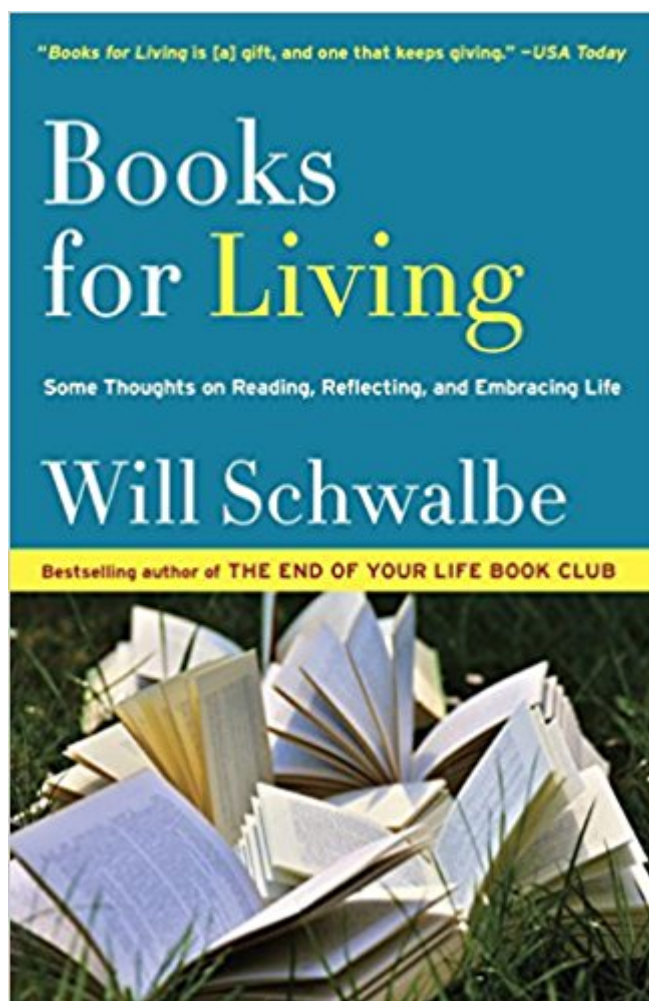


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# Books For Living: Some Thoughts On Reading, Reflecting, And Embracing Life



## Synopsis

From the author of the beloved New York Times best-selling *The End of Your Life Book Club*, an inspiring and magical exploration of the power of books to shape our lives in an era of constant connectivity. For Will Schwalbe, reading is a way to entertain himself but also to make sense of the world, and to find the answers to life's questions big and small. In each chapter, he discusses a particular book and how it relates to concerns we all share. These books span centuries and genres—from *Stuart Little* to *The Girl on the Train*, from *David Copperfield* to *Wonder*, from *Giovanni's Room* to *Rebecca*, and from 1984 to *Gifts from the Sea*. Throughout, Schwalbe tells stories from his life and focuses on the way certain books can help us honor those we've loved and lost, and also figure out how to live each day more fully.

## Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (September 5, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0804172757

ISBN-13: 978-0804172752

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 52 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #14,977 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #21 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Books & Reading > General #38 in Books > Self-Help > Death & Grief > Grief & Bereavement #623 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Memoirs

## Customer Reviews

"Books for Living is [a] gift, and one that keeps giving." —USA

"A sweet and utterly restorative series of vignettes about how books—the right books, at the right times—can not only deepen a life but save

it." —*The Christian Science Monitor* "Any season of the year, this book is a gift"

—*Mary Oliver* "Inspiring and charming. . . . Books, to Schwalbe, are our

last great hope to keep us from spiraling into the abyss." —*The New York Times* "Moving. . . . Schwalbe truly shines. . . . It should convince even reluctant readers to pick up

a book." —*Boston Globe* "First-rate. . . . Schwalbe's enthusiasm for what he covers is contagious." —*San Francisco Chronicle* "A love letter

to reading, bibliophiles will close the last page with a few more entries on their to-read list. •  
•Real Simple • “Witty, warm, [and] insightful. . . . A field guide to a handful of  
titles that might entertain, stir up trouble, or •yes•even save the life a reader already  
has. • Shelf Awareness • “The casual but polished way in which  
Schwalbe writes about some of his favorite books •and smartly peppers in his own  
life, •cs stories •makes for an engaging and easy read. • Books for  
Living • quietly reminds readers that books are works of art that carry great import in our lives,  
and might even leave you wondering what your own list of books for living might look like. •  
•5280 • “Very much a work for our age. . . . Vital. • •The Anniston  
Star

