

Great Christian Literature

A Journey Through Faith and Wisdom

*Exploring Essential Works That Shaped
Christian Thought*

Wilbur Reid, summer of 2025



Hebrews 11: The Faith Chapter
Hebrews 12:1

a GREAT Cloud OF Witnesses

Adam & Eve

Noah

Abraham

Joseph

Gideon

Elijah

Moses

Joshua

Solomon

Daniel

Exodus

David

Esther



Our Cloud of Witnesses

Augustine

Thomas Aquinas

Rick Warren

CS Lewis

John Calvin

Jonathan Edwards

Alexander Campbell

John Bunyan

AW Tozer

GK Chesterton

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dante

Martin Luther

JRR Tolkien

David Platt

Brother Lawrence

Francis Chan

JI Packer



Why Christian Literature Matters

- **Intellectual Heritage** - We stand on the shoulders of giants
 - These authors shaped how we think about faith
 - Many phrases we use come from these writers
- **Timeless Wisdom** - Core truths transcend time periods
 - Same questions every generation asks
 - Consistent answers across 1,600 years
- **Deeper Faith** - Exposure to great minds strengthens our own faith
 - See how brilliant people wrestled with doubt and emerged stronger
 - Discover new depths in familiar truths

Top 30 Best-Selling and Most Influential Christian Books

Based on Wilbur's research and discretion.



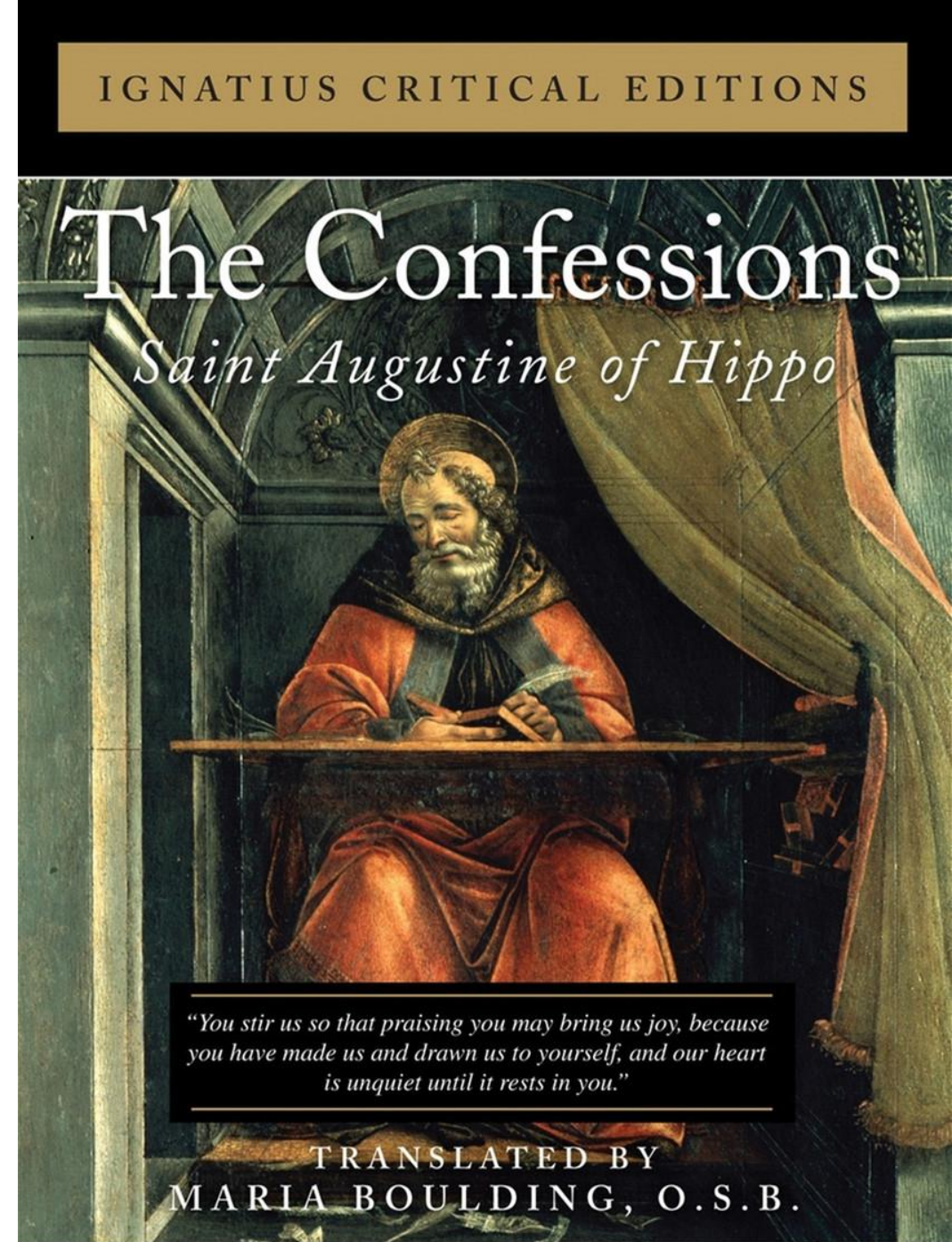
A photograph of a stone path leading through a grassy field towards a green hill under a cloudy sky. The path is made of large, flat stones and is surrounded by tall grass. In the background, there is a large, rounded green hill. The sky is overcast with grey clouds.

