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Sustained Reading

In an insightful book *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brain*, Nicholas Carr's thesis is that the ability to read and think deeply, that is, to read in a sustained and engaged way, is being undermined by the Internet. He suggests that our brains have plasticity and are being reshaped in such a way that reading as a sustained practice is getting more difficult. Perhaps many of us can nod our heads in anecdotal confirmation to this experience. It seems that our reading attention span is often limited to 500 word blogs, short comments, and brief web posts. Even these snippets may seem long to those who use the 140 characters of Twitter and text messages. We flit from website-to-website like an insatiable hummingbird desperately seeking the next nectar of consumption in the midst of detritus.

A practice for us today is to find enjoyment, insight and benefit again from sustained reading. Many resources exist to help in this process. Alan Jacobs in his book *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction* (2011) is an excellent place to begin. He writes, "We should affirm the great value of reading just for the fun of it In my experience, Christians are strangely reluctant to take this advice. We tend to be earnest people, always striving for self-improvement, and can be suspicious of mere recreation."

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. reminds in his book *Reading for Preaching: The Preacher in Conversation with Storytellers, Biographers, Poets, and Journalists* (2013) that a wonderful array of genres exist that can engage us in our conversations of reading. So read. Read or reread a classic, a mystery, a new novel, a gothic romance, diaries, collections of letters, or whatever intrigues you. Allow your brain once again to be shaped by deep and sustained reading.

One way to be interactive with a book (and isn't interactive the gold standard for folks today?) is to use page point/darts while reading. These small bronze-like clips are easy to slip on a page to mark passages. [My favorite place to get these markers is <https://www.bookdarts.com/>.] This activity lets you not only (1) mark quotes that intrigue, but also (2) allows you at a glance, even without opening the book, to visualize your procession of reading throughout the book.

My copy of *Moby-Dick* is filled with many of these page points, and I will end with this marked quote from Herman Melville's work. It is the remark from Starbuck, first mate on the *Pequod*, who is gazing into the depth of the sea. May his remark be a motto for all deep and sustained reading: "Loveliness, unfathomable, as ever lover saw in his young bride's eye!—Tell me not of thy teeth-tiered sharks, and thy kidnapping cannibal ways. Let faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory; I look deep down and do believe."