



Building a Core Library

50 Recommended Books

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The following books are recommended for Christians who want to build a systematic and substantive core library that includes some of the best Christian works in 7 key areas: (1)Biblical Studies; (2)Christian History; (3)Christian Apologetics; (4)Christian Spirituality; (5)Christian Life and Discipleship; (6)Church Life; and (7)Eschatology. All of these books are highly recommended, as is the sequence in which they are listed within each category. Also included are several reference books that are marked with an asterisk (*).

Bible Studies

- [] **Henry H. Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook with the New International Version (Deluxe Edition)* (2007)***

A wealth of information on the historical background, culture and geographical setting for each book of the Bible, including significant archaeological findings related to the narratives. This version is 1,050 pages and features full-color maps, photographs and illustrations, and is an ideal aid for in-depth Bible study.

- [] **Trent C. Butler, Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England, eds., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (2003)***

A comprehensive and in-depth 1700-page dictionary featuring hundreds of Bible-related terms and topics with more than 700 full-color graphics and other aids.

- [] **Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Third Edition (1981, 2003)**

I would never want to be a part of any Bible study group that didn't first read and discuss this book, which sets forth the basic principles of Biblical hermeneutics – or how to read and interpret Scripture. A systematic study of this book should eliminate 90% of the potential problems regarding Biblical interpretation and application, and therefore it helps clear the way for a fruitful and productive study of Scripture.

- [] **Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth and Content*. Second Edition, Enlarged (1965, 1983)**

The standard text for background information on the New Testament by Bruce Metzger, the former professor emeritus of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary and the acknowledge dean of New Testament studies. This book includes valuable background on canonization and the transmission of the Biblical texts through the centuries.

- [] **Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (1992)***

When confronted by the assertion, “The Bible is riddled with errors and contradictions,” most Christians are left speechless. *When Critics Ask* can help, and as such it is an indispensable resource that all serious Bible students should have on their bookshelf. Written in a problem/solution format, this volume addresses over 800 questions related to difficult and problematical Bible passages arranged sequentially from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 16:14.

Christian History

- [] **J. D. Douglass, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Revised Edition (1974)***

A comprehensive dictionary of the significant names, issues and events in Christian history from the first century to the 1970s.

- [] **Paul Maier, *Josephus: The Essential Works* (1988, 1994)**

An abridged and highly-readable translation of the writings of the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, whose history of Israel and the Jews covers 2,000 years from the time of Abraham through the Zealot Revolt and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Maier’s text is supplemented by beautiful full-color photographs.

- [] **Paul Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History* (1999)**

An abridged and highly-readable translation of the writings of the early Christian historian, Eusebius, whose works cover the first 300 years of Christian history from the early church through the reign of Constantine (337 A.D.). Maier’s text is supplemented by beautiful full-color photographs.

- [] **Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day*. One volume (Prince Press/Hendrickson Publishers, 2001)**

The best single-volume short (800-page) history of Christianity that provides an excellent overview the major people, issues and events over the past 2000 years.

- [] **Ivor J. Davidson, *The Birth of the Church: From Jesus to Constantine, A. D. 30-312. The Baker History of the Church, Volume I* (2004)**

One of the best single-volume histories of the early church and Volume I in the 6-volume Baker History of the Church. Written by a world-renowned scholar in the field, *The Birth of the Church* provides an overview of the major people, issues and events in the first 300 years of church history.

- [] **Ivor J. Davidson, *A Public Faith: From Constantine to the Medieval World, A. D. 312-600*. The Baker History of the Church, Volume II (2005)**
An excellent single-volume history of Christianity from the time of Constantine through the fall of the Western Roman Empire and into the early medieval era, and Volume II in the 6-volume Baker History of the Church. Written by a world-renowned scholar in the field, *A Public Faith* provides a detailed overview of the major people, issues and events during this 300 year period in church history.
- [] **Rudolph W. Heinze, *Reform and Conflict: From the Medieval World to the Wars of Religion, 1350-1648*. The Baker History of the Church, Volume IV (2005)**
An excellent single-volume history of the late medieval and Reformation eras, and Volume IV in the 6-volume Baker History of the Church. Written by a world-renowned scholar in the field, *Reform and Conflict* provides a detailed overview of the major people, issues and events in this critical and transformative period in church history.
- [] **Meic Pearse, *The Age of Reason: From the Wars of Religion to the French Revolution, 1570-1789*. The Baker History of the Church, Volume V (2006)**
An excellent single-volume history of European Christianity from the late Reformation era through the Enlightenment, culminating in the French Revolution of 1789. Written by a world-renowned scholar in the field, *The Age of Reason* is Volume V in the 6-volume Baker History of the Church, and it provides a detailed overview of the major people, issues and events in this period of church history.
- [] **Henry Bettensen and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*. Third Edition (1943, 1999)***
The essential primary documents in Christian history, including the earliest versions of the Apostles' Creed, excerpts from the early church fathers, the accounts of Constantine's conversion, major papal edicts, key documents related to the Reformation, the proclamations of the Council of Trent, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Barmen Declaration, and much more.

