Naselli, Andrew David. *How to Read a Book: Advice for Christian Readers*. Moscow, ID: Canon, 2024. 160pp. + 16pp. (front matter) + 46pp. (back matter).

From his introduction onward, Naselli confronts the fact that readers may view his book with skepticism. Those who already enjoy reading surely do not need further motivation (or do they?), and those who do not like to read . . . well, will they really be persuaded by reading a book *about* reading? Heavier and more comprehensive tomes on the topic exist (for example, Mortimer J. Adler's classic 400-plus page, *How to Read a Book*), but Naselli captures the essential *why*, *how*, *what*, and *when* of reading in a succinct 160 pages. He writes from an explicitly Christian perspective, and he defends reading as more crucial for believers than for unbelievers due to the supremely valuable Word that Christians possess and the supremely valuable Person that Christians seek to glorify.

Naselli's writing style is lucid, engaging, succinct, and highly structured. Because he favors structured lists, some readers might find the itemization of key ideas in each chapter distracting. However, those who intend to use the book formatively—either to enhance their own reading practice or to guide students in the process of reading well—will find the structure in this book both memorable and pedagogically valuable.

Naselli addresses logic, sentence constructions, best resources, and worldview at key points in his argument. He also punctuates his theme with interesting, supportive details. For instance, he notes that John Milton may well have been the last person who read every existing book in English, and if a person reads twenty-five books a year for fifty years, he will have browsed only 0.0007 percent of existing books (2).

I expected to walk away with a greater sense of guilt (for failing to read adequately) and a lesser motivation (to read wisely and well), but Naselli avoids painting a world in which reading is the only thing Christians ought to do and depicts instead a world in which thoughtful, intentional, exceptional reading becomes more achievable to his own readers. It is not that our present culture is illiterate but that it is indifferently or carelessly literate; and ignorance, sciolism, and weak character thrive in that indifference.

How to Read a Book consists of four chapters. Chapter 1, "Why Should You Read?" points to life, growth, and joy as three compelling motives behind sound reading. The concept of reading for life highlights the Scriptures, which bring light and life (Ps 119:130). Reading for growth involves the expansion of the mind, experience, and discernment—all of which make the Christian reader a more effective servant of God. Reading for joy dispenses with status seeking and reaches for the principled intentionality of enjoying God and his work (20–21).

Chapter 2, "How Should You Read?" offers insights that promote sound interpretation so that the reader arrives at a real understanding of the author's intent in communication. This is a special concern of Christians, who believe that integrity is a virtue, and who want to represent an author's beliefs and argument accurately. Two subsections—on the nature of uncertain arguments (ones that are "unclear, false, or invalid") and the types of propositions and their relationships—are worth the price of the book. (Second-year Greek students will note strong similarities between the relationship of propositions and the uses of the Greek participle.) The chapter then transitions to an explanation of

three levels of reading (survey, macro-, and micro-reading) and explains how the reader utilizes variable levels of attention and intensity to accomplish different purposes in his reading.

Chapter 3, "What Should You Read?" helps the overwhelmed reader face the 170 million existing books and select ones that are worthwhile. These include (in order of priority), the Scriptures, books that strengthen character and doctrine, books that make a person excel in his calling, books that give a true grasp of reality, books that the reader enjoys, books that model good writing, and books recommended by trusted friends and advisors. Naselli's advice spans fiction, non-fiction, theology, fantasy, and vocational reading. He directly confronts and rebuts the claim that fiction is trivial and a waste of the Christian's time (117–19), and he consciously draws heavily from C. S. Lewis's views on the nature and value of fantasy reading and novels as windows into humanity.

Chapter 4, "When Should You Read?" guides the reader to choose the best times for reading by addressing common excuses for the inability to read (no time, no desire), by suggesting different times that may prove ideal to a specific reader, and by offering alternative suggestions (audio books).

The book concludes with four appendices ("Forty of my favorite books," "Twenty-two tips for cultivating a culture of reading for your children," "Why and how I use social media," and "Why and how I organize my personal library"). Readers will find much practical advice up to the very end of this book. At the very least, those who believe that they are called to ministries involving substantial research will want to consider the library organization tips of Appendix D. Apart from some system of organization, the researcher will find himself unable to recollect the source of crucial information later.

Not all readers will be comfortable with Naselli's repeated reference to and praise of the Harry Potter series, but he explains his reasons for his recommendation and recognizes the differences of opinion that other believers may have regarding this series without simply dismissing their concerns as unfounded (68–70). The fairly strong sampling of Douglas Wilson's books (106–7, 119–21, 130) in a chapter on *what* a Christian should read feels, perhaps, imbalanced given the sheer breadth of available resources and Christian authors. It is true that Naselli's work does not represent itself to be a list of books that Christians *ought* to read; however, readers are likely to assume that the cited works are among the best that could be read, and this assumption is doubtful. Perhaps a wider referencing of "best resources" would make up for this deficit.

I do not consider Appendix A to have provided this wish-list of best resources precisely because of its heavy reliance on C. S. Lewis (9/40 books) and J. K. Rowling (7/40 books) and its limited scope. However (and this is a major caveat), Naselli *explicitly engages* the fact that he does not include a more comprehensive reading list (161–65). He *knows* that some readers will register this complaint and has consciously chosen a shorter, more reader-friendly format instead of supplying a lengthy reading list (for exactly the reasons he states). Therefore, it is helpful for the reviewer to protest that he desires a longer list, and it is just as helpful to recognize the author's own stated intent and not hold him to a standard that exceeds his purpose.

Apart from these quibbles, *How to Read a Book* compels the distracted, overly busy Christian who is not inclined to read well or often to confront the question: what really matters in the deployment of my time? Naselli contends that one answer is thoughtful, effective reading of the right kind of books.

He does not wish his own readers to pass up the vital opportunity for personal enrichment and enjoyment as well as the exercise of stewardship entrusted to them by God.

Brian Hand
Professor of New Testament Interpretation | BJU Seminary