WILL SCHWALBE • has worked in publishing; digital media, as the founder and CEO of  
Cookstr.com; and as a journalist, writing for various publications, including The New York Times and  
the South China Morning Post. He is the author of the New York Times best seller The End of Your  
Life Book Club and coauthor, with David Shipley, of Send: Why People Email So Badly and How to  
Do It Better.

When I saw Books for Living advertised on I immediately ordered it and I am glad I did. Will  
Schwalbe •cs book is written for everyone who loves to read and talk about the  
books they read. Will •cs last name means swallow in German and like a swallow,  
Will flies over and touches down on many of the books he has read from childhood to the present  
day. He tells us the story of his life with the books he has read as inspiration for his remembrance of  
things past. Will would like this reference to Proust because, like Proust, he is highly reflective and  
his reading helps him to relive the sights and sounds of his childhood and adult life. I thought to  
myself, • “I could write a book like this, • and I could, just as you, my  
readers could also look back on the books you have read in your life and share with us just what  
you thought and felt as you read your favorite books and lived through the events of your life.  
Perhaps, unlike Will •cs book, my book would be mediocre; but as Will points out,  
that is not a bad thing. It is not trying at all that is sad, for Will reminds us what G.K. Chesterton said:  
• “Anything worth doing is worth doing badly. • We may not be the  
best writers in the world, but that doesn •t matter. What does matter is that we do  
what Will does; that is, use our reading to help us understand better the world we think we live in  
and connect to other people, other times, and other places that expand our consciousness and help

us become more human. Will reveals himself to us as a flawed human being, but one who loves and cares for other people. He has been hurt himself, but he tries very hard not to hurt others. As a gay man he has learned the hard way what it means to reveal himself to others, but in his book he bravely shares his most intimate thoughts and feelings with us. We are the better for his sharing with us his life experiences. Books for Living is proving to be expensive because I find myself going to and ordering many of the books Will discusses. For example, Will takes us inside Lin Yutang's famous book, *The Importance of Living*, which is now on order for me from . Will shares this quote from the book: "If you can spend a perfectly useless afternoon in a perfectly useless manner, you have learned how to live." This quote is like a slap in the face to a person like me who has spent his life trying to be productive and achieving. What does it mean? Will says, let's talk about it and he does, helping us to understand that getting off the fast track in our "age of anxiety" as we simply experience the joy of being and begin to understand that life is a great gift that we must never take for granted. A bit later in the book Will quotes Confucius who tells us to "never lay straight in bed but always be curled up on one side." And then Will gives us a very long quote from *The Analects of Confucius* to explain why this method of resting is so important. I tried Confucius's suggestion and I like the feeling I experienced as I took a nap, something Will expands on later in his book in his chapter titled *What I Talk about When I Talk about Running* or *Napping*. Haruki Murakami, the great Japanese writer, encourages everyone to take naps. Will mentions some of the great people like Eleanor Roosevelt and Winston Churchill who always included naps in their day. I thought, "If it's good enough for Roosevelt and Churchill, it's good enough for me." Thus far I have mentioned writers Will discusses who were not familiar to me, but he also includes authors like Charles Dickens who are most familiar to me. One of his chapters is dedicated to *David Copperfield*, one of my favorite books that I have read several times. Will also loves *David Copperfield* for many of the same reasons I like this great book. Certainly, *David Copperfield* has one of the greatest cast of characters in all of fiction. Once read, we can never forget Wilkins Micawber, Uriah Heep (that "Heep of infamy"), Aunt Betsy Trotwood, Peggotty, etc. Will laughed and cried as he read about *David Copperfield*'s adventures and became more human in the process, which is what Will's book is all about. I thought about Anthony Trollope, one of my favorite novelists, as I read Will's book. Like Trollope, Will talks directly to us and tells us what is on his mind. His writing is so natural that we easily forget we are reading and instead it feels

