

## Returning to the Church's "Core Business"

I'm going to make an assumption about you: you like to read. Why else would you be reading this blog that has no TikTok clips, YouTube videos, or CGI? While some bemoan the fact that readership appears to be declining, Pew Research reports that 75% of Americans read at least one book in 2022, and on average, we read 12 books a year. (That means for all those who only read one book last year, there are others among us who read a whole lot of books!)

As an avid reader, I've bemoaned the loss of so many bookstores in recent years. It's tempting to blame Amazon for redefining how we purchase books (or purchase anything, for that matter). Admittedly, I like the convenience of Amazon's one-click purchase and having immediate access on my Kindle. But I still prefer to walk into a bookstore, "test driving" a book and skimming through it before I head to the sales counter. But, alas, the brick-and-mortar bookstore seems to be disappeari ...

NOT SO FAST! If bookstores are declining, why is Barnes & Noble doing so well? Barnes & Noble is growing in sales.



The answer is simple. Barnes and Nobel is returning to its first love: books. Imagine that: a bookstore that sells books! James Daunt, the CEO of Barnes & Noble, has led the company to revamp what they sell. They are removing things that "don't belong in a bookstore." No more blankets for sale. I've noticed that, while my local Barnes & Noble still sells vinyl LPs, the music/DVD section is a tiny fraction of what it once was. They still offer games, but the footprint dedicated to games is much smaller. Some stores are gaining up to 4,000 square feet by removing these other items. What's in the space now? Books!

Barnes & Noble is doing well because it has returned to its first and main business. The company has returned to the heart of why the company started in the first place: books.

We need to return to the heart of Christianity: the cross of Christ. In fact, without the cross (and the subsequent resurrection) there is no Christianity.

Churches don't bemoan the loss of sales like a retail outlet, but many of them worry about the emptiness of their pews. Why are these churches dying? Maybe it's because we've gradually increased our focus on minor differences in the interpretation of doctrine ... clinging to old-fashioned ways that are more about the tradition than the message ... railing about the godlessness and rampant sin in our culture rather than lovingly and gracefully pointing people to something infinitely better.

Let's return to our "core business." Preach Jesus. Preach the cross.

- "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God to us who are being saved" (1 Cor. 1:18).
- "I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).
- "He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

It is good to keep our doctrine in check. It is good to frequently evaluate our methodology to ensure we are reaching and communicating in the best way possible. But in it all—and over it all—must be the message of the cross. Without the cross, there is no point to our doctrine or methods. Without the cross, we are without life and without hope.

The church is no retail outlet. But we can learn from one such outlet and return to our "core business." The cross. Let's make the main thing the main thing!

"As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32).