

Dear Friends in Christ,

I'm currently reading *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy. I don't bring this up to brag - literally anyone could pick it up and read it. It's easy to understand. And I don't bring this up to convince you that you should read it, although I do think it would be worth your time. It's a classic, and I think it's actually underrated. But Mark Twain's definition holds true - a classic is something that everyone wants to have read and nobody wants to read. My prayer is that the Bible never becomes a classic in that sense, but I think in many homes that's exactly what the Bible has become.

You have 2 options - you can either read this newsletter article about *War and Peace* or you could read *War and Peace*. I'm not going to walk through all the intricate plot points here. (Part of the enjoyment of reading this book is watching Tolstoy weave all the many complex family stories together.) Rather, let me just make some abstract points I've glistened from Tolstoy.

First point - our attention spans are way too short. Oh look, a sand-hill crane is outside my window!

Second point - we desperately need to renew our minds. **“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).**

I love relaxing and watching *Harry Potter* as much as the next guy. But have you ever sat down as a family and said, “Let's watch something new?” and it becomes the most stressful thing you've done all day? The options on the streaming services are overwhelming. I can't keep up with the Kardashians, let alone everything else Netflix.

The benefit of a big book is that I don't have to wonder what I'm going to be doing as I prepare to sleep at night. I've got 1358 pages to work through. I've got over 500 characters to track (I don't have them all down, but as you keep reading, the characters get more familiar).

The same is true of the Bible. There's lots of things going on. There's lots of characters. It can be hard to keep track of. But when you start keeping track of things going on in the Word of God, your mind is being renewed. It goes from being soup to being stew to eventually being hot-dish. (Excuse the metaphor. It's also almost lunchtime). Every word you read and speak *should be* in service to *The Word*.

Third point - Tolstoy helps us think through history and humanity. Too many of us just consume the day's news, and then move on to tomorrow's headline faster than you can say “Coconut Tree.” Instead of obsessing over the details of a current world conflict, ask bigger questions.

Tolstoy asks, “Why do we go to war?” And He answers the question with an analogy. “Why does the apple fall from the tree? Is it gravity? Is it a withered stalk? Is it the cellular structure of the apple? Was the boy hungry?” (Vol III, Pt 1, Ch 1). The answer, of course, is all of these things. War, like apples, is somehow built into creation. Different characters in Tolstoy argue about God’s existence and the meaning of it all, and it’s encouraging to read a 19th Century Russian talk about these things to show that there really is nothing new under the sun. War has been going on since before Genesis 3 when Lucifer declared war on God.

Fourth point - Tolstoy is insightful to cultures while having a sense of humor about it. He says only Germans could be self-assured because of an abstract idea, namely science. I think this is partially why we Lutherans are in such a tizzy about justification, which is abstract. The Frenchman is self-assured because he sees himself as devastatingly charming (if you don’t know, *War and Peace* is set during the Napoleonic Wars and we get to watch Napoleon’s downfall). The Englishman is self-assured because he belongs to the best organized country in the world. The Italian is self-assured because he gets excited and easily forgets himself and anyone else. The Russian is self-assured because he knows nothing, and doesn’t want to know anything because he doesn’t believe you can know anything completely.

It would be fruitful for us to do an analysis of our culture. Why is the American self-assured? Perhaps he’s like the 19th Century Englishman, but I see a lot of Tolstoy’s description of the Russian in America. We don’t know anything anymore because we claim we can’t know anything. People look in the mirror and don’t know who they are, and they don’t know who they are because they don’t know *the* human, namely Jesus.

We need to ask this - why is the Christian self-assured? Answer: We’re not *self*-assured. We know all about our sinful nature. But we’re confident in Christ. Christ is the God of War. He’s the man of peace. So I don’t care if you read Tolstoy. But I do care if you read Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul.

Okay, I have to go. If I ever have hopes of finishing this book, I need to go read a few pages right now.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor