

Every church should have a well-stocked bookstall for at least two reasons. The first is that God uses good books to change lives. Thousands of Christians can testify to that. Perhaps you're one of them. The second reason is that the church is full of busy people. Too busy, sometimes, to drive into town and spend thirty minutes browsing through the hundreds of books in their local Christian bookshop, trying to find a book they hope will be helpful. Too busy for that - but no so busy they can't spend five minutes after the morning service glancing through the thirty or so carefully selected books on their church bookstall.

Do you want to run a church bookstall? Here's how you can do it.

Get support from your elders: If the elders are not behind you, your bookstall will never get off the ground. Like you, the elders will want to get good Christian books into the hands of their members, so ask for their support. Show them this leaflet if you think it will help. Don't continue until you have their backing.

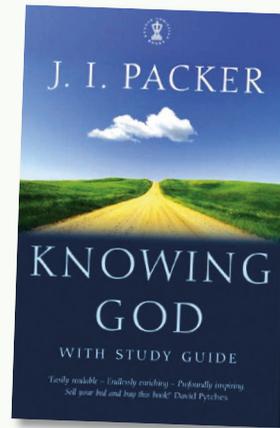
Get support from your local Christian bookshop: Every good Christian bookshop should allow you to take a small number of books on "sale or return" - as long as you take good care of them - and give you a discount on every book you sell. Remember to be nice to the bookshop manager - pay your bills on time, return your unsold books in good condition, and don't hang on to your stock for too long. Don't take every book from the bookshop - in a small church 15 books will probably be enough. Larger churches may need up to 40. But if you have too many books, people will be spoilt for choice.

Get good books: There's no point going to all this trouble just to sell rubbish - and sadly there's a lot of rubbish in what passes for Christian books. You won't be able to vet every book before you sell it. There may be some authors and publishers you know you can trust. Read reviews in good evangelical magazines. Ask your pastor to recommend books. And don't believe everything you read on the book cover! If you're not sure a book will be helpful, leave it on the shelf. You can always do a bit more research and get it next time.

Make your books accessible: If your bookstall is halfway down the narrow corridor that leads to the toilets, you're not going to sell many books. Find a good spot that is easy to access for all in the congregation, and where people can stand and browse without getting in everyone's way. Get some shelves put up, or buy a bookcase. There won't be many areas like this in most churches - so this is another reason why you need your elders' support.

Keep books in everyone's mind: Most people will quickly forget about your bookstall. Don't let them. Each month, ask your elders for permission to do 2 or 3 one minute book reviews during a service. Encourage your pastor to recommend books during his sermons. If you have a notice sheet, recommend a "Book of the Week" and write three sentences why you think the book is worth reading. You shouldn't really recommend books you haven't read, so you'll need some help with all these book reviews. Perhaps your best customers will be willing to contribute a mini-review.

Make sure your books are relevant: You may think that John Owen's sixteen volumes are a must-read for every Christian, but the newly-



converted mum with four young children would probably be better with something else. Make sure your bookstall stocks it. Have you got children in your congregation? Then have books for them. Are there adults who find reading difficult? Then some short, easily-accessible books will be just what they need. A self-confessed bookworm? A six-hundred page hardback may be right up their street. Jane is looking for a commentary to study in her quiet time. Bill is after a biography to read on the bus. Sarah wants a theology book to chew over. Jim needs something really practical to help him become more like Christ. Ted wants an evangelistic book to give away to his friend. Your bookstall must have something for all of them.

Remember, every little helps: Do all that you can to make it easy to use your bookstall. Keep the shelves tidy. Be willing to answer questions and listen to suggestions. Make sure books are priced clearly. Provide book order forms for people to request specific books (you can phone the bookshop to place your order, and collect the book when you change your stock). Provide a box where people can put their money. Provide IOU slips for folk who don't have any money with them. Provide a pen so that people can fill in the forms - and tie it to the bookshelf so no-one runs off with it!

Keep the bookstall fresh: No-one will visit a bookstall where most of the books have been around for months, so change all of your stock regularly. Every four to six weeks is usually best. Get this changeover announced in advance. You may have a flurry of last-minute sales, and create some expectation for the new books.

Use your bookstall to support your church's wider work: Is your church looking to particularly encourage personal evangelism? Then give a half-price subsidy on evangelistic books that are given away to friends. Is there a church mission coming up? Order a dozen copies of a really good book on mission, and negotiate a better discount. Is your pastor starting a new series in his preaching? Ask him to recommend one commentary he'd like the congregation to read through week by week. Is there a particular issue the church is looking to address? Ask the elders to recommend a book that would help. Are there problems that your pastor knows many are struggling with - assurance, marriage, or prayer? Ask him to let you know so you can make sure something is available. Keep looking out for opportunities.

Pray for the work of your bookstall: Like other ministries in the church, running a bookstall needs our prayers. How will you know that next week a non-Christian will come into your church and be really helped by a book about how to get to heaven? How will you know that one of the church-members is struggling to stay on course, and the book you almost didn't get is just the one God will use to rescue them from backsliding? You can't know these things - and you may never find out that is what God is doing, but when people pray, it's just the kind of thing that seems to happen. And, if your church doesn't yet have a bookstall, pray that the elders would be given a vision for one. And pray too that someone in the church would be given the burden to run one. Oh, and don't forget to pray, "Lord, I'm willing for it to be me."

