



NORTHBROOK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH | ENCOUNTER. LOVE. SERVE.

Recommended Studies: Fall 2020 - Spring 2021

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Rev. Ryan Young curates a list of recommended studies for Northbrook UMC adult Sunday school and small groups. Below are his synopses on the books and suggested study lengths. Please contact Ryan for study guides or more information at ryoung@northbrookumc.com.

Jesus Wants to Save Christians: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile, by Rob Bell

- “If our church was taken away--from our city, our neighborhood, our region--who would protest?” This is the central question of this book. What is the best expression of the church in our privileged context?
- With six chapters and an epilogue, this is a great book for a seven-week study. It does not come with a discussion guide, but if your group doesn't want to be totally self-directed, we can make one for you.

Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again, by Rachel Held Evans

- What do we do when an obstacle to our faith is the Bible itself? How do we navigate our beliefs when the scriptures that are so dear to us are also often so unsettling? Just what do we mean when we say that the Bible is “inspired” anyway? Rachel Held Evans walks us through her own personal journey from faith, through disillusionment and doubt, and into an even deeper faith where the scriptures exist as a living witness to the living God.
- This book has eight chapters and would be great for an eight-week study.

Jesus for President: Politics for Ordinary Radicals, by Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw

- An interesting book to read during an election year--particularly such a polarized election year. Shane Claiborne calls us to recognize ways that we often place hopes on politics and politicians that rightfully belong to God. Our hope is not in partisan political opinions, but in Jesus Christ and the Church which is to embody an alternative to the world.
- This is a very different book as it is part theology, part poetry, and part visual art. It is a good book to consider when wondering how the church should engage politically.

The Cross and the Lynching Tree, by James Cone

- “Unfortunately, during the course of 2,000 years of Christian history, [the cross] has been detached from any reference to the ongoing suffering and oppression of human beings--those whom Ignacio Ellacuria, the Salvadoran martyr, called ‘the crucified peoples of history.’ The cross has been transformed into a harmless, non-offensive ornament that Christians wear around their necks. Rather than reminding us of the ‘cost of discipleship,’ it has become a form of ‘cheap grace,’ an easy way to salvation that doesn't force us to confront the power of Christ's message and mission. Until



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we can see the cross and the lynching tree together. Until we can identify Christ with a ‘recrucified’ black body hanging from a lynching tree, there can be no genuine understanding of Christian identity in America, and no deliverance from the brutal legacy of slavery and white supremacy.”

- This would be good for a six-week study. We have a discussion guide for classes who would like to take on this study.

The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe, by Richard Rohr

- What do we mean when we call Jesus “the Christ”? How do we understand Jesus to be, to this day, at work in the world? Father Richard Rohr invites us into the beautiful mystery that is central to the Christian faith. This is a deep, but beautiful book.
- It is a dense book with seventeen chapters and multiple appendices. This book would best be used as a long-term study for a small group.

Raising White Kids, by Jennifer Harvey

- I would make this required reading for every parent of a white child and anyone who works with white children if I could. Jennifer Harvey takes on the two most prevalent methods of combating racism that white people have espoused over the past few decades--color blindness and diversity--and lays out an argument for why neither are adequate to help white children understand the world, their place in it, and the possibility of creating a better culture. Note that this is not a faith-based study, but is an important study if we are to be a church that speaks hope into our racially discordant world.
- This book has seven chapters and a conclusion. I would suggest it for an eight to ten-week study to give a group enough time to adequately discuss it.

Out of the House of Bread: Satisfying Your Hunger for God with the Spiritual Disciplines, by Preston Yancey

- Clearly [I got super into bread baking during quarantine](#), but I stand by the point that it is a fantastic image of spiritual discipline. In this book, Yancey, an Anglican writer, writes beautifully about the importance of daily ritual and discipline to growing faith.
- This book explores ten spiritual practices and would be a fantastic study around Lent.

Three Simple Rules: A Wesley Way of Living, by Reuben P. Job

- Back to basics. In this short, but powerful, book the late Bishop Job lays out John Wesley’s three General Rules of Methodist societies: To do no harm, to do all the good you can, and to stay in love with God.
- This is a very short book--less than 100 pages--but it is packed with wisdom. This would be a fantastic tool for small groups to read together for three weeks (one for each rule) and find ways to



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be intentional about each of the rules in their day to day lives. I would even suggest that, after your group reads this book you could use the rules to check in every week.

The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door, by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon

- The two greatest commandments, according to Jesus, are to love God with everything we've got and to love our neighbors as ourselves. The trouble we have is how to understand these commandments as more than abstractions--how do we actually and actively love God and our neighbors? This book is based on a simple premise: what if Jesus meant for us to love our actual neighbors--the people just outside our door? How might the world change if we all made a concerted effort to take the Great Commandment literally?
- This book has twelve chapters and a study guide.

Paul: A Biography, by N.T. Wright

- It is often really difficult to break down the apostle Paul's journeys and writings. What did he write and when did he write it? To whom was he writing and why does it matter right now? N.T. Wright has authored a biographical look at Paul in a manner that weaves together his letters, the book of Acts, and the theology that was coming together in the mind of one of the greatest thinkers of the first century. Wright spends a good deal of time on one of the central themes of Paul's writing, namely faith, the Greek word *pistis*. N.T. Wright refocuses the word in a manner consistent with the first century church and in a way that has a profound impact on what it means to be loyal to Jesus, especially in the face of absurd power.
- This book is fifteen chapters over 430 pages. While it is straightforward for the most part, it does contain a great amount of material. There is no study guide with the book, Wright does have wealth of material on his YouTube site: <https://www.youtube.com/c/NTWrightOnline>