**2009 Christmas Gift Book Suggestions:**

**(What Oakhurst Members Are Reading)**

**Compiled and Gently Edited by Carolyn Copenhaver on Behalf of the OBC Library Committee. Proofread and corrected by Mary Jo Crawford.**

**Co-Chairpersons: Harold Hoffman and Jan Murphy**



**ADULT FICTION**

**Abide With Me** by Elizabeth Strout

**Amsterdam** by Ian McEwan (Booker Prize Winner)

**Atonement** by Ian McEwan (Shortlisted for the 2001 [Booker Prize](http://prize) for fiction)

**The Bonesetter's Daughter** by Amy Tan

**The Children of God** by Maria Doria Russell

**Collected Stories** by Eudora Welty

**Dark Places** by Gillian Flynn

**Eight, The** by Katherine Neville

**Everything is Illuminated** by Jonathan Saffron Foer

**Fire, The** by Katherine Neville

**Genesis** by Bernard Berckett

**Gilead** by Marilynne Robinson

**A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories** by Flannery O’Connor

**Grendel** by John Gardner

**Hannah Coulter** by Wendel Berry

**Home** by Marilynne Robinson

**Jayber Crow** by Wendell Berry

**Last Temptatation of Christ, The** by Nicholas Kazantzakis

**Lying Awake** by Mark Salzman

**Mermaid Chair, The** by Sue Monk Kidd

**My Name is Asher Lev** by Chaim Potok

**Olive Kittridge** by Elizabeth Strout

**Pardonable Lies** by Jacqueline Winspear

**Push** by Sapphire (Lee Daniels)

**Road, The** by Cormac McCarthy

**Sarah’s Key** by Tatiana de Rosnay

**Saturday** by Ian McEwan

**Slapstick** by Kurt Vonnegut

**To Kill a Mockingbird** by Harper Lee

**A Thread of Grace** by Maria Doria Russell

**Sparrow, The** by Maria Doria Russell

**POETRY**

**Thirst** by Mary Oliver

**ADULT MEMOIRS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHIES**

[Note from Ed.: With one exception, the following books are marketed as memoirs, an exploding, elastic, and inclusive genre.]

**Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Soul** by Tony Hendra

**Galileo’s Daughter** by Dava Sobel (Historical Memoir)

**Good Women of China, The: Hidden Voices** by Xinran (Autobiography)

**Guinea Pig Diaries, The: My Life as an Experiment** by A.J. Jacobs (Experimental Memoir)

**Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books** by Azar Nafisi

**Saved by a Poem** by Kim Rosen (With CD featuring Reading of 19 famous poems)

**Traveling with Pomegranates** by Sue Monk Kidd and Ann Kidd Taylor

**Story Teller’s Daughter, The** by Saira Shah

**ADULT NONFICTION**

**Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor** by Bob Lupton

**Fast Food Nation: What the All-American Meal is Doing to the World** by Eric Schlosser

**The First Christmas: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus’ Birth** by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan

**The First Paul** by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan

**A Generous Orthodoxy** by Brian McLaren

**God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now** by John Dominic Crossan

**How We Die: Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter** by Sherwin B. Nuland

**I Am A Strange Loop** by Douglas Hofstadter

**If Grace is True: Why God Will Save Every Person** by Philip Gulley and James Mulholland

**Kluge** by Gary Marcus

**Left Behind: What the Bible Really Says About the End Times** by James M. Efird

**The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain** by María Rosa Menocal

**Sacred Way, The: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life** by Tony Jones.

**Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II** by Douglas Blackmon

**Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, Not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan** by Greg Mortenson

**Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness** by Tracy Kidder

**Strengthsfinder 2.0** by Tom Rath

**Talk to the Hand: The Utter Bloody Rudeness of the World Today or Six Good Reasons to Stay Home and Bolt the Door** by Lynne Truss

**This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of Human Obsession** by Daniel J. Levitin

**A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail** by Bill Bryson

**When Religion Becomes Evil: Five Warning Signs by** Charles Kimball.

**Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family** by Gary M. Pomerantz

**COMMENTS BY OUR MEMBERS**

**TRINA BALDWIN**

I recommend the latest book by **Sue Monk Kidd** – it is called **Traveling with Pomegranates** and is co-authored by her daughter **Ann Kidd Taylor**. It is an excellent book!!

