

Summer Reading List

Episcopal Church of the Ascension

Recommendations from our staff for the summer months

Summer offers a little more room to read. The list below gathers what our staff are reading and recommending, grouped by subject. Take one, take several, or pass them along. Each entry notes who recommended it and a general sense of the reading it asks of you.

A note on the reading-level tags: Light reading is approachable and quick; General reading is accessible to most readers; Deeper reading rewards patience and some prior familiarity.

What We Believe: Faith & the Episcopal Way

Books that introduce the Christian faith and the Episcopal tradition.

Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer · Rowan Williams

Recommended by Emily Collette | General reading

A short book by the former Archbishop of Canterbury on the four basic practices of Christian life. A good place to start or to revisit the fundamentals.

Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief · Rowan Williams

Recommended by Ashley Monachelli | General reading

Williams walks through the Creed as a statement of trust in God. Clear and thoughtful for anyone wanting to understand what Christians believe and why.

Episcopal Questions, Episcopal Answers: Exploring Christian Faith · C.K. Robertson & Ian Markham

Recommended by Jack Alvey | Light reading

A question-and-answer guide to the Episcopal Church covering worship, sacraments, and practice. Useful for newcomers and longtime members alike.

Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters · N.T. Wright

Recommended by Jack Alvey | General reading

Wright presents the historical Jesus and the kingdom he announced in plain terms. Grounded in scholarship but written for a general audience.

Reading Scripture

For reading and reflecting on the Bible.

Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who's Who · Frederick Buechner

Recommended by Emily Collette | Light reading

Brief, often humorous character sketches of people in the Bible, from Abraham to Zacchaeus. Easy to pick up and put down.

Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination · Eugene Peterson

Recommended by Jack Alvey | Deeper reading

Peterson reads the Book of Revelation as a resource for prayer and worship rather than prediction. Rewarding for readers willing to sit with a difficult book of scripture.

Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again ·

Rachel Held Evans

Recommended by Olivia Hill Sheffield | General reading

An honest engagement with the hard and beautiful parts of scripture, for anyone who has struggled with the Bible and wants to read it again.

A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23 · W. Phillip Keller

Recommended by Ashley Monachelli | General reading

Written by a former shepherd, this reads the familiar psalm through the practical realities of caring for sheep.

The Path: A Journey Through the Bible · Forward Movement (Melody Wilson Shobe & others)

Recommended by Jack Alvey | Light reading

A condensed, narrative walk through the whole arc of scripture from Genesis to Revelation. A clear entry point for anyone who finds the Bible overwhelming.

Grief, Loss & Being Human

Reading for difficult seasons, written by those who have known them.

Tracks of a Fellow Struggler: Living and Growing Through Grief · John Claypool

Recommended by Jack Alvey | General reading

Reflections drawn from the death of Claypool's young daughter. An honest and consoling account of grief from a pastor's perspective.

Mending the Heart · John Claypool

Recommended by Jack Alvey | General reading

Claypool on forgiveness and the slow work of healing what has been broken in us. Pastoral and direct.

The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be · Brené Brown

Recommended by Karyn Watts | General reading

Brown's research-based case for trading perfectionism and shame for courage and self-compassion.

Late Migrations: A Natural History of Love and Loss · Margaret Renkl

Recommended by Ashley Monachelli | Light reading

Short essays connecting family memory and the natural world of the South. Meant to be read slowly, a little at a time.

Life Together & Everyday Faith

On community, daily life, and ongoing spiritual practice.

Life Together · Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Recommended by Jack Alvey | Deeper reading

Bonhoeffer's account of Christian community, written from an underground seminary in Nazi Germany. A serious look at what living together in Christ requires.

Always We Begin Again: The Benedictine Way of Living · John McQuiston II

Recommended by Jack Alvey | Light reading

A brief adaptation of the Rule of St. Benedict for ordinary modern life, offering a rhythm of balance and intention. Short enough to read in one sitting.

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ · Peter Scazzero

Recommended by Jack Alvey | General reading

A practical look at how emotional health and spiritual maturity grow together. Includes exercises and tools for daily practice.

Church of the Small Things: The Million Little Pieces That Make Up a Life · Melanie Shankle

Recommended by Ashley Monachelli | Light reading

An encouraging, conversational reflection that ordinary and unremarkable days are where much of life's meaning is found.

How We Learn to Be Brave: Decisive Moments in Life and Faith · Mariann Edgar Budde

Recommended by Emily Collette | General reading

The Bishop of Washington reflects on moments of courage in ordinary and extraordinary life—drawing on scripture, personal experience, and the lives of others to explore how faith shapes decisive action.

Journeys, Outcasts & Unexpected Grace

Memoir and reflection on finding grace in unlikely places.

Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church · Rachel Held Evans

Recommended by Jack Alvey | General reading

Structured around the sacraments, a memoir of leaving and returning to church. Resonant for anyone with a complicated relationship to faith communities.

The Sacred Journey · Frederick Buechner

Recommended by Ashley Monachelli | General reading

Buechner's memoir of his early years, read as a story God was telling. A model for paying closer attention to one's own life.

In the Sanctuary of Outcasts: A Memoir · Neil White

Recommended by Rebecca Posey | General reading

A man sent to a federal facility that shared grounds with a leprosy colony finds his life changed by the people there. A memorable true story.

Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism · Alice Walker

Recommended by Olivia Hill Sheffield | General reading

Essays on faith, justice, and love from one of America's notable writers.

Joy & Contemplation

For gratitude, attention, and reflection.

The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World · Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu & Douglas Abrams

Recommended by Kathy Lounsbury | General reading

A record of a week of conversation between two longtime friends on finding joy amid suffering.

Devotions · Mary Oliver

Recommended by Olivia Hill Sheffield | Light reading

The poet's own selection of her best work, centered on attention to the natural world. Well suited to reading one poem at a time.

Rooted: Life at the Crossroads of Science, Nature, and Spirit · Lyanda Lynn Haupt

Recommended by Olivia Hill Sheffield | General reading

A naturalist and contemplative writer draws together ecology, science, and spiritual practice to explore what it means to be at home in the living world.

For Kids & Families

Curated by Ashley Monachelli for bedtime, road trips, and family faith.

Books

The Action Bible · edited by Doug Mauss

Recommended by Ashley Monachelli | Ages 8+

Scripture in comic-book form. A good fit for kids who enjoy graphic novels.

The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name · Sally Lloyd-Jones

Recommended by Ashley Monachelli | Ages 4+

A children's Bible that ties every story to the larger story of Jesus. Widely loved by parents too.

The Chronicles of Narnia (start with The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe) · C.S. Lewis

Recommended by Ashley Monachelli | Ages 8+

A classic fantasy series shaped by the Christian story. Begin with the wardrobe.

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane · Kate DiCamillo

Recommended by Ashley Monachelli | Ages 7+

A china rabbit learns to love over a long journey. A good read-aloud about loss and hope.

A Wrinkle in Time · Madeleine L'Engle

Recommended by Ashley Monachelli | Ages 10+

An adventure across space and time by a writer of deep faith, about love standing against the dark.

Podcasts for Kids

Kids Bible Stories — Bible stories told for young listeners.

God's Big Story — The biblical story told for children.

Ask Away — Children's faith questions, answered simply.

Found one you appreciated? Tell us, and pass it along.