

Advice from a Type A Librarian

“Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” (Ecclesiastes 12:12b ESV)

If I did not know better, I would think that Solomon wrote this verse just for me; however, I realize that it also may apply to other people—especially librarians. Like me, most of the librarians I know display at least some Type A personality behavior. In fact, this desire for perfection helps most of us do our jobs better.

When I first became a librarian, I made lists of books that I wanted to read in a Word document. When the lists multiplied and the number of books on those lists grew to unmanageable lengths, I tried an equally unsuccessful method—collecting one-page printouts of prospective books to read and filing them until the file folders became too thick to manage. Eventually, I caught up with the twentieth century and kept track of my to-be-read books in an Excel spreadsheet. Now I download records of books I want to read into my RefWorks account and stack library books on my desk until I read them. Though I read a book a week, it would take me over 88 years to read all 4,600 of the books I saved to RefWorks—not to mention the other book records I would add during those 88 years. Maybe I could catch up by Y3K! Part of my problem is the number of books that interest me, but the other part is my own limitations. The relative shortness of life, physical and mental weaknesses, and need for rest can be frustrating to someone with my personality. I need to keep up. What should I do?

In the context of Ecclesiastes 12:12, the Preacher or Teacher (depending on your Bible version) warns us about distractions that keep us from focusing on what is really important, like honoring and obeying God’s word. Trying to read and study books could be one of those distractions. Therefore, we must carefully choose the books we read, and let the others go. Perusing reviews and tagging records of recommended books in RefWorks or similar tools can help. Praying for wisdom about the books we read is another suggestion.

Additionally, as the Preacher helped his people focus on what was important (verses 13-14), we can select good books for our libraries on topics that our weary students need. We can make LibGuides or similar tools which link to quality books. We can help our stressed students choose important books for their research projects and seek God’s wisdom to teach them how to do so for themselves.

Lord, help us Type A librarians to realize our limitations and trust You to help us carry out our responsibilities without getting weary.



—Jeff Gates

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