**LEON CLYMORE**

I highly, highly recommend the book we studied for the Patchwork class, **The First Paul by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan.** It is eye-opening and gives a needed lifting up of Paul. Their approach is that there are actually 4 Pauls in the New Testament:

--Paul of the 7 authentic letters of Paul

--Paul of the 3 letters probably not written by Paul

--Paul of the 3 letters almost surely not written by Paul

--Paul of Luke in the book of Acts

These conclusions are not just the authors’, but represent many mainline scholars today (and for the past 20-30 years).

**CAROLYN COPENHAVER**

**Push by Sapphire.** An unforgettable and troubling novel told in first person by an obese Harlem teenager, abused by her mother and raped by her father, resulting in the birth of two babies. This book has recently has been made into the movie, **Precious**.

**Lying Awake by Mark Salzman.** A prize-winning novel describes how a cloistered nun in Los Angeles deals with “holy” visions brought on by temporal lobe epilepsy.

**Amsterdam by Ian Mc Ewen**. Winner of the Booker Prize. As one critic writes, “What happens there to Clive and Vernon is the most delicious climax of a novel brimming with surprises.”

**Saved By A Poem by Kim Rosen**. Part memoir, part “cry of the heart,” the author claims that poetry “is the earliest form of prayer,” and argues for poetry to be memorized and recited aloud even when one is alone. Rosen, herself a poet, is better known as a “spoken word artist.” The accompanying CD featuring the reading of 19 famous poems, by Rosen and others, is especially powerful.

**I Am A Strange Loop by Douglas Hofstadter.** An insightful, original, wordy, repetitive, and brilliant book by the famous cognitive scientist and author of *Bach Godel Escher: An Eternal Golden Braid*. I agree with the “Scientific American” reviewer who warns that you need “a loopy mindset” to read this strange book on the “strange loopy” nature of consciousness. I’m glad I did.

**Kluge by Gary** **Marcus**  “The human mind, Marcus writes, is ‘the most fantastic kluge of them all,’ an organ whose ‘haphazard construction’ is apparent in our memory slips, credulous beliefs and self-defeating choices.”—NYTimes

**Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II by Douglas Blackmon.** The author reframes the history of Reconstruction into a shattering story of continued Southern brutality or “re-enslavement”; a history that has long been “out of sight” and unimaginable. Required reading.

**How We Die: Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter** by Sherwin B. Nuland. A jolting book about a taboo subject by a renowned surgeon and, as one critic writes, “a book where death rejoices to come to the aid of life.”

**MARY JO CRAWFORD**

**Gilead by Marilynne Robinson**, author of **Housekeeping** (I wrote a lot about this book in your summer reading list,)

**The Bonesetter's Daughter by Amy Tan**, author of **The Joy Luck Club** and **The Kitchen God's Wife** (Amy Tan is a darn good writer; plus you benefit from reading about the tension between immigrant parents and their first generation American children.)

**The Mermaid Chair by Sue Monk Kidd**, author of *The Secret Life of Bees* (This book is not going to please everyone. Many of my friends did not like it, but I did. Don't expect to read *The Secret Life of Bees*; this book is totally different. It will probably appeal most to feminist-types and/or middle-aged woman.)

**Talk to the Hand: The Utter Bloody Rudeness of the World Today or Six Good Reasons to Stay Home and Bolt the Door by Lynne Truss**, the author of *Eat, Shoots & Leaves* (The older you are the more you will enjoy this book. She is a British author, and sometimes the vocabulary is a bit strange. That said, however, it doesn't hurt us to learn a few new words!)

**Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, Not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, by Greg Mortenson**, author of *Three Cups of Tea* (This new book grows out of *Three Cups of Tea*) [A Must-Read. See the Internet reviews, particularly by the San Francisco Chronicle.—Ed.]

**Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness, by Tracy Kidder,** author of *Mountains Beyond Mountains, Among Schoolchildren, House*, and many others (This new book grows out of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*.)

