Introductions:

Small Group Book Discussions, Some Great Books

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Overview

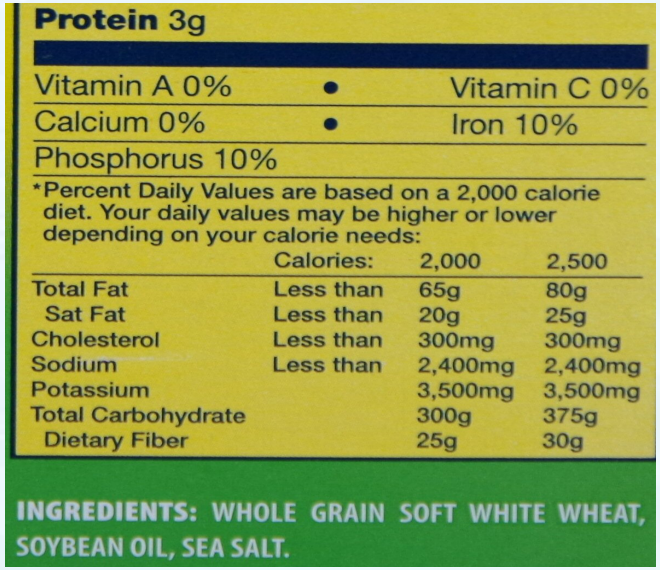
Tips for starting, coordinating, sustaining a small group for discussing books

Brief, individual book introductions: theme, selected quotes or observations

Encourage you to read and discuss books!

Small Group Ingredients

- Reasons
- Forming
- Meeting frequency
- Choosing books
- Hosting
- Group member responsibilities
- Discussion approaches
- Building relationships



Protein 3g

Vitamin A 0%	•	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0%	•	Iron 10%
Phosphorus 10%		

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Potassium		3,500mg	3,500mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

INGREDIENTS: WHOLE GRAIN SOFT WHITE WHEAT, SOYBEAN OIL, SEA SALT.

Why Small Groups?

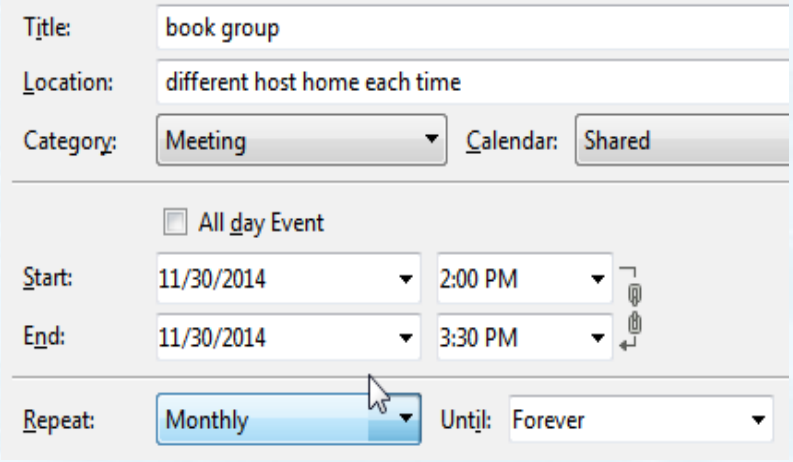
- More book idea sources
- Deeper learning: discern together, from different perspectives, gaining synergy from discussion
- Fellowship: build meaningful relationships
- Small group compared with larger group
  - All can contribute more easily
  - More meeting place options

Forming a Small Group

- Seek others who share:
  - Topical interests
  - Preferred reading amount, meeting frequency
  - Discussion pace goals
- Decide on group size
  - Affects interactions, where discussions held
  - Changes over time; can start with more than ideal
- Who will coordinate, how to communicate?

Meeting Frequency

- How often?
- Constant or varied?
- Time to obtain, read book



- One meeting per book, chapter; or AMAIT?
- Be consistent, so members can plan
- Might affect each meeting length

Choosing Books

- If group theme, stick to it
- Agree on process:
  offer candidates & vote,
  rotate, or ...