Christian Apologetics

- [] **Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (1999)***
The most comprehensive compendium and reference book on Christian apologetics, covering the major relevant themes, issues, events and people, including key atheists, skeptics, and leaders in major non-Christian religions and cults.
- [] **Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions* (1983)***
With major sections on cults, the Occult, non-Christian religions, and "secular religions," this is one of the best reference volumes available for information on major non-Christian philosophies, religions and spiritualities. Contents include Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientology, Transcendental Meditation, parapsychology, ghosts and demons, witchcraft, Marxism, secular humanism, and much more.

[] **James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (1976)**

Using the major tenets of basic Christian Theism as a standard of evaluation, Sire offers a concise but substantive analysis of alternative worldviews and demonstrates how they contrast with a biblical worldview. This has been one of the most practical and influential books on Christian apologetics of the past 25 years and is indispensable for anyone who wants to be culturally-aware and relate the Gospel in a culturally-relevant manner.

[] **Nancy R. Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (2004)**

“Everyone is aware that American culture changed enormously during the twentieth century, but very few people understand how the change was brought about.” Pearcey’s *Total Truth* is a sweeping analysis of contemporary culture that challenges Christians to think clearly and consistently in accord with a biblical worldview, and then to apply Christian values and beliefs in the way we live our lives. For those who have read and absorbed James Sire’s *The Universe Next Door* (see above), *Total Truth* is the next step in terms of formulating a coherent, consistent and comprehensive Christian worldview.

[] **Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (1999)**

An anthology of Christian apologetics presented in annotated outline form, this has been the most popular apologetics sourcebook for evangelical Christians since the publication of volume one of this compilation in the early 1970s. *New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* is expanded and updated, and contains a wealth of information. Although McDowell’s presentations are occasionally too selective and ignore complicating factors, this remains a valuable source for a general overview of apologetics.

[] **Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (1998)**

A primer in the basic issues and controversies surrounding the historical Jesus and the reliability of the New Testament gospels, featuring interviews with some of the leading evangelical scholars in the field.

[] **Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest For the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (1995)**

One of the best books on the controversy over the “historical Jesus” and a damning indictment of the pseudo-scholarly Jesus Seminar. Johnson, a professor at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology, argues that the Jesus of history cannot be separated from the Jesus of the New Testament. Ultimately, however, the “real” Jesus can best be found not through exhaustive historical research but in a life-changing personal encounter with the living and active Christ.

[] **Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (2000)**

A basic primer in Christian apologetics that addresses some of most controversial issues related to the Christian faith such as the problem of evil and suffering, miracles, Christian exclusivity, science and evolution, Hell, the violence and oppression in Christian history.

[] **G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (1925)**

The first great Christian apologetic of the 20th century and a veritable *tour de force* in which Chesterton explores the realms of anthropology, history, mythology and comparative religion to support his contention that Jesus Christ and the Christian faith are unique. Chesterton, a Catholic Christian and a journalist, was one of the great Christian humanist scholars and social thinkers of the 20th century, and this book greatly influenced C. S. Lewis’s apologetic.

[] **C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952)**

A modern classic and perhaps the most influential and beloved Christian book of the 20th century, *Mere Christianity* is an informal primer in Christian apologetics and basic theology that was originally delivered as a series of BBC radio addresses from 1942-44.

[] **Dinesh D'Souza, *What's So Great About Christianity* (2007)**

A scholarly yet engaging refutation of the major claims against Christianity by atheists and other skeptics, with a special focus on some of the current scientific controversies, Christianity's historical contributions to Western civilization, and the uniqueness of the Christian faith.