Ancient Foundations

400s

The Confessions (397-400)

- **Author:** Augustine of Hippo
 - North African bishop, theologian, philosopher
- **Summary:** Augustine's autobiographical account of his conversion and spiritual journey from sin to salvation.
- **Quote:** "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."



The City of God (413-426)

- **Author:** Augustine of Hippo
- **Summary:** A defense of Christianity against pagan accusations and a vision of God's eternal kingdom versus earthly kingdoms.
- **Quote:** "Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, the heavenly by the love of God."

SAINT AUGUSTINE

The City of God



Selections and Introduction by
Hans Urs von Balthasar



Medieval Wisdom

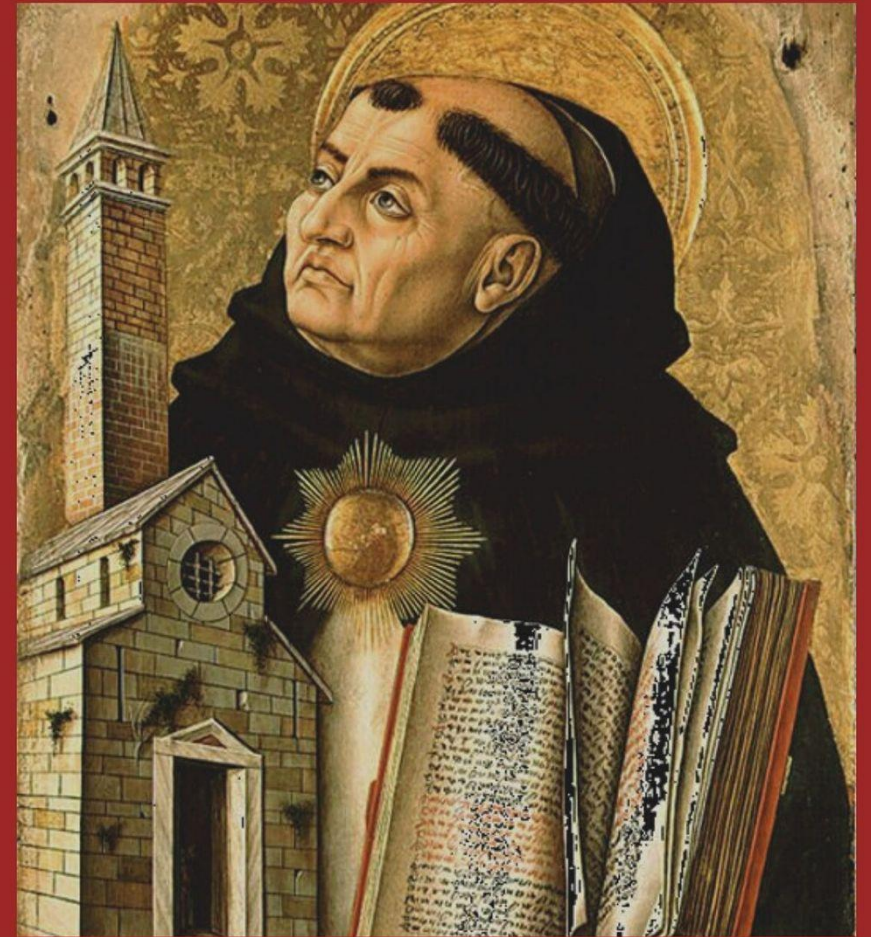
1200s - 1400s



Summa Theologica (1273)

- **Author:** Thomas Aquinas
 - Italian Dominican Friar and theologian
- **Summary:** A comprehensive theological and philosophical work systematically presenting Christian doctrine and natural theology.
- **Quote:** "To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible."