- Choose well in advance, but not so far that tastes may change
- Decide whether some books are too long

Choosing Books: example

Process refined over time:

- Invite two book candidates per member
- Add links to descriptions, reviews; no personal reviews but indicate read status
- Send list to group, asking for preferred four, ranked votes
- 1st choice = 10 points, 2nd = 9, then 8, 7
  (three 4th-place choices outweigh two 1st-place, e.g.)
- Read/discuss up to four books that have 3-vote minimum

Hosting

- Same place/host or varied?
- Own spaces, or arrange public room use?
- Perhaps not all members will want to host
- Keep it simple
  - Simple beverage offer
    - Easier hosting
    - More time for discussion
  - Just need reasonably quiet, comfy space

Group Member Responsibilities

- Consider group covenant, privacy
- Read book before meeting
- Participate in discussions, per group size
- Listen, to understand others' perspectives
- Put meetings on calendar, set time aside
- Inform host, coordinator if cannot attend
- Respond promptly to communications

Discussion Approaches

- Open and close with prayer
- Prepared questions, or free-form?
- Need control mechanism for who has floor?
  - Round-robin
  - Single “baton”
  - Meeting leader calls on each participant

Building Relationships

- Naturally ongoing, from shared meaningful experiences and love of books
- Consider additional interactions
  - Meeting for other purposes, like a meal
  - Group e-mails, texts, Facebook page
  - Explore other common interests

Segue

Questions about small groups?

… on to book suggestions

Study Materials List

Small Group Book Study Materials List

Here is a list of books and other materials, studied by an ever-evolving small group at Zumbro Lutheran Church.

The group started late in 2006 as a science fiction and Bible study. In the fall of 2008 it expanded in scope, with a focus on heroes, leaders, and disciples. By fall of 2009 group members decided that any books thought to be interesting to the group could be candidates to read and discuss.

Title	Author(s)	Discussion
Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now	Walter Brueggemann	11/2014
Jesus > Religion: Why He is So Much Better than Trying Harder, Doing More, and Being Good Enough	Jefferson Bethke	10/2014
Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion	Sara Miles	9/2014

Today's Book List

Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life - Winifred Gallagher, 2009, ~220p

The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully - Joan Chittister, 2008, ~220p

Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White: Thoughts on Religion, Morality, and Politics - Adam Hamilton, 2009, ~235p

The Gospel of Grace - Dr. Mark Wickstrom, 2008, ~110p

Crossing the Bar: Home By Another Way - James G. Johnson, 2010, ~230p [story style]

Making Sense of the Christian Faith - David J Lose, 2010, ~235p, [conversational style]

The Reason For God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism - Timothy Keller, 2008, ~300p

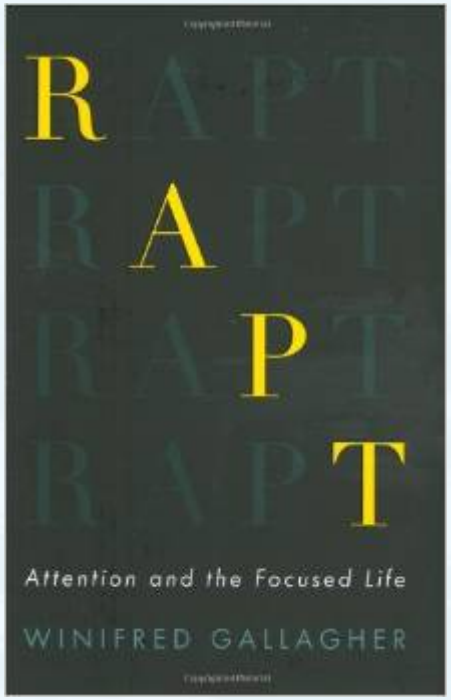
Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution - Kenneth R. Miller, 1999, ~290p, [scientific style]

The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts - Gary Chapman, 2009, ~170p

Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion - Sara Miles, 2007, ~320p

Rapt

Theme: much quality of life depends upon attention choices.



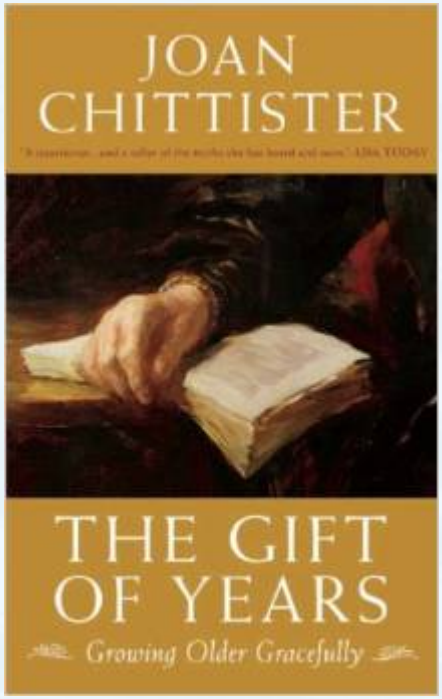
"your ability to focus on this and suppress that is the key to controlling your experience and, ultimately, your well-being"

"attention distills the universe into your universe."