[] **Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (1999)**

This book is intended to be a sequel to Francis Schaeffer's classic study in cultural apologetics, *How Shall We Then Live* (1976), which was a sweeping overview of the significant people, issues, ideas and events in Western civilization that shaped the dominant worldview of the 20th century. Colson and Pearcey's study lacks the historical breadth of Schaeffer's work and is written on a more popular level, but it is more substantive in terms of dealing with the four seminal issues of life:

(1)Origins: Where did we come from?

(2)The Fall: Why is the world – and everyone in it – so dysfunctional?

(3)Redemption: What is the solution to the world's problems? and

(4)Restoration: How to live an integrated life of wholistic discipleship in the midst of our current society that is rapidly deteriorating under the influence of postmodern and neo-pagan influences.

[] **Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Truth: A Guide to the Fallacies of Bart Ehrman's Misquoting Jesus* (2007)**

A detailed rebuttal and point-by-point refutation of the fallacies in Bart Ehrman's influential book, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story of Who Changed the Bible and Why* (2005). Ehrman, the author of several best-selling revisionist critiques of the Bible and early Christianity, contends that the Bible not historically reliable, nor is it an authoritative source of theology or morality. Ehrman argues that the Bible is seriously lacking in textual integrity, and that Biblical texts have been so corrupted in the transmission process over the centuries that modern readers cannot possibly know that the authors originally wrote.

Jones' book is important for Christians to read, study and discuss because it critiques Ehrman's strongest skeptical arguments against the divine inspiration and authority of Scripture.

[] **Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology As Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (1977)**

A thought-provoking critique of modern psychology and the "me" generation. Analyzing the popular and pervasive theories that espouse a secular humanistic worship of the self, Vitz argues that modern psychology has become a surrogate religion and is part of the problem of contemporary life rather than a solution to it. Nevertheless, when understood and applied properly, psychology can be a vital asset in terms of increased self-awareness and a spiritually healthy life. Vitz was a professor of psychology at New York University.

[] **Richard F. Carlson, ed., *Science and Christianity: Four Views* (2000)**

Many Christians are conflicted and confused regarding the correlation (or lack of correlation) between science and the Christian faith. This valuable book sets forth 4 basic positions that Christians hold regarding this relationship: Faith over science; faith and science as separate and independent realities; faith and science in creative tension; and a total correlation between faith and science. Advocates for each position state their case, after which their arguments are critiqued by the other three.

[] **J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (1999)**

This the best source for an introduction to the three views that Christians hold regarding creation and evolution: Young Earth Creationism (YEC), Old Earth Progressive Creationism (OEPC), and Theistic Evolution (TE). Advocates for each position state their case, after which their arguments are critiqued by a panel of scientists, philosophers and theologians.

Christian Spirituality

[] **A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (1948)**

As a theological conservative and a contemplative mystic, Tozer was a rarity among modern evangelical Christians. In one of the great spiritual classics of the 20th century, Tozer challenges Christians to go beyond mere doctrinal orthodoxy into the realm of intimate communion with the Spirit of God who resides within. Like the great spiritual mystics whom he admired and wrote about, Tozer lived in the presence of God and spoke with authority as a true prophet for his time.

[] **Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Twentieth Anniversary Edition(1978, 1998)**

This book has probably done more than any other to introduce evangelicals to the rich history of contemplative Christianity and the traditional spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith.

[] **Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (1981)**

With the death of Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen emerged as the foremost popularizer of the contemplative Christian tradition and lifestyle. This succinct but substantive introduction to the spirituality of the Desert Fathers focuses on three spiritual disciplines: solitude, silence, and prayer – the perfect antidote for our over-stimulated, materialistic and hedonistic society.

[] **David Winter and Bernard Bangle, eds., *Christian Classics in Modern English* (1991)**

Introductions and key excerpts of three great spiritual classics: *Practicing the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence; *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A Kempis, and *The Confessions of St. Augustine*.

[] **William A. Meninger, ed., *The Loving Search for God: Contemplative Prayer and The Cloud of Unknowing* (1994)**

A commentary on the 14th century spiritual classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing* and an excellent guide for anyone who desires a deeper and more fulfilling communion with God.

