

# Five Books I Have Read Ten Times

Are They That Good?

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Five Great Books (image: the author)

I recently reread a book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, that I have read so many times, I can't even count. This caused me to start thinking of any other books I have read so many times that I can't count. I came up with a list of five that I have read at least ten

times.

As I contemplated these books, I had to ask myself, Why? Why have I read them repeatedly? There are numerous reasons, including entertainment, valuable lessons learned, and quality of writing. But there are many books that are entertaining. What makes these different? After all, ten times is a lot to read any book.

I enjoy books that have believable character construction. I like stories that cause me to reflect and ponder. I like books that build me up, cause me to feel gratitude, and show me how to be a better person. These books show me these qualities but, interestingly, a few of these books show the anti-example of these qualities.

I have used some of these books and their characters in previous posts. The character of Atticus Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of the most well-written characters in modern literature. He is courageous, humble, and thought-provoking.

Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*, while also being extremely well-written, is the exact opposite of Atticus. He is cruel and sadistic, almost demonic. Both of these characters show us how to be people of quality, equality, courage, and foresight, parents of well-rounded children who value life and relationships — one by his example and one by his anti-example.

Also, as I have pondered why these books intrigue me, I

have concluded that courage is a central theme. Again, in some cases, the examples are very courageous and in other cases, they are not courageous — anti-example is also strong and thought-provoking.

Two of these books are religion-based books, and while I am not a Zen-Buddhist or a Taoist, the precepts and descriptions of quality and courage contained in these books can be of great value to anyone.

What are the books that I have read ten times or more thus far in my life?

## **To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee (fiction)**

[\*To Kill a Mockingbird\*](#) was written by Harper Lee and published in 1960. The book won the Pulitzer Prize in 1961.

This is a coming-of-age story of a young girl, nicknamed Scout, growing up in the Depression and Jim Crow era of Alabama. The girl's relationships with her father, brother, and the family's maid are struggles for her at times. She deals with trying to understand a difficult dichotomy in her world, the struggle between equality and racism, love and hatred.

This story teaches me of fatherhood, tolerance, love, and equality. It teaches me to trust and value my children and

the other relationships in my life. My world, my town, my colleagues, and my family require my honesty and integrity. It is up to me to be the person I should be.

[Joseph Crespino](#) wrote, "In the twentieth century, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is probably the most widely read book dealing with race in America, and its main character, Atticus Finch, the most enduring fictional image of racial heroism."

## **The Prophet by Kahlil Gibran (Prose poetry)**

[The Prophet](#) was written by Kahlil Gibran and published in 1923. The book has been translated into over 100 languages and has never been out of print. As of 2012, over nine million copies have been sold in the United States alone. Gibran was a Lebanese-American writer, poet, artist, and philosopher. *The Prophet* entered the Public Domain in 2019 and can be [downloaded for free](#).

The book tells the story of Al Mustafa, a prophet living in a foreign land who prepares to return to the land of his birth. Prior to his leaving, the people ask him to speak to them one last time.

The prophet's teachings are broken down into 28 short chapters separated based on topic. The prophet discusses many important topics with them including

humanity, humility, love and acceptance, joy and sorrow, reason and passion, religion, and death.

This book teaches so much that is of value, but what I feel the strongest after reading is patience, peace, and quiet. This book provides much clarity of mind for me.

*You give but little when you give of your possessions.*

*It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.*

*There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward.*

*And there are those who give with pain, and that pain is their baptism.*

*It is well to give when asked, but it is better to give unasked, through understanding.*

## **Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance by Robert M. Pirsig (fictionalized autobiography)**

[Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance](#) (sometimes referred to as *ZAMM*) was written by Robert M. Pirsig and published in 1974. Pirsig wrote that he was rejected by 126 publishers before the book was finally accepted even though the editor who accepted it felt it would never generate a profit. The book proved the editor wrong and

remained on best-seller lists for decades.

The book could be qualified as a self-help book in today's world but does not read like a typical book of that genre.

The narrator describes a first-person account of a 1968 cross-country motorcycle trip with his 11-year-old son. The reader experiences the trials and enjoyments of the journey along with them. The father and son learn about one another and each other's qualities and weaknesses.

The premise of the book is learning about finding value and learning to determine quality in life and relationships, even in the midst of trouble, hardship, and discouragement.

The motorcycle they are riding is a somewhat aged machine and requires continual maintenance and upkeep, especially on such a long, difficult trip. Life is likened to the journey and the motorcycle to us as individuals as we also require personal maintenance and upkeep as we endure hardship and trials.

## **Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë (fiction)**

[\*Wuthering Heights\*](#) was written by Emily Brontë under the pen name Ellis Bell and published in 1847. *Wuthering Heights* is a gothic tragedy and, in my opinion, an epic story in a Homer-Esque tradition. This story will cause

you sadness and a touch of depression as you read of the relationships and treatment of people who should be appreciated and loved. The values within the family, the society of the small neighborhood, and the treatment of newcomers are disturbing. *Wuthering Heights* is in the Public Domain and can be [downloaded for free](#).

The themes in the story are love and hatred, morality and religion, storm and rare calm. Contemporary reviews were quite polarized with the book's controversial descriptions of mental, physical, and emotional cruelty.

The characters Heathcliff, Hindley, and Joseph are the anti-examples of how to find joy, equality, and application of the Golden Rule.

You will hate certain characters while also hoping they learn to love and forgive. But you will like Nelly, and laugh at Lockwood, that much I guarantee. This book will entertain you, anger you, confuse you, and surprise you. You will find yourself re-reading passages, making sure you understood correctly, not because of ancient or confusing language but because the people are so horrible at times. You will just need to make sure you read it correctly.

The anti-examples of courage and caring of *Wuthering Heights* is a strong-counter to what a reader encounters in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

Virginia Woolf said of Emily Brontë — her writing could “make the wind blow and the thunder roar.”

Unfortunately, *Wuthering Heights* was her only novel. She died at the age of 30.

## **Tao Te Ching by Laozi (Classical Chinese Philosophy)**

The [\*Tao Te Ching\*](#) (pronounced *Dao De Jing*) was written in the sixth century B.C. by Laozi, also known as Lao Tzu.

The text was first translated into English in 1868.

Although this information is quite widely accepted, there is still debate about the authorship and date of

composition. No one really knows who Lao Tzu was. The *Tao Te Ching* is in the Public Domain and can be

[downloaded for free](#).

I have owned different copies of this over the years but the one I use and read is a translation by Stephen Mitchell published in 1991.

The *Tao Te Ching* is fundamental to Taoism but is also considered to have influenced other forms of philosophy and religion, including Confucianism and Buddhism.

The concepts within the book are enlightening and helpful. I have asked young people to read this in an effort to help them understand relationships and gain an appreciation for life.



*In dwelling, live close to the ground.*

*In thinking, keep it to the simple.*

*In conflict, be fair and generous,*

*In governing, don't try to control.*

*In work, do what you enjoy.*

*In family life, be completely present.*

*When you are content to be simply yourself*

*And don't compare or compete,*

*Everybody will respect you.*

If these books are unfamiliar to you, please try them out. And if five books seem a bit daunting, please start out with *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This is time well-spent.