"The inextricability of thought and emotion is one of … psychology's most important discoveries."

"When I can't fathom something that a dear one has just said or done, I try to remember that he or she focuses on a different world and ask for some illumination."

The Gift of Years



Theme: growing older brings benefits.

"Our spiritual obligation is to age well—so that others who meet us may have the courage, the spiritual depth, to do the same."

"Experience is what gives an older person the right to bring, not biography, but history to the situation"

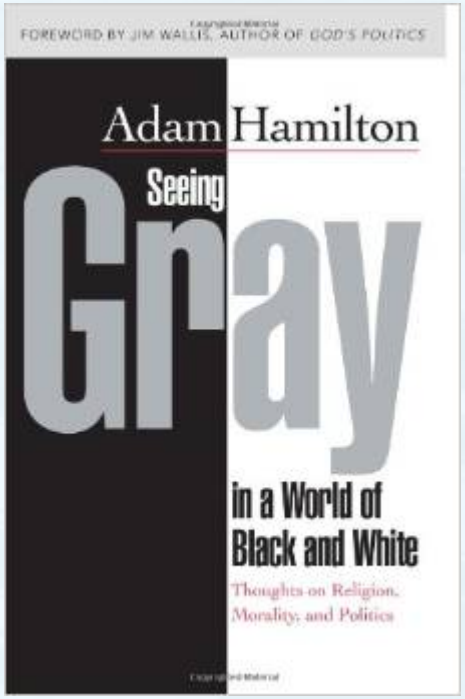
"This is the time for melting into God."

"Neurological research now confirms that old brains are indeed physically smaller, but no less intellectually competent"

"Down deep, where our souls live, we stay forever young."

Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White

Theme: pursue a middle way, seeing truth as multi-sided.



"any issue about which thinking Christians disagree likely has important truth on each side of the debate"

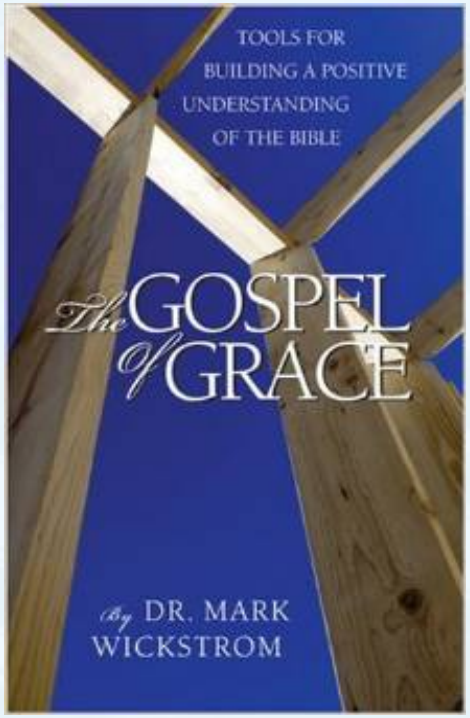
"Humility is essential to Christian faith."

"The world of gray requires that we show up and be present. It does not afford us the luxury of putting life on automatic pilot." - Byron Williams

"There are a host of things I seek to avoid in life not because participating in them would harm anyone else, but because I don't believe they would honor and please God."

The Gospel of Grace

House metaphor to differentiate uses of texts within the Bible.



Foundation and framework: Gospel of grace is heart of Bible, true for all people for all time.

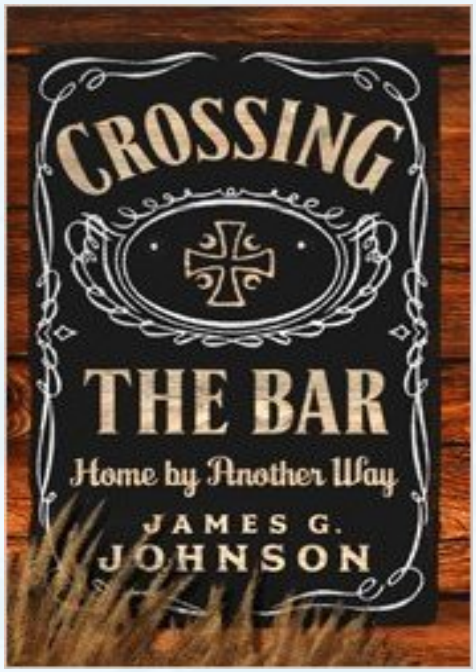
Interior walls: timeless truths, not pertaining to grace, emphasize groups' choices. House intact if altered.