[] **Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart* (1986, 1992)**

An overview of the history of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition, and a practical guide in the method of centering prayer as a path to spiritual transformation.

Christian Life and Discipleship

[] **Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For?* (2002)**

“It’s not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness.... If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose.”

Thus, the starting point for understanding who we are and why we’re here is the character and will of God.

Although sometimes disparaged as Christianity Lite, *The Purpose Driven Life* is a valuable book that challenges even the most mature Christian to soberly reassess his/her life and priorities.

As a systematic guide to a 40-day spiritual journey, the book requires that we take stock our beliefs, our values, our desires, our motivations, our priorities, our lifestyle, and our commitment to God in order to clarify our unique mission in life and live a truly meaningful and purpose driven life.

[] **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937)**

“Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church... When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die...” Written in the crucible of the Nazi ascent in Germany, Bonhoeffer’s classic is an unequivocal call to radical Christian commitment and civic responsibility. Offered sanctuary in the US at the outset of World War II, Bonhoeffer chose to return to Germany, explaining that he would have no moral authority to help in the reconstruction of his homeland after the war if he had not suffered with his people during the ordeal. In our age of feel-good Christianity, *The Cost of Discipleship* reminds us of the timeless truth that “All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

[] **C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (1941)**

An imaginative cosmic drama in which Lewis exposes the tangled web of demonic-inspired temptations and delusions that bind and confuse even the most dedicated and conscientious Christians. Lewis was a professor of Classical Literature at Oxford University for over 30 years and one of the 20th century’s most popular Christian authors.

[] **J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (1973)**

Many Christians are woefully ignorant of the Bible and basic Christian theology, and therefore live confused and meaningless lives. Our purpose and destiny in life is to know God, personally and intimately, but knowing God entails far more than merely knowing *about* God. We come to truly know God by experiencing him, communing with him, spending time in his presence, and converting what we know *about* him into knowledge *of* him through prayer, meditation, and reflection, allowing him to transform us into the image of Christ. Packer was one of the most respected and influential evangelical writers of the late 20th century.

[] **M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (1978)**

One of the most significant books of the 20th century, this modern classic did more to liberate psychology from the chains of Freudian atheism than any other work in the field. The subtitle sums up the gist of the book: “A new psychology of love, traditional values and spiritual growth.” Peck wrote the book while in the process of converting to Christianity, and there are rough edges that some evangelicals might find objectionable, but no one can deny the immense impact this book has had in turning lives toward the ultimate source of all mental health.

[] **John White, *The Golden Cow: Materialism in the 20th Century Church* (1979)**

“In the first century Christ made a whip to drive the moneychangers out of the Temple... This book is about materialism in the church. Another Temple cleansing is needed. The church today is a prostitute that needs to be brought back.” In *The Golden Cow*, John White addresses an issue that most Christians (including most Christian leaders) avoid like the plague, and in the process he analyzes how many churches, evangelism ministries, “Christian businesses,” and “Christian fund-raisers” are caught up in the false values of our materialistic society. White was an author, a counselor, and professor of psychiatry at the University of Manitoba. [NOTE: *The Golden Cow* is out of print, but copies are available through Amazon.com.]

[] **Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (1977, 1990)**

Is God actively involved in evil and suffering, or is he merely a passive by-stander? Why does so much of life seem to make no sense? Furthermore, how can Christians reach out to those who are suffering? Using Scripture and personal experiences, Yancey avoids trite and simplistic answers to the problem of evil and suffering while affirming that God is neither capricious nor unconcerned

[] **Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians In An Age of Hunger* (1977)**

Conservative Christians tend to blame poverty, crime and other social problems on individual choices, while liberals typically focus on political, economic and social structures. This is perhaps the most influential book on Christian social responsibility since Rauschenbusch’s *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (see above) and a prophetic challenge to reevaluate our attitudes toward money, possessions, and our lifestyles in general. Sider is professor of theology at Eastern Seminary and the founder of Evangelicals for Social Action.