**LYNN DONHAM**

**All the Maisie Dobbs books by Jacqueline Winspear**. A strong, spiritual female character solves mysteries in Post WWI Britain.

**Strengthsfinder 2.0 by Tom Rath.**  Easy to read handbook to find your strengths and build on them.

**The Good Women of China by Xinran**. A powerful collection of stories of women who lived through the Cultural Revolution ~~which~~ that examines the questions of women's identities and purposes in modern China**;** wirtten by a former radio journalist in Beijing.

**Galileo's Daughter by Dava Sobel**. Outstanding combination of historical narrative and actual letters from his daughter, a nun. Letters were only recently opened to the public as part of the Inquisition Archives in Rome.

**BECKY DRYSDALE**

My recommendation is a book about Christmas, the original one, that is. It is aptly titled **The First Christmas: What the Gospels Really Teach about****Jesus’ Birth by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan.** Borg and Crossan outline the two very different Christmas stories in Matthew and Luke, which Christians tend to blend into a single narrative. The authors describe these accounts as "parabolic [related to parables] overtures to the story of Jesus" and explain what the two stories mean historically and theologically in their first-century context and also what they say to us today. If you've read any other books by Borg or Crossan, you know that you will benefit from their tremendous multifaceted scholarship about Jesus, but you can also expect to be challenged by some of their ideas. Was Jesus illiterate? Did Caesar Augustus really order a census of the entire Roman world? What was the importance of a virginal conception? For me this book was not only very readable and insightful, but it also made experiencing Christmas a deeper, richer experience

I would recommend **A Thread of Grace by Mary Doria Russell**, which is about the Italians hiding Jews during World War II. It's a powerful book. (Indeed, **any book by Mary Doria Russell** is good.)

I can't get **Slavery by Another Name by Douglas Blackmon** out of my mind. It is about how involuntary servitude continued after the Civil War until World War II via a system of arresting black men on the flimsiest of pretexts (or none at all) and selling them to the owners of mines, plantations, etc. The book details the system in horrifying accounts that Blackmon, a native Mississippian and Atlanta bureau chief for the Wall Street Journal, researched extensively in county courthouses in the South. Meanwhile, the federal government looked the other way. When there were some investigations in the early 1900s, the defense of the owners of "slaves" claimed that slavery was not illegal in the United States--and indeed, there were no laws against it. I think this should be required reading in our schools and widely discussed in our churches and public places.

**LYNN FARMER**

Ten books in my own library that would make excellent gifts any time of the year:

**Thirst by Mary Oliver (Poetry)**

**My Name is Asher Lev by Chaim Potok**

**A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories by Flannery O’Connor**

**Collected Stories by Eudora Welty**

**To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee**

**The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain by Maria Rosa Menocal**

**Fast Food Nation: What the All-American Meal is Doing to the World by Eric Schlosser**

**Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books by Azar Nafisi**

**God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now by John Dominic Crossan**

**This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of Human Obsession by Daniel J. Levitin**

**PAUL FICKLIN-ALRED**

I’m sure that others have suggested these, but I highly recommend the books **Gilead** and **Home by Marilynne Robinson**. They are both beautifully written and have spiritual themes.

**BRETT HARRIS**

These books have spoken to me about the gift of relationships and the search for meaning in a confusing world:

**Everything Is Illuminated by Jonathan Saffron Foer**

**The Road by Cormac McCarthy**

**Slapstick by Kurt Vonnegut**

**CAROLYN HALL**

I recommend **Sarah’s Key, by Tatiana de Rosnay**. It is based on a true event that happened in Paris during World War II in which the French police seized Jews and shipped them off to camps. The event is personalized, as it is described through the eyes of a young girl, whose family is affected by this event. It is a gripping read. I literally could not put it down.

**WALKER KNIGHT**

**Any of Wendell Berry's novels**: my favorites are **Hannah Coulter** and **Jayber Crow**. These tell of the deterioration of community, in which many of us once lived. Short, easy to read, but powerful.

**DEAN PROBST.**

Not a new book, and perhaps the Library already has a copy. **Ian McEwan’s** Booker Prize shortlisted book **Atonement** is the most brilliant and absorbing work of fiction that I have read in the last ten years.

