

This is not necessarily my all-time top favorite books, but they are ones I highly recommend. Although some of these are intense reads, none are difficult reads –most are very suitable to someone who isn't a regular reader, but is looking for a place to start. Some of these are character-rich, contemplative and meditative reads, and several are action-packed page-turners. Enjoy!

1. *The City of Tranquil Light*, Bo Caldwell (2010): A deeply spiritual story of missionary labors in early 20th century China. It is also a love story of two Christian workers who serve side by side, suffering together, sacrificing together, and reaping blessed fruitfulness together. It is most of all a moving meditation on suffering --suffering in the midst of following hard after God's will --going on day after day when the pain is almost unbearable. This was one of the most satisfying books I've read in a long time. One reviewer on the cover said it perfectly, "A beautiful, searing book that leaves an indelible presence in the mind."
2. *Gilead*, Marilynne Robinson (2005): This book takes the form of a letter written by an aging and ill pastor, John Ames, to his young son, whom he fears he will not live to see grow up. *Gilead* speaks to the frailty of our human condition, our need of redemption in this life and the next, and the incredible beauty of everyday life. This book won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2005. Robinson's companion novel *Home* is equally enjoyable.
3. *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1850): You probably read this in a high school or college Lit class and heard the instructor rip apart those cruel Puritans, but I encourage you to take up the book again and read it as an adult –read it as a fellow sinner who knows their need of Christ –as one who has borne the burden of guilt of shame that only Christ can take away. If you do this, I believe you'll come away with a better understanding of what Hawthorne was saying
4. *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe (1719): Again a book you may have read while in school or perhaps your children have read a children's version of it. It is another rewarding read for the adult –for anyone who has found themselves in dire straits with nowhere to look but to God –a powerful book about contentment and faith.
5. *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, Eric Metaxas (2010): A well-written biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the fearless pastor and theologian who was imprisoned and executed by Hitler's Nazis. Metaxas put together a thoroughly researched and thoughtful examination of Bonhoeffer's life. This book will challenge your soft, casual, and comfortable approach to daily living. It will make you feel silly for fretting over which movie you

want to watch on Saturday night! While some are critical of Bonhoeffer for not being an "evangelical," the dry, dead, purely cerebral, liberal context out of which he came makes his passionate life all the more amazing and inspiring.

6. *Darkness at Noon*, Arthur Koestler (1941): I cannot talk about this book without having the hair stand-up on my forearms. It is modern masterpiece –occurring on every list of "best books of 20th century." Some argue it is the most insightful book on communism ever written. The story is a fictional account of an actual general in Stalin's inner circle. During Stalin's purges, Nicholas Rubashov, an aging general, is imprisoned and psychologically tortured by the communist party to which he has devoted his life. Under mounting pressure to confess to crimes he did not commit, Rubashov relives a career that embodies the ironies and betrayals of a system of living and thinking that left God out of the "equation."
7. Anything by P. G. Wodehouse, especially *Jeeves in the Morning*, *The Inimitable Jeeves*, *The Code of the Woosters*, *Laughing Gas*, and *The Mating Season*: If you like British humor, zany tails, twisting plots, and hilarious characters, great writing, and unbelievable endings then you'll love Wodehouse. These books are fun and lite, but Wodehouse's mastery of the English language is legendary. No one can paint a picture of a character better than Wodehouse. He is known as the funniest comedic writer ever.
8. *Every Man Dies Alone*, Hans Fallada (1947): This disturbing novel, written in 24 days by a German writer who died in 1947, is inspired by the true story of Otto and Elise Hampel, who scattered postcards advocating civil disobedience throughout war-time Nazi-controlled Berlin. Fallada aptly depicts the paralyzing fear that dominated Hitler's Germany, when decisions that previously would have seemed insignificant—whether to utter a complaint or mourn one's deceased child publicly—can lead to torture and death at the hands of the Gestapo. This is a novel about quiet and personal courage that refuses to be corrupted. It is also a book about the profound impact of small, seemingly insignificant acts of protests against injustice and brutality.
9. *Jayber Crow*, Wendell Berry (2001): Berry is a profound thinker and great writer of poetry, essays, and novels. On one level *Jayber Crow* is a warm tale of the life of Jonah Crow, from his youth as an orphan, to his life as a small town barber, and into his time of looking back upon the span of his long life. On another level, *Jayber Crow* is a philosophical reflection on the nature of love, community, family, belonging, loneliness, God, time, and eternity. This is one of my top three all-time best books.