Furnishings: cultural norms, personal opinions. Such interpretations add color, can change with no effect on interior walls or backbone of house.

“God's word is a living document, ... we do not have to agree about every interpretation, … the Spirit can lead each of us to a different conclusion, and … we can nevertheless have loving and encouraging conversations.”

Crossing the Bar

Crossing the bar is joining God's work-a-day mission, like Jesus.



"Grace frees us, each and every day, to be fully alive, to be who God meant us to be."

"assume that God is already at work in the life of every person we encounter."

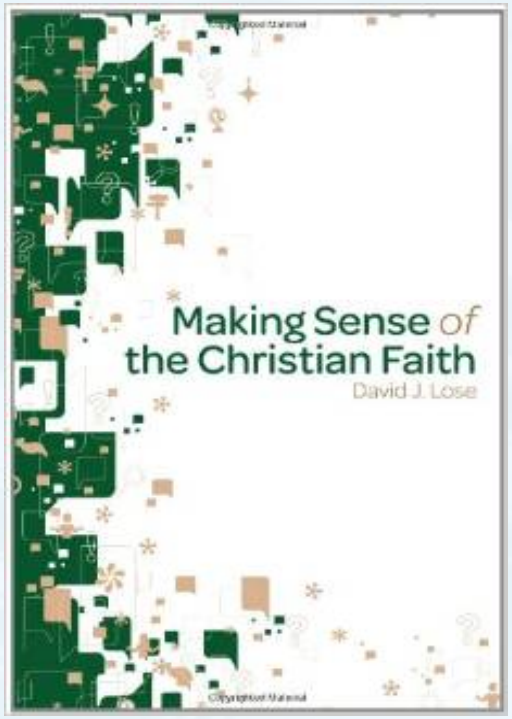
"We develop language, rituals and ways of doing things that are intimidating to first-timers."

"This is where peace is finally found, in a relationship with the God who loves us enough to come after us. Many times, this is what church people need to share with bar people."

Making Sense of the Christian Faith

Conversational discussion of key Christian doctrines.

"Faith ... is more like trust than knowledge. Even so, I think we should always test what we believe, and if it doesn't make sense, then there's something wrong."

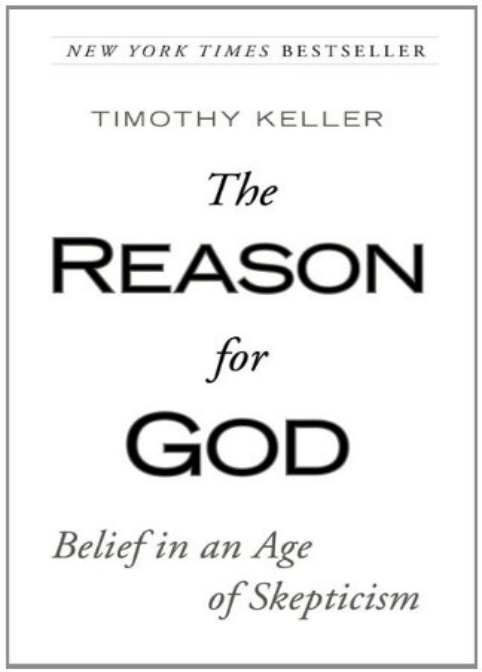


"at its best, church prepares you to go out into the world, the place where God is waiting for us to join in God's work of blessing and caring for the world."

"Being faithful to God doesn't have to be heroic. There are opportunities to do God's will, to be God's people, all around us."

The Reason for God

We should ask & answer hard questions about our beliefs.



"A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it."

"To be sure that miracles cannot occur you would have to be sure … God didn't exist, … an article of faith."

"A fish, … is only free if it is restricted and limited to water. … freedom is not so much the absence of restrictions as finding the right ones"

"Hearts are unruly things, and to be sure that we have put our heart-trust in Jesus rather than in other things, we need to follow through and join a body of believers."

Finding Darwin's God

True knowledge found in God's works (creation) and word (Bible).

Science and faith are completely compatible.