Church Life

[] **Ray Stedman, *Body Life* (1972)**

“The purpose of this book is to recover the dynamic quality of early Christianity... which operates now on exactly the same basis that it did then. The same dynamic impact described in the book of Acts is possible today.” Arguing that the church was intended to be the most powerful force on earth, Stedman reveals the ways in which his church unleashed the spiritual energy that is often bottled up in most conventional church services. Written at the height of the Jesus Movement, *Body Life* is a classic on church renewal and a powerful testimony to what can happen when church leaders relinquish control and allow people to minister to one another on the basis of their spiritual gifts.

[] **Gene Edwards, *Revolution: The Story of the Early Church* (1974)**

An interpretive study of the primitive church and a critique of institutionalized Christianity, the book provided a biblical and historical basis for the modern house church movement.

Edwards, a former Baptist evangelist, dropped out of organized Christianity in the early 1960s and founded a network of house churches in the ‘70s and ‘80s.

[] **Howard Snyder, *Radical Renewal: The Problem of Wineskins Today* (2005)**

According to Snyder, “The institutional church is the greatest hindrance to the practice of authentic Christianity today.” Although not as radical as Gene Edwards’ *Revolution*, Snyder’s critique of organized religion demands a sober reassessment of the way we do church. This edition, entitled *Radical Renewal*, is an updated version of Snyder’s original 1973 book, *The Problem of Wineskins*. [NOTE: *Radical Renewal* is available through Amazon.com.]

[] **Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity? Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* (2008)**

Frank Viola writes in the Preface, “I believe the first century church was the church in its purest form, before it was tainted and corrupted.... The church in the first century was an organic entity. It was a living, breathing organism that expressed itself far differently from the institutional church today.” In fact, much of what Christians do in church each Sunday is rooted not in the New Testament but in pagan culture and rituals that were integrated into Christian worship long after the apostles. Furthermore, most churches are organized on a corporate/institutional model rather than as a living organism, the Body and Community of Christ on earth. The basic thesis of this book is undeniable even if the authors occasionally overstate their argument and go beyond the evidence.

Eschatology

[] **Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (1977)**

A must-read for any serious student of Biblical prophecy and eschatology – the study of the End Times. This book provides substantive chapters by leading scholars and proponents of the four major interpretations of the Millennium: Historical Premillennialism, Dispensationalism, Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism. Following the summary are responses and critiques by those who represent the alternative schools of interpretation. A valuable and necessary source for those who want a full understanding of the breadth of the topic and why it has been such a controversial issue throughout Christian history.

[] **Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views. A Parallel Commentary* (1997)**

Like Clouse’s book, this is a must-read for any serious student of Biblical prophecy and eschatology. A verse-by-verse parallel commentary on Revelation that presents the arguments of the major four schools of interpretation: the preterist, historicist, futurist, and allegorical/spiritual.

[] **Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (1993)**

Metzger, a partial-pretest, offers keen insight into interpreting Revelation that avoids the kind of pop literature and sensationalism that characterizes many eschatological studies of the past 50 years.

Significant Books by Non-Christians

Christians who are well-grounded in the Christian faith and apologetics should be familiar with the significant writings of non-Christians. The following books, divided into 5 categories, are some of the most important non-Christian works by advocates of other religions or anti-religious skeptics. Obviously, these works should be read with critical discernment, but they are valuable nonetheless. Christian scholars have written direct rebuttals to several of these works.

Atheist Critiques of Christianity

- Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927)
- Paul Kurtz, ed., *The Humanist Manifestos I, II and III* (1933, 1973, 2000)
- Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (2006)
- Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (2005)
- Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Good: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007)

Critiques and Revisionist Views of Christianity

- Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979)
- Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story of Who Changed the Bible, and Why* (2005)
- Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (2003)

Comparative Religions

- William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902)
- Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (1991)
- Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*
- Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (1993)

Eastern Mysticism

- Lao Tzu, *The Dao de Jing (The Way of Life)*
- Eknath Easwaran, ed., *The Upanishads*
- Eknath Easwaran, ed., *Bhagavad Gita*
- Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (1923)
- Herman Hesse, *Siddhartha* (1951)
- Jack Kornfield, *A Path With Heart* (1993)

New Age

- Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (1963)
- Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968)
- Helen Schucman and William Thetford, *A Course in Miracles* (1976)
- Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980)
- Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (1988)
- James Redfield, *The Celestine Prophecy* (1992)
- Deepak Chopra, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* (1994)
- Neil Donald Walsh, *Conversations With God* (1997)
- Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth* (2005)