like we are in a conversation with Will, ready to share our own thoughts with him about the special books that have made a difference for good in our lives. And now I am talking directly to you, my readers to say that if you love to read and reading is an important part of your life, you are going to enjoy reading *Books for Living* and perhaps be prompted to share your own thoughts with us here on .Update 1: It is always a downer to write a lengthy review summarizing what is best about a good book and then get for the first vote a "NO" not helpful response. I say to myself, what more could I have done in this review to share with readers what is best about the book? and as I reread the review, I didn't come up with any answers. If anyone reading this update has advice for me, please share your thoughts with me in comments. Thanks. Russell

Will Schwalbe's celebration of books inspired me to not waste time on books that don't touch me as deeply as the 26 books that he highlights touched him and changed his life. I am grateful for his bringing Lin Yutang's masterpiece back into print and for introducing me to the importance of loafing!

From the beautiful human, Will Schwalbe, who brought us *THE END OF YOUR LIFE BOOK CLUB*, comes his newest embrace to books, *BOOKS FOR LIVING*. This book is a gorgeous compilation about books that have greatly moved him at various points in his life, followed by a poignant story about where and when he read them, and what he gleaned from the book at that moment that helped him in one way or another, and continues to, to this day. What Schwalbe does, so carefully and so well, is to show us how books, from our past as well as new, can guide us, whether we realize it or not. He also helps us see how books can open a whole new world, right from the chair where we are reading them. They take us on journeys, connect us with others, help heal our hearts, keep someone's memory alive, seek understanding, perhaps find forgiveness in our hearts, and know hope. Regardless of how many books recommended or referenced in the book that speak to you, and trust me, there will be plenty, get ready to hit the nearest bookstore hard. You will no doubt come away with an abundance of messages and memories of your own, from the books that you have read, in your childhood and just last month. I love that Schwalbe points out that reading is "a respite from the relentlessness of technology." Other than when I am reading on my Kindle, I am unplugged. I concentrate on reading. No phone, no laptop, no TV, and no music. I am all in on that book. He goes on to say much more on this subject and how it allows him to rejuvenate in a way. While reading is a solo expedition, it allows you to gain knowledge, which then gives you something to talk about with friends, your book club, or

colleagues. To have lively discussions. “Good books often answer questions you didn’t even know you wanted to ask. I found it validating that the author talks about fiction with such high regard when he stated “[f]iction doesn’t exist to change us for the better, but I believe it almost always does. Fiction opens us up. One of my favorite gifts that Schwalbe points out comes from the book WONDER. I don’t want to spoil anything, so I will leave it to you to read on your own. Suffice it to say, it is beautiful. Another really lovely message that Schwalbe shows us is one that seems so simple, but he shows us how powerful it truly is to ask others “what are you reading?” He shares an example of a grandmother and her grandson who don’t seem to connect much anymore. But when the grandmother asks her grandson what he is reading and then starts to read the same book, well, now they have something that they can talk about. Engage with each other on the same level. What a breakthrough. Imagine if we could all do this with people whom we have a hard time connecting with. Imagine world leaders talking about the latest Harry Potter book. There is one book, mentioned throughout, that I am eager to read, THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING by Lim Yutang, which Schwalbe sums up that it “is about the need to slow down and enjoy life. And, it is about the importance of books and reading. He goes on to use the wisdom from this book and the author’s philosophy by adding: “And reading all different kinds of books is not simply reading all different kinds of books; it’s a way of becoming more fully human and more humane. Mr. Schwalbe, you have captured everything that I love about reading. You have opened up my mind to even more ideas and books that I would never have known. If I were to get a tattoo or even a bumper sticker, neither of which is in the cards for me, it would be the last two lines of your book.

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