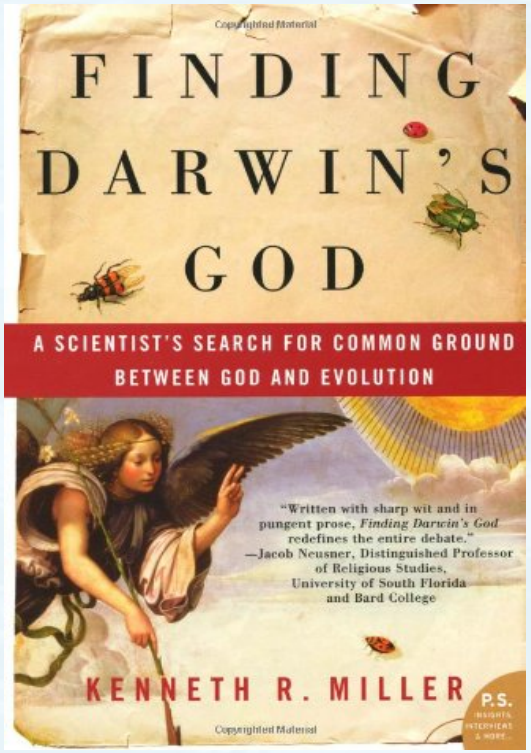
Evolution is very important, sound science.

God not diminished by creating with a process.

Faith should not try to undermine science.

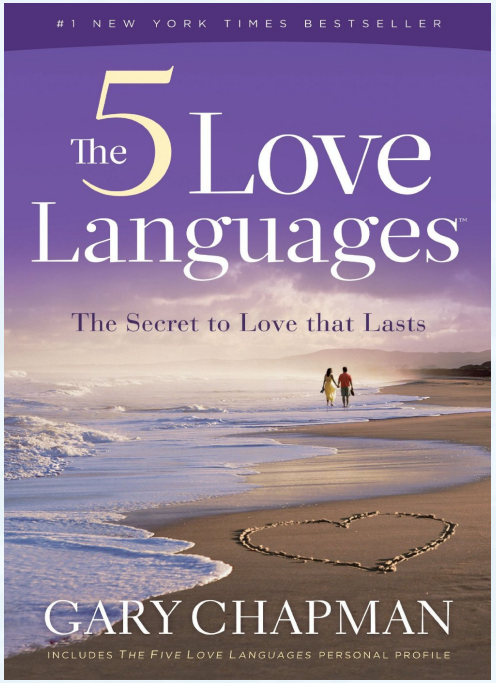
Science should not try to explain ideas beyond its method (God's existence, life's meaning).

Science can help us recognize how God set up universe for free will while yet allowing God to act (e.g. quantum indeterminacy).



The 5 Love Languages

People have emotional “love tanks”, most effectively filled when love is expressed in the way most meaningful to the individual.



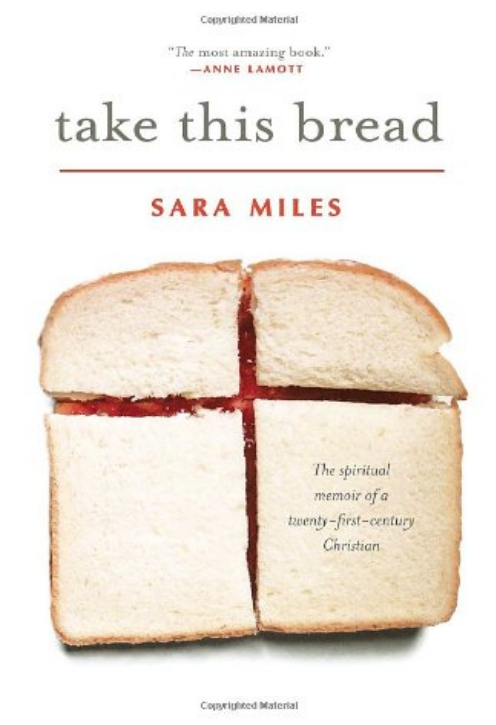
“How do we meet each other's deep, emotional need to feel loved? If we can learn that and choose to do it, then the love we share will be exciting beyond anything we ever felt when we were infatuated.”

“When we choose active expressions of love in the primary love language of our spouse, we create an emotional climate where we can deal with our past conflicts and failures.”

Affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service, touch

Take This Bread

Amazing conversion story, example of loving neighbors.



"Faith, for me, isn't an argument, a catechism, ... It is instead a lens, a way of experiencing life, and a willingness to act."

"when I was looking at it from the outside, faith seemed to be about certainty. What a surprise."

"point of church isn't to get people to come to church." "No?" ... "What is it?" ... "To feed them, so they can go out and, you know, be Jesus."

"What happened once I started distributing communion was the truly disturbing, dreadful realization about Christianity: You can't be a Christian by yourself."

Conclusion

Great books even better with discussion

Developing a small group for discussing books is not difficult

Other observations or questions?

Thank you!