

An argument for difficult books and the people they shape

I bought a new bookshelf recently and over the weekend, I finally had the time to sit down and put it together. This endeavor ended up taking up most of my time on Saturday and some on Sunday as well — not because the bookshelf was difficult to put together (it wasn't, minus the legs) but because as it usually happens for any task involving books, I tend to spend more time flipping through pages than I do anything else.

Without a doubt, the process of removing the books from the old shelf, which then got placed in another room to hold *more* books, and putting my favorites back on the newly constructed shelf in my room took up more time than everything else combined.

Right now, my new bookshelf is a little under half full, and



EMMA McNAMEE
What's left?

awaiting the boxes of books I left in Duluth when I moved to Worthington. I brought my absolute favorites with me — the books I couldn't bear to leave behind. Some of them are not pleasant books. Some of these books are downright painful to read for their content, and I am unable — still, after innumerable rereads — to get through them without crying.

I have always been an avid reader, because I have always been, first and foremost, a writer. What can I say, I love a good story and there is no better way to improve your writing than by reading the

work of people who are better than you. So I read. I consume stories wholeheartedly. Even the ones that don't end happily. Even the ones that are difficult. I read books that make me sad, uncomfortable, angry, and often I don't just feel that these books, in particular, have made me a better writer, but a better person, because I come away more empathetic, more understanding than I was before, having gained a perspective I might not have considered.

There is an ongoing conversation in America that has gained new interest recently, about books and schools and children. A Tennessee school board voted unanimously last month to ban "Maus," Art Spiegelman's award-winning graphic novel about the Holocaust on the grounds that it contained language and

imagery inappropriate for students, and the ensuing debate over this has continued to make headlines for the last several weeks.

I could say a lot of things on this matter. I could talk about the importance of understanding history so as not to repeat it. I could state that I think censorship in schools is a dangerous and slippery slope that often leads to the limiting or erasure of any perspective that is deemed as "other" by the general masses. I could argue that isn't the entire point of school to learn, to be challenged, to gain the understanding you did not before possess? And I could tell you that as someone less than a decade out of school, who still keenly remembers the discussions held in classes where we read literature that made us

uncomfortable, I am grateful to my teachers who created those assignments.

The hardest book I ever read was Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye," and I did so because one of my teachers said it was a book everyone should read at least once, not in spite of being difficult but because of that. She was right, and though it's not a book I ever want to read again, it left an impact on me that I doubt I will ever forget — and that is not a bad thing. I was lucky enough to be reading it with classmates and a teacher who wanted us to understand the importance of what we were reading. The horribleness, the grief, the unpleasant nature of the content were not things we shied away from in discussion, which made it more bearable than if I had

been reading it on my own.

I understand wanting to protect kids from the horrors of the world, but as someone who was not so long ago counted among that group, I think denying them the opportunity of learning and sharing their thoughts in a safe space is a far greater disservice.

Kids are intelligent creatures, and they're not blind to the world around them. Give them the tools to understand stories, the themes, the tactics used — how to identify an unreliable narrator, how to pick on nuance and give context — and they'll be able to use those skills in the real world.

Give them reading that challenges them, makes them uncomfortable, makes them think, and they won't just have a better understanding of the world, but their place in it.

Look around to see a God and church whose love surrounds you

Worthington
This past Monday was Valentine's Day. This day comes once a year and is a day that is designed to celebrate love toward someone else around us. Many choose to celebrate this day by going out with their spouse or someone they love. They may go out for a special meal and exchange a card or a gift. Others think the day is commercialized and may not do anything special. Some may just stay at home and spend the time with the ones they love.



RYAN ANDERSON

No matter how you personally feel about this particular special day on the calendar, there is a principle behind it that we all desire in

our lives. We all have a God-given human desire to feel loved and wanted.

For many, this is not something we are willing to admit, and may not even feel comfortable to express at times. Especially for us men, we don't want to admit this is a need that is built within us. Why? Well of course, because we are strong, resilient and often show little emotion. What all of us need is to take some time and realize the Lord

has given us a gift; a gift to be able to receive love from others and a gift to show love to others.

