

Carry-on reading: Summer book suggestions

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [July 11, 2006](#) issue

It's summer, a time when most preachers are lucky enough to enjoy an extended Sabbath. For me, summer affords the opportunity to do the kind of reading I know I need to do but am not able to get to in the midst of the normal schedule. I save major works to take with me on summer vacation.

But what to take? If you are traveling by air, the weight limits are significant. The limit for luggage is 50 pounds, and I can testify that packing enough books to last several weeks can bring you dangerously close to the limit. You can get away with one 700-page tome, but probably not two.

One book that is worth the space and weight is Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. Some other recommendations: *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, Miroslav Volf's new book on God's generosity. If you haven't read *The Da Vinci Code*, it's now available in paperback, and you should probably read it since a lot of people in the pews have, and they think Dan Brown is on to something. John Hersey's *A Bell for Adano* is a lovely story of an American major in a Sicilian town during World War II.

For devotional reading, consider *Twenty Poems to Nourish Your Soul*, by Judith Valente and Charles Reynard. She's a correspondent for the PBS show *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*; he's a circuit court judge. They are married to each other, they are devout Christians, and they love poetry. Their book is a gem.

Speaking of books that travel well, I've never found anything better than the NRSV Bible with Study Helps, printed by Holman Bible Publishers for Cokesbury. It has maps, a concordance, introductory essays on history and geography and even a piece on how to study Bible passages. It has a center-column cross-reference section with the words of Jesus in red. Best of all, it has a flexible cover and it's slim—you can tuck it in your pants, if necessary.

Reading on a plane is becoming a challenge, with economy seating narrower than ever. If you have bifocals, reading a newspaper is virtually impossible unless you have an aisle seat.

The most creative traveling reader I know is my companion—the woman I’m married to—who has a whole category of books she calls “expendable.” She does what for me is unthinkable: she rips pages out as she reads them, so the books get smaller and smaller. I know it’s practical, but I can’t treat books as expendable. That’s why I have on my shelf (and she doesn’t) a copy of *Principles of Physical Geology* from freshman year of college.