**ROY QUINCY**

**Olive Kittridge** and **Abide With Me** both **by Elizabeth Strout**

**KAREN SMITH**

**The Storyteller's Daughter by Saira Shah** is a compelling story of journalist Saira Shah's search to find the truth about her homeland, Afghanistan, and her own identity. It is personal, political, and philosophical, dealing with a diversity of issues--from the role of cultural myths in our lives to the political, social and religious realities of Afghanistan and Pakistan and how Western misunderstanding has had devastating consequences. It's beautifully written and relatively short. A gem.

Katherine Neville, **The Eight (1988)** and its sequel, **The Fire (2008).** Katherine Neville writes in what seems to me to be her own genre--historical thriller verging on the world of fantasy but never quite going there. Her stories, which revolve around a chess set that belonged to Charlemagne and take you from North Africa to the Balkans to North American and back again, are intelligent and compelling.

**JONATHAN SPENCER**

**The Last Temptatation of Christ by Nicholas Kazantzakis**. This is the novel by the Greek author Kazantzakis on which Martin Scorcese's film was based. A unique reflection on the life of Jesus and the reality of the intertwining of the earthly and spiritual aspects of human experience. A moving and provocative book.

**The Sparrow** and **Children of God** **by Maria Doria Russell**. These two novels tell the story of a late 21st century Jesuit mission to the inhabitants of a distant planet and the unintended consequences. At times heart-breaking, this marvelously-written set of books explores a number of theological questions, including the problem of evil and the transcendence/imminence of God. Russell, a convert to Judaism, was raised Roman Catholic.

**A Generous Orthodoxy by Brian McLaren**. A great book by one of the leading articulators of what has been called "the emergent church."

**The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life by Tony Jones**. An excellent overview of time-honored practices for spiritual formation.

**If Grace is True: Why God Will Save Every Person by Philip Gulley and James Mulholland.** The blurb on the back cover says, "Two Pastors Offer Their Controversial Belief in Eternal Salvation for All Through God's Perfect Grace."

**Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor by Bob Lupton**. Lupton has been working among the poor in Atlanta for 35 years and has some important insights into the most effective ways to go about doing holistic community development.

**A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail by Bill Bryson**. A delightful book!

**God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation** by Jon Meacham. Meacham, a Newsweek Magazine editor, offers a fascinating book about how the founders of the American nation wrestled with the relationship between faith and politics.

**Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family by Gary M. Pomerantz**. An important and intriguing book in which the author traces the generations of two families in Atlanta, one white and one black. These families produced two mayors of Atlanta, Ivan Allen, Jr. and Maynard Jackson.

**Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Soul by Tony Hendra.** Hendra, a humorist who was a contemporary of John Cleese and Graham Chapman, later of Monty Python fame, tells the moving story of his relationship with a Benedictine monk who demonstrated love and empathy during Hendra's times of soul-searching. An outstanding book.

**When Religion Becomes Evil: Five Warning Signs by Charles Kimball**. Kimball, head of the religion department at Wake Forest University, offers an insightful and timely book about the problems with dogmatic religious exclusivism that can lead to dangerous extremism. Very readable and thought-provoking.

**Left Behind: What the Bible Really Says About the End Times by James M. Efird.** Efird, a retired professor from Duke Divinity School, points out the problems with the kind of pre-millennial, dispensationalist theology represented by the hugely popular "Left Behind" series of books.

**Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II by Douglas Blackmon**. Blackmon documents a system that was perpetuated throughout the South in which many African-Americans, mostly men, were essentially enslaved through collusion between the penal system and a number of major industries.

**STEVE VELLINES**

**Genesis by Bernard Beckett** This is a very short science fiction novel that reminded me a lot of **Rod Sterling's The Twilight Zone**. Very thought-provoking and entertaining. It is set in the future and touches on many classic SciFi themes -- conformity, utopian societies and what it means to be human.

**Dark Places by Gillian Flynn** The is a good crime mystery that is told from different characters and flashes back and forth from he present to a terrible crime committed in 1985. It has a lot of plot twists and turns and keeps you guessing until the end.