

BOOKS THAT HAVE CHANGED MY LIFE

by Rick Sarre

It's quite a challenge to think of the authors whose works I have enjoyed over the years and to condense them into a short list. It's a little easier to think of the books that have changed my life. That's a bold statement, so it's best rephrased as the books that caused me to think a little differently; that challenged me to break out of the confirmation bias that affects everyone's judgment.

There are five well-thumbed books I have chosen. I place them here in no particular order.

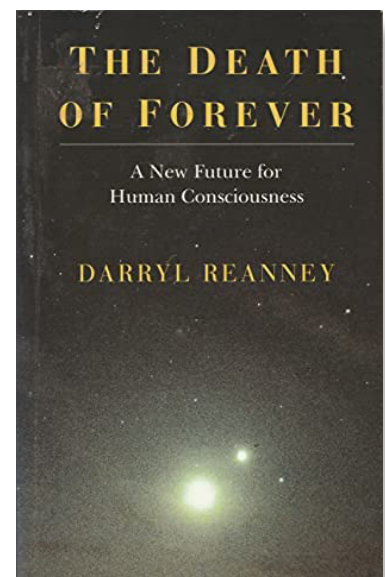
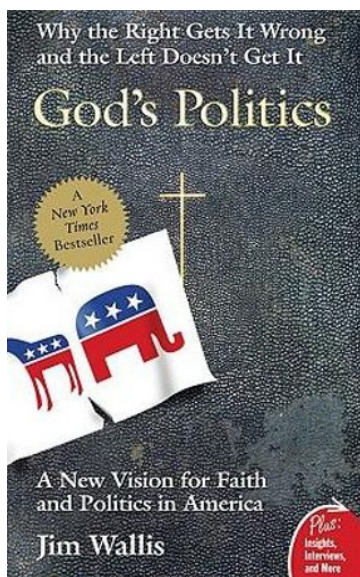
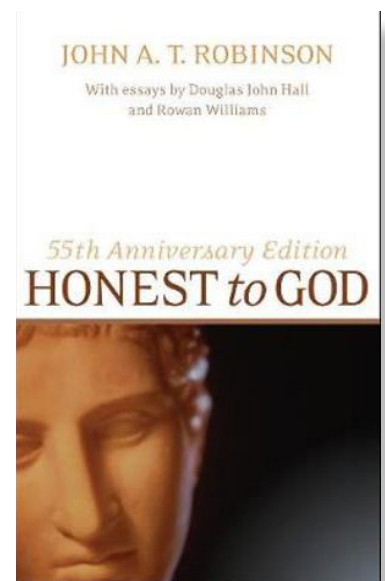
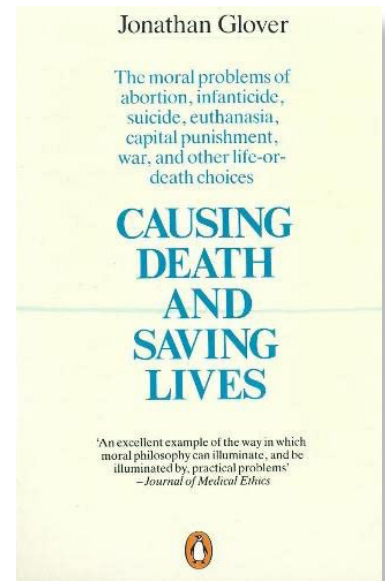
The first is a little paperback by the Oxford-based philosopher Jonathan Glover entitled *Causing Death and Saving Lives*. I bought the book from Blackwell's bookstore in Oxford in 1979. It still sits on my bookshelf now, with half its paragraphs underlined. It tested and challenged me: how does one make ethical judgments? "The more detailed guidance a moral system gives, the more complex it is likely to be. On the other hand, the less it is worked out in detail, the more likely it is to entail unnoticed, unacceptable consequences." I have gone back to it time and time again when forced to ponder life-and-death choices.

Next is John Robinson's *Honest to God* which I read as part of my theology study at Graceland. The book's purpose was to make God 'real' for the modern, scientific, and secular age. His words were revelatory. No longer did I have to affirm that our church was the only one that had 'correct' purpose and relevance. I realised that all religious permutations were striving to find meaning. I was now freed up to begin my own faith quest.

The third book is *God's Politics* by American theologian Jim Wallis. Jim argues that the idea of the separation of church and state does not banish moral and religious values from public discussion. This allows us to demand that our leaders reject war as an option without being judged as disloyal to our country.

Next is the novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque, a German veteran of World War I, describing in intimate detail a soldier's extreme physical and mental stress in a war zone. First written in 1929, it was banned by the Nazis. If ever there was a book that highlighted the futility of armed conflict, this is it.

The last book is Darryl Reaney's *The Death of Forever: A New Future for Human Consciousness*. Here the author is calling for an approach to death "with gratitude, seeing it for what it is, the final elimination of ego and the end of the fallacies of time and self". It, too, was life-changing.



Songs/Musicals that have inspired me or had a positive influence on me:

by Kristie Woodward

Benedictus (from Karl Jenkins' The Armed Man: A Mass For Peace).

This impressive choral piece features an opening haunting cello solo and develops into a very full, loud orchestral and choral section in the middle. I imagine that the beauty, simplicity and fullness created in this piece is exactly what an encounter with God sounds like. It gives me goosebumps and moves me to tears every single time. The lyrics reflect the Catholic Mass' Sanctus and are translated into English as; "Blessed who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." I've had the privilege of singing this impressive choral work and I often listen to professional recordings of it as a reminder of the power of perfectly composed music as a tool for divine encounters.

Second Hand White Baby Grand (song written by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman, featured in the musical TV series 'Smash')

I think it's the very last line of this song which inspires me the most; "I still have something beautiful to give". The baby grand piano is used as a clever metaphor for the subject of the song, as she reminisces of the once pristine and beloved white baby grand piano that, with the passing of time, slowly loses its purpose. The fact that this instrument still has something beautiful to give, despite the dust and cracks, really speaks to me. On days when my chronic back and leg pain are getting the better of me, this message prompts me to recognise that who I am to my core is what matters and to believe that I still have something valuable to offer.

Waitress: The Musical (by Sara Bareilles)

I saw this musical on Broadway in January of 2017 and uphold it as one of the most endearing and motivational stories I've seen. It's about chasing dreams, taking chances on people and situations and absolute devotion to the ones we love. It takes the audience on a beautiful, relatable journey of deep connection to the loved ones who have come before us and to those who will follow. With a pre-teen daughter at the time of seeing the show, this story inspired me to hold tightly to the strong relationship I had with her as she began her teenage years and it regularly reminds me of the importance of expressing my love and admiration for her.