The Bible tells us in Psalm 86:15, "But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to

anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

The Lord is ever so gracious to us and shows his love to us continually, or unconditionally. He is faithful, to stick with us regardless of our past or present.

During the last two years it has become easier than ever to become isolated and feel like we are on our own. Due to new work-at-home schedules, online worship and many people attempting to go out less has created a sense of isolation.

However, when we isolate ourselves from things in life, we can easily begin to feel that we are not loved and not wanted.

After 2020 and 2021, we need to remind ourselves that this is furthest from the

truth! There is a God that loves you so much and deeply cares about you.

Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He gave his very own life for us."

God knew you before you were born, just like in Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you."

He died for you, so you could have eternal life. Not because we are perfect, but because he loves us.

If you've been feeling a little down over this past holiday, be encouraged! You are known and loved. God cares so much about us as people, he actually designed an incredible support structure. He gave us the

church, an assembly of great people!

Last week's faith article reminded us to get out of our recliner and get back to church to worship. When we gather together, we not only worship God together, but we also find a place to remind us that we are loved. There is a church of people that love you and are there for you.

Today I hope you are reminded of the love the Lord and the church has for you and your family! You may not be perfect, but you are loved!

I challenge you to look around you and see the love that surrounds you. If you're feeling alone, let Jesus know, he will surround you with love. Let God shower you with his unconditional love.

Ryan Anderson is pastor of Abundant Life, 627 Clary St., Worthington.

YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Joseph Biden (Democrat), White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20500. Phone: (202) 456-1414; website: whitehouse.gov/contact.

Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar (Democrat), 302 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. Phone: (202) 224-3244; website: klobuchar.senate.gov.

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Minnesota District 1 Rep. Jim Hagedorn (Republican), 325 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-2472; website: hagedorn.house.gov.

Minnesota District 7 Rep. Michelle Fischbach (Republican), 1237 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. Phone: (202) 225-2165; website: fischbach.house.gov.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz (Democrat), 130 State Capitol, 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., St. Paul 55155. Phone: (651) 201-3400; email: mn.gov/governor/contact; Facebook: Gov Tim Walz; Twitter: twitter.com/GovTimWalz.

Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley (Republican), 135 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. Phone: (202) 224-3744; website: grassley.senate.gov.

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Minnesota Senate Majority Leader Jeremy Miller (Republican), 3113 Minnesota Senate Building, St. Paul 55155. Phone: (651) 296-5649; email: sen.jeremy.miller@senate.mn.

Minnesota Speaker of the House: Melissa Hortman (DFL), 463 State Office Building, St. Paul 55155. Phone: (615) 296-4280; email: rep.melissa.hortman@house.mn.

Minnesota Senate Minority Leader Melissa Lopez Franzen (DFL), 2221 Minnesota Senate Building, St. Paul 55155. Phone: (651) 296-6238; email: sen.melisa.lopez.franzen@senate.mn.

Minnesota House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt (Republican), 267 State Office Building, St. Paul 55155. Phone: (651) 296-5364; email: rep.kurt.daudt@house.mn.

Minnesota District 22 Sen. Bill Weber (Republican), 95 University Ave. W., 2109 Minnesota Senate Building, St. Paul 55155. Phone: (651) 296-5650; email: sen.bill.weber@senate.mn.

Minnesota District 23 Sen. Julie Rosen (Republican), 2113 Minnesota Senate Building, St. Paul 55155. Phone: (651) 296-5713; email: sen.julie.rosen@senate.mn.

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The Globe
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Joni Harms, publisher
376-7308, jharms@dglobe.com

Jessica Pass, graphics manager
376-7333, jholinka@dglobe.com

Roberta Fultz, advertising manager
376-7313, rfulz@dglobe.com

Doug Wolter, sports editor
376-7328, dwolter@dglobe.com

Emma McNamee, reporter
376-7311, emcnamee@dglobe.com

Julie Buntjer, editor
376-7330, jbuntjer@dglobe.com

Kari Lucin, community editor
376-7319, klucin@dglobe.com

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