

Christian Must Read List

Below is a list of books I believe every Christian should read. To make this list, a book needs to make me feel that it would be easily read by most highschoolers, it must offer powerful lessons, and it must promote, directly or indirectly, Christian ideals. I tend to avoid books that quote the Bible too much, as one needs to be able to defend the Faith against those who don't recognize the Bible as an authoritative source.

Because of my preference for powerful lessons, I tend to favor more philosophical books as opposed to allegorical stories. I see no reason why I won't update this list as time goes on as my reading never seems to stop. I am not offering a strict grading system on books, but generally the higher the book appears on the list, the more powerful I think it is. I will also offer a few brief comments on the selections. I am also including an "Honorable Mention" list of books that I think are worthwhile, but for one reason or another didn't qualify as a "Must Read."

Must Read:

Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis. This book is not listed first by accident, if there is only one book on this list you do read, this should be it. Based on transcripts from a radio series he did during World War II, each chapter is short and intended for readers of every level. Despite the brevity of each chapter, he covers almost every possible topic a Christian needs to know about the Faith. While his examples reflect English life during the war, they are nonetheless remarkably timeless and easy to internalize.

Smoke on the Mountain by Joy Davidman. Joy lived a quite interesting life. Being born into a Jewish family, she was once an energetic supporter of the Communist party in the United States before she saw through the contradictions of such politics. After corresponding with C.S. Lewis, she came to accept Christianity. Eventually the two were married. Each chapter in the book is dedicated to one of the commandments of the Decalogue (using the Protestant numbering). With her history, she is able to give a unique appraisal of the history behind the Decalogue, how the understanding of it changed with Christianity, and how the common person fits it into their life. This is the only book on this list that I seriously considered placing above *Mere Christianity*.

The New Apologetics edited by Matthew Nelson. This is a collection of 41 essays from 40 Catholic apologists that cover a wide variety of subjects. Although this has a Catholic emphasis, nearly everything in it is appropriate for any Christian who wants to defend the faith. From science to the "nones," from traditional attacks of religion to the wokism of today, there is a wealth of information for almost any debate or argument one may find oneself in.

The Four Loves by C.S. Lewis. I believe the three concepts most useful in explaining Christianity include the dualist nature of the Ritual and the Philosophical (as talked about in *Mere Christianity*), the Four Loves and the Seven Virtues. And this book does a great job explaining what one needs to know about Love.

Seeds of the Word by Bishop Robert Barron. Christians need to learn that we do not have a Fideistic religion, and I think the best way to show this is to demonstrate just how the Faith applies to everyday life. In this book, Bishop Barron gives very quick, two or three page analyses of dozens of cultural icons in American life.

Answering Jihad by Nabeel Qureshi. Raised as a very devout Muslim, Qureshi came to believe the Christian Faith was correct after years of Theological debate with his best friends. His full story of conversion is included in the Honorable Mention list, but this book is a shorter, more concise, version of it. While this relatively short read is filled with gems, I think perhaps the greatest lesson the reader can take away from it is how non-Christians from non-Christian cultures view Christianity. It can really help to understand what makes Christianity so unique.

A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis. I will not apologize for making this list heavy with Lewis's books; he is that good and that diverse. This book is a record of the pain he went through after the death of his beloved wife, Joy. For those familiar with his other books, we see a man having to face the painful side of all the ideas he presented to his readers over the years concerning God, and his struggle to still trust God through it all. Joy's son gave an introduction, and he claims almost no one but C.S. Lewis could have written this book. I agree.

The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis. A very amusing, yet profound, account of Christianity as seen by demons. There is much advantage to be gained from seeing our Faith through others' eyes, which few books attempt. But first and foremost, this book should convince the reader of the dangers of being too complacent in their Faith.

The Abolition of Man by C.S. Lewis. Make no mistake about it, the people influencing the culture we live in today do not tolerate Christianity. They have the will; they only lack the political power. And they are making great headway in getting that power. This book is a must for all parents worried about their child's education. A great many people know there is a problem with our education system; this book will help the reader articulate their concerns.

Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary by Brant Pitre. Generally speaking, I'm not really interested in what separates Protestants from Catholics, as I am more interested in what joins us. But when it comes to the Virgin Mary and the Real Presence, I do believe most Protestants are missing an essential part of Christianity. Dr. Pitre has written books on both of them, with the one concerning the Virgin Mary making this list. His other book, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*, however, I found rather convoluted. While I hope viewers of this list will decide to read it as well, I did feel it was too complicated for either of my lists.

The Great Divorce by C.S. Lewis. While the wonder and the power of Christianity comes from the mystery of how so many apparent contradictions seem to come together (such as the Ritual and the Philosophical), such unions are limited to what is real (or what I sometimes refer to as Truth). God is Truth, and Truth cannot form a union with Untruth. Real cannot form a union with unreal. Purity cannot form a union with impurity. With this book, we can easily see why. This book is probably the best description of what Purgatory is, and it is not even written by a Catholic! No doubt, what he wrote here played on his mind when his beloved Joy died.

1984 and *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. Along with *The Abolition of Man*, these books should serve as a wake up call to anyone who doesn't realize the very real war going on today between good and evil. These books are very prophetic of what is happening in our culture today. We Christians need to know what this war of ideas is about if we are to win it, and what it is we stand to lose.

