* in the Adams library built by his father. Explaining the importance of the library to him, Brooks Adams would comment, "I need a sitting room where I can entertain my friends, but I must have a library where my books can entertain me."

Neither John Adams nor John Quincy ever entered the library that would be dubbed the Stone Library, but their pictures are on the wall, and numerous artifacts from their lives remind everyone who enters of the importance of the great patriarchs and their continuing influence on the generations that followed.

Still open to the public, the Adams family library is home to more than 14,000 volumes and is remarkable for

its simplicity, its depth, and the multigenerational vision it communicates. The message of the library is simple: The best educations are taught from father to son. Important tools of such an education are the carefully selected books which are handed down from one generation to the next. It is the duty of sons to preserve the intellectual legacies of their fathers.

The library screams generational thinking! One is reminded of John Adams' observations once shared in a letter to his wife, Abigail:

I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.

The structure of the Adams family library is a simple rectangular building, about thirty by thirty feet, with true Puritan New England simplicity. Having said this, the beauty of the floor tiling, the richness of the shelving, and the magnificence of a room in which every square inch has been designed with purpose, leaves the visitor breathless. Of course, the statues and paintings which visually chronicle

the life of the Adams family and their friends is impressive, but it is the leather-bound books that captivate and enthrall one's attention—thousands of them, most ancient first editions that tell the story of the education, the passions, and the vision of one of the most influential families in history.

Building Your Library

In 2004, I visited the Adams library with my father, my sons, and my good friend, author and antiquarian, Dan Ford.

We entered the room and just stood with our mouths gaping until I finally broke the silence.

“This is a man's library,” says I.

“Yes, and it even smells like a man's library,” another chimes in.

To which Dan replies, “Ah, the smell! There should be a cologne called ‘Old Books.’ I would wear it every day.”

A few minutes later one of our team exclaims, “Wow, I would love to have a man's library like this.”

“Be careful, the Tenth Commandment forbids us from coveting our neighbor's goods,” another responds.

At which point my dad ended this line of the dialogue by retorting, “Gentlemen, I don't covet this library; I just want one exactly like it.”

Dad was joking, of course, but there was a point behind it—it is right and good that men should desire to leave a legacy of wisdom for their children—and the written word is a key means of accomplishing that goal. For this reason, the Christian man’s library should be a reflection of the core principle that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10).

Because the Bible is the only perfect book that instructs man in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, a Christian man’s library is built with the recognition that even the best books are merely supplemental to the Holy Scriptures. But wisely selected supplemental books are an invaluable asset to the Christian man; an encouragement and an incentive to dive deeper in search of the pearls of God’s written revelation. That is why I favor building libraries around histories, biographies, literature, and research tools which allow the Christian man to better understand the person and character of God, the universe He has created, and His providential hand in history.

With a little bit of thought and research, any Christian father can start the process of building a Christian man’s library. To begin, one must understand that a great man’s library is not a museum, but a toolshed of knowledge, a scientific laboratory of learning, and an office for self-improvement.

Wise fathers invest in their children. That investment involves enormous amounts of time dedicated to discipline, prayer, discipleship, and training. It is good to leave a financial inheritance to faithful sons, but it is better to leave a legacy of wisdom. By leaving a carefully built library for your sons and daughters, a man can hope to do just this. Because the purpose of knowledge and wisdom is not intellectual satisfaction, but preparation for a life of spiritual warfare and dominion works for the Lord. The Christian man's library may be an inviting, treasure-laden sanctuary of peace, but its mission is preparation for combat readiness. It is a classroom for Christian manhood.

Through my father's example, I came to believe that, in some ways, a man's library is a reflection of the life of the man: The library tells you what the man has been thinking about and what ideas he prioritizes. It is filled with the icons and artifacts of a man's life. But like the man himself, a thoughtful library takes a lifetime to build.

In the case of Charles Francis Adams, the family library took forty years to build. The first thirty-nine years were spent collecting, collating, and organizing the books and papers of the Adams family. The actual construction of the fireproof building took much less time. In his diary of September 28, 1870, Charles Francis Adams writes:

THE LITTLE BOY DOWN THE ROAD

“The Library may be pronounced complete today. It was cleaned and the last mechanic left it at five o’clock. It has taken about six months to construct a single room. Now the labor of removing the books will begin. . . .”

The apostle Paul thought it important enough to remind Timothy to “bring the books.” Wise fathers of the twenty-first century would be well-advised to do the same. The sooner fathers get about the business of collecting and reading important books, the sooner they can invite their sons to join them in that special cove of repose known as the man’s library.