

## **How do you remember what you read?**

**John Piper - February 2008**

My memory is not very good, so I don't remember what's in books if I don't make some effort to preserve the content for myself.

So I do a lot of underlining and marginal commenting. And I always use pencil instead of pen so that I can adjust what I write.

But the main thing I do is a kind of indexing, either in the front or back flap (or both).

When I read some remarkable insight or illustration, I will chose a 1-3 word phrase that captures what it is about, write it in small print inside the flap, and then put the page number beside it. And I'll draw a line down the middle of the page so that I make two columns. And by the time I'm done I may have 100 or so of these references, filling 2-4 pages.

Very often, a year or two later, I will be writing a sermon that has to do with something in that book. Now I can't remember what all my thoughts were back then, but if I just run my eyes down the columns of those indexes I'll find old quotes, insights, and illustrations there that are now easily accessible through the index in the front or back of that book. That's the most common thing I do.

If a book is very provocative and stirs up all kinds of new thoughts, then I want to do more than indexing. I want to write down my thoughts. So I keep a journal. It is also indexed, but that's at the end and it's not in any particular order. I just write what each entry is about.

I may take a page or two for each entry to think out loud about what this book just provoked in me. And it might become a newsletter article or a blog entry or a sermon illustration. But there it is, lodged in my journal for future access if I want to try and find it again.

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