

Some of my most prized possessions sit falling apart, neatly tucked away on shelves, their worth underestimated by others. Some of them have a musty smell; years have taken their toll on the pages, creased from many readings. Those are the books that have had the most impact on me, some of them favorites of my mother when she was a child. In a nation where almost 200,000 new books are printed each year, sometimes the timeless treasures that have survived generations worth of page turnings receive the most adoration, and with good reason. Despite a changing world, the oldest books still have the power to arouse and move us into action. Any book that is worthy to be called a classic and given the power to move us should pass three tests. It should improve our way of living by giving us standards or examples; explore all sides of human nature, whether showing the depths and possibilities of the heart or exposing the raw depravity that we are capable of; and let us see the world, not as it is, but as we can make it.

A good book gives us examples of human life—what we should do with it, and how we can live it. A good story about a character who overcomes against odds is inspiring, especially when it is true. Before autobiographies can be written, struggles must be lived. Self-help books may be popular, but a narrative of someone who has been through your problem, easily found in literature, is more inspiring than a five-step program.

Classic stories also have round characters who have both admirable and detestable qualities, through which they show us what the world can become. No human is perfect, as our daily lives show. Humans lie, commit homicide, and steal every day, as so vividly reported by the news.

Any good fiction story, whether an adult or children's tale, contains imperfect characters. By night, Spiderman swings around New York demolishing evil. By day, Peter Parker struggles with relationships, jealousy, bitterness, and power. Despite his shortcomings, Spiderman changes the world. Realistic characters give us a hope of what we as imperfect beings can do with the world.

Any author who gives examples, believable characters, and standards creates an admirable manuscript. The books that stir us do not do so because of their impressive vocabulary or erudite theses. Books stir us because of their examples, characters, and world view. Only one book that I have read successfully executes all three.

I have given many books the privilege of being read more than once. The plots were just as exciting, the tears still fell, and the moral was still invigorating after many readings. There is only one book, however, that I have read countless times. Many books have moved me into temporary action, but only one has permanently changed the course of my life: the Bible. The Holy Bible contains examples of every kind of writing: poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Proverbs consists of words of wisdom, Genesis answers questions about our beginning, and the New Testament gives us the hope that lies in Jesus Christ. The Bible also contains standards and examples, round characters, and a hope of a world that can be.

A written example of how we should live our life is seen in Exodus when God gives the ten commandments. Later, God sent a living example: Jesus Christ. Jesus' words of loving your neighbor are commonly referred to today, though not commonly lived. Jesus lived a perfect life of loving others more than himself, only doing God's will. We fall short of his life, the only perfect example of conduct.

Jesus is the only perfect example in the Bible however. Because real humans are written about, real faults are written as well, one of the most famous being David. David, the king of Israel, committed adultery with Bathsheba, a beautiful married woman. When Bathsheba became pregnant with his child, David murdered Bathsheba's husband, only succeeding in complicating matters. Though David was the writer of the Psalms and in the highest position of power in the land, he was not immune to temptations. Real people falter, whether or not we would like to

admit or show it. The Bible shows true stories in which both the depravity of the heart and forgiveness is found.

The Bible paints a real picture of what life on this earth is like—painful, challenging, and unstable. The Bible also shows us how we can change it. “Turn the other cheek” and “Love your neighbor” are quoted often, but rarely is the credit given to the source which it is from: the Bible. “A house divided against itself cannot stand” did not originate out of the mouth of Abraham Lincoln, but of Jesus in the book of Mark. “A shining city on a hill” is credited to Ronald Reagan, but Jesus spoke those words in the book of Matthew centuries earlier. The Bible's wisdom, wisdom that offers insights or ways to make the world better, is in everyday life, though some may never realize it.

The Bible is a time-tested classic, surviving decades, and being outsold by no other book.

Though written long before anyone I know was born, the Bible shows me examples I can base my life off of, characters I can relate to, and enough hope in its words to stir not only my life, but the lives of all who read it. Someday, when I am old and gray, I hope to pass down my Bible to my children. Filled with all of my notes and family tree, I hope that my Bible will become one of their prized possessions, and I know it will still hold the power to stir their lives.