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## Spotlight: Reading for Change

Matt Litton And Jeff Goins

Editor's Note: *Two writers review two new books that use stories of hope to promote social action and global change, Tom Davis' Red Letters and Bill Clinton's Giving.*

### **A Faith That Bleeds: A Review of *Red Letters* by Tom Davis**

*Red Letters* begins not with startling statistics or an alarming call to action, but with a simple story about a teenager named Kirill who lived on the streets of Moscow.

We've all been there before, trying to assuage our feelings of guilt with justifications and avoiding eye contact. Author Tom Davis did what many of us would have done. He kept walking. I can resonate with that; it's the "wise" thing to do. But then he did something different; he turned around.

"Living a faith that bleeds" is the tagline for this book about justice, hope and change. It begins with a story about a man who saw his Savior on the street. Davis lives his life by the principle that Jesus is everywhere and often seen in the "least of these." When Davis went back, his faith started to bleed.

In the first few chapters, he discusses the essence of the Gospel, which is something to be lived and not just discussed, and the global problem of poverty. As "little Christs," we have a responsibility to do something about suffering in the world. Davis goes on to discuss the AIDS crisis, Africa—particularly Swaziland, which has the highest rate of HIV in the world and will go extinct in 50 years if nothing changes—and his heart for the forgotten and forsaken.

The statistics *do* come, and he doesn't leave the reader with a lot of excuses for inaction. Producing change isn't hard; it just requires a willingness, he argues.

The latter chapters call the reader to action, but unlike many books of this tenor, they don't abandon you there. Davis gives you potential routes to pursue. He invites you to join his [fivefor50 campaign](#), go on a [mission trip](#) and raise money and awareness.

My only disappointment with *Red Letters* was that there were not more stories. My favorite chapter, "Snapshots of Hope," tells of African babies rescued from abandonment, Russian orphans turned into leaders and how those who cared for them were radically changed.

Perhaps what I admired most about the book was the author's dedication to his own cause. Tom Davis isn't interested in selling books to just propagate more "corporate Christianity"; he's really seeking to make an impact on the world, which is why a portion of the book sales go directly to feeding orphans. I can't help but respect that.

*Red Letters* isn't about social action. It's about Jesus—about finding Him in the least likely of places and our commitment to meet Him there.

"I've discovered a new way to live. Every morning when I get out of bed, I look for Jesus. No, not because I've misplaced Him. And I'm not talking about a feeling I get during prayer, or revelation that comes to me while reading Scripture. I'm talking about finding Jesus in the eyes of real people. In the eyes of the poor, the handicapped, the oppressed, the orphan, the homeless, the AIDS victim—the abandoned and the forgotten."

—Jeff Goins

## **A Call to Action: A Review of *Giving* by Bill Clinton**

Nothing raises eyebrows like walking through your workday in middle America carrying a copy of a book with former President Bill Clinton's name emblazoned in raised blue block-letter ink on the cover. If you ever need to generate some water-cooler talk, I highly recommend the strategy. I did that recently, and the result was hilarious! People can't help themselves when they recognize the Clinton name; very few public figures illicit such a passionate response from such a broad population of people.

But to appreciate the recent book by the polarizing political figure, you'll need to put your Red and Blue associations aside for a moment. Clinton's new book, *Giving*, is a worthwhile read—especially for people of the Christian community. The book is “a call to action,” and although one must look past a good bit of self-adulation by the former president, it accomplishes his purpose with inspiring stories of everyday people who have committed time, money, resources and ideas to change the world.

I found the tales of the philanthropy of billionaires including Bill Gates, George Soros and Warren Buffett almost taxing to read, and parts of the text sound like a sales pitch for Hillary Clinton's 2008 campaign. However, the book resplendently demonstrates our capacity to make a difference in the world—the former president's fondness and admiration for the people he documents in this book comes through vividly. Some of the most poignant stories tell of “ordinary” people making great sacrifices to give:

*Brianne Schwantes*, a child born with *osteogenesis imperfecta*, a rare bone disease, who despite her disability has devoted her life to volunteering and helping others.

*Oseola McCarty*, an 87-year-old African-American woman who dropped out of school in the sixth grade, worked washing and ironing other people's clothes, and in 1995 donated \$150,000 of her personal savings to the University of Southern Mississippi to establish a scholarship fund for African-American students in financial need.

*John Bryant*, founder of “Operation Hope,” gave one of the more profound quotes in the book when asked why he has continued giving. “I keep doing it because the key to happiness is to stop focusing on the *me* and start focusing on the *we*.”

The most heart-wrenching account involves a survivor of the brutal tribal wars of Rwanda named Josephine Murebwayire, who lived through a machete attack that killed her husband and six children. At the time she met President Clinton, she was raising six orphans who had lost their parents during the genocide. Her declaration in the aftermath of the genocide was full of purpose and grace: “My life must have been spared for a reason, and it could not be something as mean as vengeance. So I do what I do to help us start again.”

Clinton provides excellent resources and ideas for those who question *how* to get involved. In the chapter titled “Giving Things” he describes “The Backpack Club,” a wonderful operation found in several U.S. cities that can feed hungry families for \$2-\$3 a day. He suggests a children's book, *A Kid's Guide to Giving*, as a way to teach our children the importance of giving, and offers a convenient website, [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org), for those who wish to find a way to get involved in their community.

Clinton is truthful and sincere when he says, “I've done my best in this book to demonstrate that all kinds of giving can make a profoundly positive difference.” Whatever your opinion of the author, *Giving* speaks motivation and guidance to the idealists of the world—idealists like us, the followers of Jesus.

—Matt Litton

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*He's getting married in January.*

