

# Christian Leaders Must be Readers

**Kenneth S. Hemphill**

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NASHVILLE -- Recently I was in Tulsa, Oklahoma, sharing in an EKG/Sunday School conference. It was both well-organized and well-attended. A large crowd gathered for the better part of a beautiful Saturday to learn how to develop a more effective Sunday School.



While staying at a local hotel, I picked up a quarterly magazine which focused on high performance business and people from the local area and beyond. Included was a book review of "Secrets of the Millionaire Mind." I quickly scanned the article to see if there were any principles of value. The author, T. Harv Eker, speaks of what he calls "mastering the inner game of wealth" and he pictures the brain as a large storage vault of millions of "files" for the various categories of life. Eker's goal is to help readers revise the "money files" which might be betraying our success.

One of the corrupted "files" and its replacement captured my attention. "Rich people constantly learn and grow. Poor people think they already know." The point is clear. People who have been successful are those who continue to read and learn. Those who think they know all there is to know about a subject remain impoverished.

As I thought about that "file," I recalled a pastor friend telling me of an event he attended where Kenneth Blanchard, the author of several best-selling leadership books, was the keynote speaker. He made a simple statement that startled the participants. He indicated that with very few exceptions "readers are leaders." Yet he went on to relate the statistics of how few people today are actually "readers."

I speak at numerous meetings where a LifeWay bookstore is provided. I am constantly amazed at how few of the participants at these meetings attended by the leaders or potential leaders of our churches actually purchase books. On my way home from a recent trip, I was browsing in an airport bookstore when I ran into a recent graduate from one of our Baptist colleges. During our conversation he indicated that he was relieved that since college he no longer had to read.

Can it be true that we no longer read? Are Eker and Blanchard correct about their emphasis on the importance of learning to succeed? Could this explain why

many churches struggle to recruit leaders for various ministry needs? Is this the primary reason that many churches are plateaued and declining?

### **A Memory from the Past**

As I have contemplated these questions, I have thought about an event that occurred just before my dad died. My dad had undergone surgery for a brain tumor. The surgery had impacted his short term memory and thus when he wanted to tell us something that came to mind, he did so before he would lose the thought. We were watching television when dad jumped to his feet and called me into his little study just off the family room. He asked me if I wanted any of his books since he would no longer need them.

As I looked them over, I thought about my childhood when I would enter the house and find my dad lovingly reading his Bible and his books. Books were a part of our home and my childhood. I glanced at the top shelf and noticed all the "old" study course books that dad had led his people to read together while he was pastor. Many of these were about Sunday School and church growth. Others, however, were about key doctrinal issues. All were written for and studied by laymen.

My reflections led me to think back on the times when I would accompany my dad when he would speak at a sister church. We would walk the hallways of the education building and I would always be impressed by the certificates displayed on the wall that indicated how many study course credits various teachers had earned.

I have since pondered what impact the reading of these books had on our people and their churches in the decades when Southern Baptists experienced their most rapid growth. From 1940 to 1960 Southern Baptist increased enrollment in Bible study from 3,590,038 to 7,382,550. During that same period baptisms increased from 245,500 to 386,469. In 2007 Sunday School enrollment was 7,876,611 and baptisms totaled 345,941.

I believe there is a direct correlation. Church leaders were reading and growing and this, in turn, led to numerical and evangelistic growth for churches. Let's paraphrase Eker. "The effective read and grow. The apathetic think they already know."

### **A Call to Action**

Luke gives us a glimpse at Jesus' childhood. His summary statement concerning Jesus' development is found in Luke 2:52; "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Notice the emphasis on "continual" growth and on balanced growth which included wisdom which would include the ability to apply knowledge. Earlier we are given a glimpse of Jesus' growing

hunger for a greater understanding of the Scriptures as we find Him in the temple listening and asking questions of the teachers (Luke 2:46).

Verse 47 says, "And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers." At some point during the day the tables turned and the wise scholars began to ask questions of Jesus, who demonstrated an amazing understanding of God's Word. What had been the source of such great knowledge? Remember: The incarnation means that the boy Jesus was fully man (as well as fully God). No doubt Jesus' parents had taught Him the Scriptures from infancy, developing in Him the desire to "keep increasing" in wisdom.

Later, when Jesus was asked by a lawyer concerning the great commandment, He responded; "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). I hear more emphasis on loving God with all your heart and soul than I do loving God with all your mind.

This is a call to action. Let's love God with all our mind. Such a commitment would require that we renew our commitment to reading God's Word and supplementing that with other good biblical materials that call us to action. If you struggle with reading, get help -- for the glory of the King and the sake of the Kingdom. You can also buy or borrow good books on tape. Additionally, we should renew our commitment to Scripture memory.

Effective Christians read and grow.

***Kenneth S. Hemphill*** is the SBC's national strategist for *Empowering Kingdom Growth*.

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