

# Faith Pulpit

## The Preacher and His Library, Part 2

### How to Build a Library

As you work toward building a library of your own, consider borrowing books from a fellow pastor or people in your congregation. If you do, be sure to follow the ethics of borrowing: always treat a borrowed book better than your own, and do not mark in a borrowed book unless the lender specifically gives permission to do so. You will also find college or university libraries a helpful resource for borrowed materials. Such libraries do not have to be part of a Bible college or seminary to have theological volumes. For that matter, do not neglect the public library, where, amidst all the liberal books that are of little or no value for your study, you will likely find a great wealth of helpful material even in a small town public library.

Since you will probably want to mark or frequently use books for study, it is best that you purchase your own books. The question arises, “How can one afford so many books in the vast field of biblical studies and theology?” There are many ways to acquire books without breaking your budget. Buy them on sale and request them for Christmas, birthdays, and any other occasion you can dream up. Paying full price for a book is often unnecessary. Even when you go to a bookstore that carries new books, you can browse in the discount sections and find some excellent volumes.

The preacher needs to develop “radar” for used theological volumes. In the days of the great Baptist commentator and theologian John Gill, people used to say, “It is as sure as that John Gill is in the book seller’s shop”<sup>1</sup> when they wanted to stress the high assurance of a thing. Many regular bookstores include a religion or theology section. Check the yellow pages under “Books Used and Rare” for a list of stores that will offer you great satisfaction in the search for treasured tomes.

You can also order theological books from catalogs that deal specifically with biblical subjects. As you acquaint yourself with authors, prepare an alphabetical list to help you readily identify books you are

seeking. It is well-spent leisure time to scan through a new or used book catalog to trigger your memory, and sometimes you will find a real gem at a reasonable price.

As you visit other communities or spend time book shopping in your own community, check antique shops as well. Do not let the high prices of some antique volumes discourage you from continuing to search. There are reasonably priced antiques out there, and some shop owners are willing to negotiate prices. Do not neglect Goodwill, Salvation Army, and similar stores in your community. From my own experience and what others have shared, great books are waiting for you in these stores. In addition, if you are ever on or near our campus, be sure to stop by the Faith Bookstore. They offer discounts on new books and have a great used book section. For those who are not in the area, materials may be also purchased online at [www.faith.edu/bookstore](http://www.faith.edu/bookstore) or by phone: 1-800-352-0146.

Keep your eyes open for store bulletin boards, the local newspaper, and other advertisements that may have book sales in your area. Friends of the Library, Women of America, and other organizations almost always provide good books at unbelievable bargain prices. A note of caution: it would be a good practice to find out who benefits from the sale to avoid supporting an organization whose position is contrary to your values. You may also want to check the Internet or call local libraries to find local book sales. Record the dates and visit these sales to increase your toolbox for sermon preparation.

Surprisingly, flea markets, auctions, and garage sales are also great sources for books on theology. For as low as twenty-five cents, you can find volumes that have been out of print for years. I have been able to obtain fantastic bargains on books and sets at auctions. You might even give your name to auctioneers in the area and ask them to notify you when a religious library is up for sale.

When visiting Bible college and seminary libraries, always ask the librarians if they have any books that have been removed from the shelves to sell. Frequently libraries do this to expand the room on the shelves and earn a little money for adding newer volumes. Once I visited the replica of Spurgeon's study in the William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri, with a traveling music group. We were looking at Spurgeon's library housed there, and upon inquiring whether they had used books for sale, we were taken to a room where many books were for sale. One student purchased a Strong's Concordance for fifty cents, and another purchased Martin Luther's book, Commentary on Galatians, for the same price. When you visit our campus make sure to stop by our library to see if used books are for sale.

Retiring pastors are another great resource. Many are willing to sell part or all of their libraries. In this case, you will be able to build your library rapidly and help a man of God who is downsizing his own library as he prepares to carry on a less active ministry. It would also be profitable to put an ad in the newspaper expressing your interest in buying used theological books. You may find yourself overwhelmed by the response.

The Internet is also an excellent source for purchasing new and used books. The following are sources utilized by some of our students:

[amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

fetchbook.info [updated, 2025; website no longer available]

del.icio.us/enipal1/books [updated 2025; website no longer available]

[cbd.com](https://www.cbd.com)

GetCheapbooks.com [updated 2025; website no longer available]

half.com [updated 2025; website no longer available]

[alibris.com](https://www.alibris.com)

buy.com [updated 2025; website no longer available]

campusi.com [updated 2025; website no longer available]

You can also Google [AbeBooks](https://www.abebooks.com), and/or the general category “Used Books.”

Develop a reputation for building your library. As others become aware of your “hobby,” they will give you leads and tell others of your interest. I purchased an entire preacher’s library and eventually obtained all of his files just because of my reputation as a book lover.

### **What Should be in the Preacher’s Library**

During your college and seminary years, you no doubt acquired a mental, if not a written, list of books that you would like to buy besides textbooks and recommended books. You may wonder, “How can I wisely spend my money even at bargain prices? How does the expositor know which books to buy?” There are volumes that are written specifically to help you choose the best books. The Minister’s Library (Volumes 1—3) by Cyril J. Barber provides a goldmine of information dealing with each field in the study of theology. Since these volumes are out of print, you will have to find these on used book lists. An excellent book on commentaries is Commentaries for Biblical Expositors by Dr. Jim Rosscup. John Glynn’s Commentary and Reference Survey is also helpful. Consistent revisions keep the information current in Glynn. These books will cost a bit, but they are a valuable resource concerning the books that you should purchase for your personal library, providing information about both the authors and the books themselves. As you prepare to preach on a book or subject in the Bible, it would be good to consult Barber, Glynn, and Rosscup for the best books available.

Though you may not follow the excessive practice of Erasmus, be sure that you save some money to buy books as you study diligently to become an effective expositor of God's Word.

## Works Cited

1. Gill, John, A Body of Divinity (London, 1839; reprint, Atlanta: Turner Lassetter, 1965), vi (page citation is to the reprint edition).

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