

So many books, so little time: Got to keep reading

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [May 22, 2002](#) issue

The human race can be divided in various ways. There are people who love baseball and those who don't; people who love the beach and those who are bored by it; and people who read and those who don't. Not that the nonreaders never read anything. It's just that for them reading plays a functional role in life. Readers, on the other hand, cannot quite survive unless there is something to read close at hand. When we are asked what we do on vacation, we say, "Go to the beach and read." When we are eating breakfast and the newspaper has not yet arrived, we readers turn to the cereal box and read the ingredients.

Readers find it hard to throw books away. "Do you really plan to read that again?" my wife will ask, suspiciously eyeing the college textbooks on my shelf: *Principles of Physical Geology* and *Constitutional Law*.

Readers also like to read about reading, and I've read two wonderful books on the topic recently. Anne Fadiman's *Ex Libris* is a witty and wise memoir about her love affair with books and reading. Fadiman is such an addicted reader that she once pored over a 1974 Toyota Corolla operating manual because there was nothing else around to read. She and her family habitually proofread restaurant menus and proudly present edited copies to the maitre d's.

The other book is Frederick Buechner's new *Speak What We Feel (Not What We Ought to Say)*. It's about four authors who influenced Buechner—Gerard Manley Hopkins, G. K. Chesterton, Mark Twain and William Shakespeare. Buechner testifies that as the four wrote out of their own pain and sadness, they have helped him bear the weight of his. I have always appreciated Buechner's writing, especially his willingness to share his own struggles and doubts and faith.

Martin Marty has said that a major turning point in our lives is realizing we're never going to read everything we want to read before we die. I continue to read because reading keeps me in touch with the great community of men and women across the

ages who have struggled with and reflected on the mystery of God. I read also because I prepare sermons, and it is good to know what others have said and are saying about the text, issue or idea before me and the congregation. Some preachers may disagree with me about this, but I think it's a good idea to let people know that others have wrestled with the text and the topic in ways that deserve to be heard.

I know I've got to keep reading.