

10 Recommended Books to Read and Discuss Lent 2015

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Meeting God in Mark: Reflections for the Season of Lent

By Rowan Williams

I'll start with the only traditional collection of Lenten reflections on this list. Normally, I'm not a big fan of this sort of devotional-type books, but Rowan Williams is always thoughtful (and sometimes provocative), and this book's focus on Mark's Gospel challenges us to stay focused on Jesus, which is an important reminder in our age of ideology.

Teach Us to Want: Longing, Ambition and the Life of Faith

By Jen Pollock Michel

One important purpose of the traditional practice of fasting during Lent is to help us reflect on our desires, and the ways in which we are often held hostage to them. This 2014 Christianity Today Book-of-the-Year is a well-written meditation on desire in the Christian faith.

Our Only World: Ten Essays

By Wendell Berry

Fasting, as we do during the Lenten season, reminds us that we must necessarily live within limits. For many years, farmer and environmentalist Wendell Berry has been championing the need for conservation and restraint in an age without limits. This new collection of essays challenges us to live disciplined lives for the sake of the common good of "our only world."

Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now

By Walter Brueggemann

One friend recently told me that she will be preaching on Sabbath through Lent, and it occurred to me that a focus on Sabbath, one of the most important disciplines amidst the fast culture of the 21st century, is perfect for the season of Lent. Brueggemann's book is a wonderful resource for helping us to understand and practice Sabbath in our age.

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

By Michelle Alexander

Lent is also a season of lament and repentance, and in the wake of events like those in Ferguson, Missouri, there is a lot of lament and repentance needed around issues of race. Michelle Alexander's book is a really helpful guide to one of the deepest manifestations of racism in the United States, the criminal justice system. This book is sure to spark conversation about issues of race and criminal justice, and if we are attentive to its message, it may serve as a guide, leading us into lament and repentance.

Jesus and the Disinherited

By Howard Thurman

In a similar vein to Michelle Alexander's book, this classic is an important and accessible meditation on race and Christian faith in the United States. This book is also a call to compassion, that is, suffering with those who suffer, and what better time than the season of Lent to be reminded of our calling to follow Jesus in the way of compassion.

This Is My Body: From Obesity to Ironman, My Journey into the True Meaning of Flesh, Spirit, and Deeper Faith

By Ragan Sutterfield

Fasting and the traditional disciplines of Lent, remind us that we are called to follow Jesus with not just our minds, our hearts and our souls, but also our bodies. This brand new memoir is a poignant story of the author's conversion to a holistic faith in which bodies matter. There is plenty to discuss here about the disciplines that we submit ourselves to and why they matter for our faith.

Embracing the Body: Finding God in Our Flesh and Bone

By Tara M. Owens

Another excellent new book that challenges us to think and act faithfully with regard to our bodies. "In *Embracing the Body* spiritual director Tara Owens invites you to listen to your thoughts about your body in a way that draws you closer to God, calling you to explore how your spirituality is intimately tied to your physicality."

The Grand Paradox: The Messiness of Life, the Mystery of God and the Necessity of Faith

By Ken Wytsma

Lent is a season of darkness, where we learn to acknowledge our doubt and rest in our faith in Christ. Ken Wytsma's new book is an excellent guide for this journey, speaking honestly about the challenges that we will inevitably face, and learning to trust in a God that is sovereign in the face of our uncertainty and pain.

A Glorious Dark: Finding Hope in the Tension between Belief and Experience

By A.J. Swoboda

Another superb new book that challenges us to live an authentic face in spite of the darkness we experience in the world. Real, raw, and achingly honest, *A Glorious Dark* meets readers in the ambiguity, doubt, and uncertainty we feel when our beliefs about the world don't match up to reality. Tackling tough questions like *Why is faith so hard? Why do I doubt? Why does God allow me to suffer? and Is God really with me in the midst of my pain?* A. J. Swoboda puts into sharp focus a faith that is greater than our personal comfort or fulfillment, and what message could be more fitting for the season of Lent?

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