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Footnotes: Curated Resources for Ministers

Harding School of Theology

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Footnotes: Free eBooks + Shorts + Church Stats

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Footnotes¹

¹Curated Resources for Ministers



Free Electronic Books

Many of the questions I get relate to the future of books: *Are they going electronic? Is print dead? What about Kindle?* These are all good questions and with every newspaper that bites the dust, the public is more justified in suspecting the imminent death of the book. But like the character Ronald Givens in Tobias Wolff's short story *Mortals*, this particular eulogy may be premature, and the subject might actually still be alive. I don't think print is dead or even dying. That said, I admit to being a fan of electronic books in many contexts (particularly when I travel and don't have to worry about due dates).

But electronic books don't work the same as print. This is not only true in their format (screen vs. printed page) but also in their distribution. Digital books cannot be purchased second-hand nor lent to a friend. And there are questions about platform. Do you need a particular tablet or phone? Is this read on the browser or in something like Adobe or Kindle? Do you own this or are you simply borrowing it?

This week I'd like to walk with you through the maze of electronic books. I'll admit that I'm far from an expert here. And even if I were, the number of ways to access materials (and the limitations therein) are incalculable at this point. But we need to start. Here are some ideas I have regarding how you can find free access to electronic books. My initial impressions are pretty simple: the current offerings provide more than you could ever read but may lack the titles you really want. But we need to keep with it; this will hopefully change with time.

You might have ideas on this one. If so, shoot me a note at rjturner@harding.edu. I'll keep your recommendations for future use.

Open Library

This is part of the [Internet Archive](#) family I discussed a few weeks ago in the issue about the [Wayback Machine](#). The collection is not deep in the areas of theology or biblical studies, but you might find a few bestsellers. While sites like Google Books specialize in titles from before World War 2 (out of copyright), Open Library features a reasonable collection of titles that have been published in the past 10 years. It's not perfect, but before you run over to Amazon for something by G.K. Chesterton, you might give Open Library a shot. I did notice they hold critical research on the [history of Saved By the Bell](#). Don't judge.

Local or State Library

Many church leaders haven't made it a habit to rely on the collections of their local libraries for good reasons. We love public libraries, but we can agree that, particularly in small towns, they've been busier collecting Janet Evanovich, James Patterson, and David McCullough more than they have N.T. Wright, Tim Keller, and Carol Newsom. But this limitation may not apply as much to digital books. There are a few possibilities. First, check and see what digital books are available through the public library. Second, check and see if your state library has an electronic collection. Both local and state libraries often host their books on a platform like [Overdrive](#) (and the [Libby](#) app), so you'll want to set up an account. The advantage here is that the state library holds considerably more books than your local library (unless your local library is the New York Public Library). So, give it a shot. I've been pleasantly surprised by the results.

Project Gutenberg

[Project Gutenberg](#) is likely the most long-standing and well-known of the spots to get digital versions of books. The collection is older, and is the perfect place to look up those authors that James K.A. Smith and David Bentley Hart cite and you wish you knew. No bestsellers here. Just old, important things that may or may not have been assigned to you in college.

Princeton Theological Commons

The [Theological Commons](#) is probably the leading source of curated theological materials. It holds over 100,000 items. The best aspect of this collection is that it is really deep and has been curated by scholars. The main negative, like most other collections, is that the materials are going to mostly be old or unique. This is really helpful for research, but not as much for leisure reading.

Promotions

I don't do many of these, but I've heard good things about some of the promotions on Logos, Accordance, or Kindle. For users of these platforms, eBooks are often marketed at really low prices (like \$2.99) or straight up free. Of course, you would own these, and not just be borrowing them. One downside of these platforms, however, is the books are hard to transfer to another user. It's not impossible, but not easy, either.

These promotions really tell the whole story of electronic books. The truth is that most everything currently published is available in electronic format. For the right price and on the right platform, you can have it. But most sites that advertise large quantities of free electronic books are probably offering older titles that are out of copyright.



Shorts

Books Reviews for People in a Hurry



SCOT MCKNIGHT
Open to the Spirit

Are you open to the Spirit? This is the question that Scot McKnight explores in his new book. Often, we determine if we are open based upon how we feel about miraculous gifts, but McKnight challenges us to see the complete working of the Spirit for the life of the church. *Open to the Spirit* is a readable and relatable book on the Spirit.

Frank Bolling
Minister
Park Avenue Church of Christ



JONATHAN GOTTSCHALL
The Professor in the Cage

"Violence is often seen as evil, antithetical to love and goodness, a scourge to society in need of stamping out."

Jonathan Gottschall, an English professor who, by all accounts, should find (and did find) such a characterization of violence influential, provides here a description of the evolutionary benefit of violence in the promulgation of the human race and civilization. Experiential, anecdotal and with some amount of science thrown in, it is an engaging read that offers a fairly unique position on a contentious issue.

John Coffey
M.Div. Student
Harding School of Theology



Small Churches

The [Christian Standard](#) always does an excellent job of reporting the statistical details of congregations among Independent Christian Churches (or, the 4Cs -- Churches of Christ-Christian Churches). This issue they featured [small and very small churches](#). They define *small* as 100-249 members and *very small* as less than 100. A few takeaways:

1. **These churches carry less debt than larger churches.** This gives financial flexibility, even though they may be less likely to have members with serious wealth.
2. **Very small churches are faring better than small churches in terms of attendance.** The growth rate of small churches is -0.3% whereas at very small churches it was 5.5%.
3. **Baptisms are happening.** Small and very small churches reported baptism rates that were proportional to large churches. Basically, these churches baptize 5-6 people per 100 members per year.



A Few More Footnotes.

1. Print vs. digital: 85% of high school students prefer print over digital when reading for pleasure and 92% when reading for long texts for schoolwork (see Naomi Baron's [Words Onscreen](#) for more).
2. Bad news: [Leisure reading at an all time low](#). Don't blame Kindle; blame Netflix.
3. "We should be on guard against talking about Trump more than Paul talked about Nero--especially if we are talking about Jesus less than Paul talked about Jesus," [says Ted Olsen](#).
4. The challenges of life in the forest portrayed by...Ethan Hawke. [A great review by Kathryn Reklis](#).
5. Steve Martin [once complained](#) that atheists didn't have any songs. Well, that has changed with this California-based [choir for atheists](#).
6. Stanford professors: stop finding your passion and [start developing it](#).
7. [Hobby Lobby and the antiquities market](#).
8. Churches of Christ and race relations, [fifty years later](#).
9. [Suicide rates on the rise](#) for one group: farmers. (note: it's not just financial...for more, see Sebastian Junger's [Tribe](#)).



FOOTNOTES helps church leaders discover the resources that will improve and sustain their ministries. It will regularly feature interviews, book recommendations, site reviews, and editorials. It is a project of Bob Turner. You can direct any questions or feedback to rjturner@harding.edu. Complaints can be sent to his [Juno account](#).

UPCOMING
Summer Break

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