

# Statesman

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## Two local authors' religious books inspired me this summer

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Summer has ended; Labor Day is shimmering in the rearview mirror; and, perhaps, you harbor some regret that the summer reading list you put together for yourself last spring did not include books that stretched in the direction of your own spiritual growth. Don't despair. It's not too late. I read two books this summer that I recommend to every reader of this column who is interested in, or more like dedicated to, growing in the direction of becoming a more loving human being.

The first is Stephen Reese's gentle call to religious sanity, "Hope for the Thinking Christian." Reese is an active Methodist layman and also an associate dean at the University of Texas' School of Communications. In an age in which good people often find themselves in serious conflict with other good people who just happen to express their faith out of a different tradition, Reese's book is not only a breath of fresh air, but also likely a new and mighty wind blowing across the troubled religious landscape of this great country. This book employs reason, common sense, good biblical interpretation and sound theology to make the case that the expression of love and its concomitant, religious tolerance, are first and foremost always the best and the truest demonstration of any of the world's great religions.

This book should be taught in every adult Sunday school class in this country and should be a must-read for every pastor and seminarian. In the not-too-distant future, I expect to see it listed on best-seller lists nationwide. It is that good and, moreover, that important.

The second book is "True When Whispered ... Hearing God's Voice in a Noisy World," by Paul Escamilla, who is senior pastor of St. John's United Methodist Church here in Austin. Escamilla also serves on the adjunct faculty of Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology.

I'm a white-knuckle flyer. While I once commuted by air from Dallas to Austin on a weekly basis, I've never really learned to enjoy flying. My antidote to anxiety is to read a book sufficiently engrossing as to allow me to forget that I'm traveling at 500-plus miles per hour in a relatively small metal tube 40,000 feet above the surface of the Earth. This summer my wife and I flew to Denver and then to Durango, Colo., with the second flight punctuated by some serious thunderstorms seemingly intent upon rattling the Rocky Mountains far below.

Before we took off in Austin, I made certain that I had Escamilla's book with me. I opened the book while we taxied toward take-off on one of Bergstrom's runways, and several chapters later, I was stunned to hear the pilot announce that we were landing in Denver. I finished the book on the return trip by leaning into what little cabin light was available on a late-night flight.

This book is a must-read for every soul who is seeking to find a deeper satisfaction in his or her personal discipline of prayer. Paul Escamilla's insights into Scripture are as inspiring as they are amazing, and yet his style is as gentle and as loving as his content. This is one of the most helpful books I've read in years — after all, it got me to Denver and then back home.

So if you were not particularly stirred this summer by what you read, do yourself a favor and pick up these two books. Trust me, you'll be glad you did.

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