Honorable Mention:

The Hope of the Gospel by George MacDonald. This book is written by the man C.S. Lewis called "the

master," so it should not be lightly discarded. It was a borderline call to place it here instead of the Must Reads, but I felt its strength (clues of what we might see in heaven) was also its weakness (we might desire heaven for these things instead of God). This book should shatter any doubts about a sterile, boring Heaven; or fears that we won't find loved ones in Heaven. Still, we must remember the warning in *A Grief Observed*, and not let these concerns make idols of our loved ones and therefore lose everything as the mother did in *The Great Divorce* (in which George MacDonald makes an appearance as the guide for the protagonist). We must have Faith that the presence of God is greater than the presence of our loved ones, but we can have Hope of seeing them there.

Why Does God Allow Evil? by Clay Jones. The problem of pain and suffering in this world is the single greatest argument against an omnibenevolent God. Indeed, it is arguably also the strongest argument against God. And the answers to this problem are so important that they even have their own branch of study: Theodicy. I have yet to see anything anywhere else (including from C.S. Lewis) that was as all-encompassing and complete on this matter as this book, and it was very readable to boot! For almost the entire length of this book, I was sure it would make my Must Read list, but near the end he began to talk of how we, as impure beings, could be made pure so as to inhabit Heaven (as pointed out in Revelations 21:27). Here, the author denies the concept of Purgatory. This alone would not have kept it from the Must Read list, but I felt this was the one and only area where he failed to provide a convincing argument. I am convinced that the tradition of Purgatory, which is accepted by the Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican Churches, remains the best answer to this question.

Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus by Nabeel Qureshi. As I mentioned above, this is the autobiography of Nabeel and his road to Christianity. He not only goes into greater depth, but we get a very good look at the thought processes of Eastern cultures. For an apologist, I believe this is indispensable insight on how to discuss the Faith. Furthermore, it is a treasure trove of key topics of Christian and Islamic Theologies, as well as scripture references to defend these points. I would consider this a Must Read for any aspiring apologist, but since this work is for Christians in general, I placed it on the Honorable Mention list.

Rediscovering Catholicism by Matthew Kelly. In a time when it seems our culture is no longer satisfied in attacking the Catholic Church, but has grown so bold as to start attacking Christians of all Faiths as well, this is a wonderful "sanity check." While the philosophy focused on the "be the best self you can be" idea, it is refreshing to see just how wonderful, good, and holy Christianity really is, even if the particulars focus on Catholic accomplishments and persons.

Answering the New Atheist by Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker. Written specifically to dismantle the attack Richard Dawkins made in his best seller *The God Delusion*, it does a great job showing just how weak the Atheist attacks on Christianity really are. Indeed, the only thing I find more astonishing than how weak the contemporary Atheist claims are is how readily so many people buy into them. This was a close call for a Must Read, but I felt the authors went "deep" instead of "broad" in their discussions. Rather than discredit one of Dawkin's claims and move on, they tended to go on and on with each point. As a result, I felt it too complicated for a Must Read, but not so much for those who really want to know.

The Everlasting Man by G.K. Chesterton. Perhaps only C.S. Lewis has done more than G.K. Chesterton to defend the Faith, but Lewis drew much inspiration from Chesterton. And this book has been quite inspirational for me too. Chesterton is justly famous for his surprising and unexpected sayings that are both deeply profound and memorable. Unfortunately, his supporting efforts are as weak as his insights are strong. He can give great hypothetical examples, but real world examples are

often so obscure they are impossible to understand. It's like he had an idea come along, and then applied whatever he read in the papers that day to support this idea (he was, after all, a journalist by profession). And even the few references that I could track down tended to be not quite right as presented in Chesterton's writings. One should read this book with the idea of capturing his main points, examining his hypothetical examples, and not paying much attention to the rest. This book was almost excluded from this list due to the vagueness of the supporting text, but I felt the main ideas were strong enough to list it here.

The Shack by William P. Young. This is another book that was almost not included on this list. The book is quite controversial, mainly because it goes against the grain of mainstream Christian teachings. As such, it can be seen as being disrespectful to the Faith, even heretical. If we can make the mental leap from the union of "Ritual and Philosophy" to the union of "Truth and Purity," then we can properly understand this book. One of many examples of this is in portraying God the Father as a black woman. The protagonist was abused by his father, and God points out that for Him to appear as a white man would hinder the healing the Trinity wanted to give the protagonist. The "Truth" of God as a Father figure was suspended (but not denied) for the "Purity" of better healing of the protagonist. I only give this one example to help the would-be reader understand what is coming. Even so, there are at least two times I think "Purity" went a bit too far, but overall I think it is a great way to look at God's saving Grace from a different perspective.

Sir Gibbie by George MacDonald. I never thought I would add a book like this to the must read list. It is very long and the Scottish Doric accent used in the dialogues is annoying at best and sometimes distractingly difficult to understand. Yet despite its length, it is varied enough that one never becomes bored with it. And while the dialogue is a major detractor, it is fortunately sparse. Almost no dialogue takes place in the first third of the book, and narration is the norm for the rest of it as well. But the character of Sir Gibbie more than makes up for the problems. When C.S. Lewis said that no one comes closer to capturing the voice of Jesus Christ than MacDonald, this book is proof of the incredible claim. What one will take away from this story is not a deeper truth of Christianity or an explanation of a tradition, but simply what a life of innocence looks like. In a world that constantly seeks to drag humanity down to its level, a vision of what life was meant to be is invaluable. And this story is a vision of what life was meant to be.

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