SUMMA THEOLOGICA

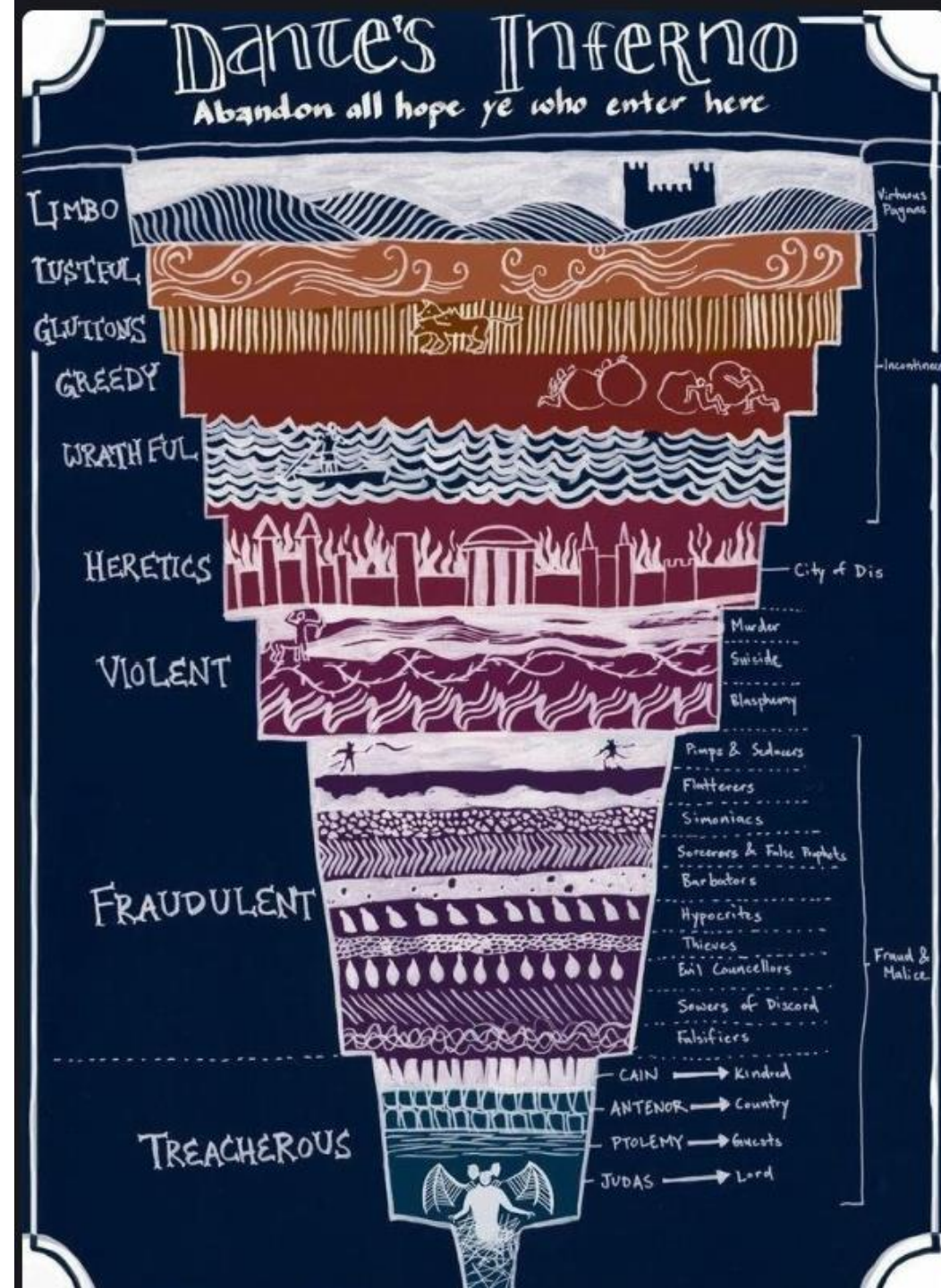


THOMAS AQUINAS

The Divine Comedy

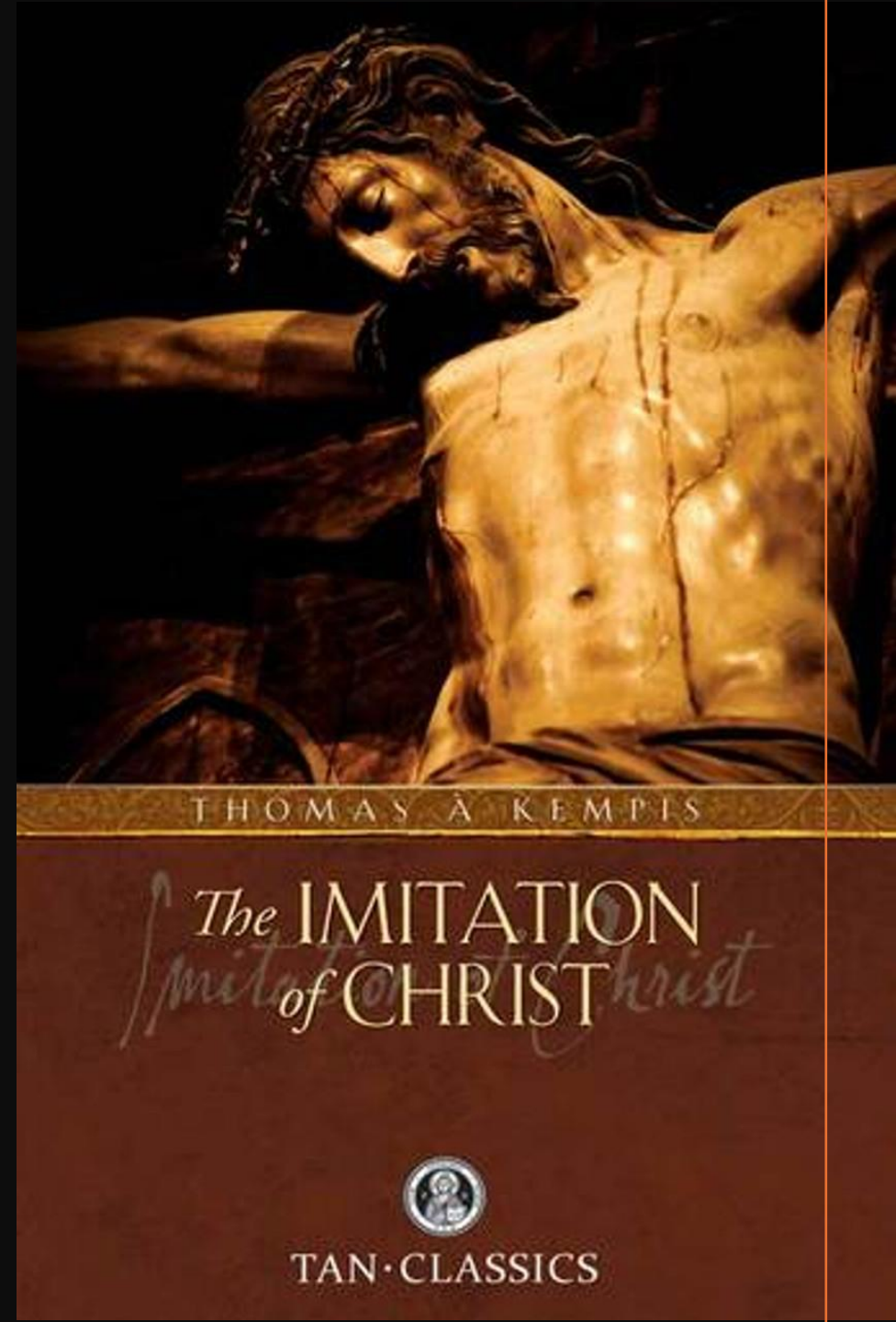
(Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso, 1320)

- **Author:** Dante Alighieri
 - Italian poet and philosopher
- **Summary:** An epic poem following Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, representing the soul's journey to God.
- **Quote:** "In His will is our peace."
(*Paradiso*)



The Imitation of Christ (1418-1427)

- **Author:** Thomas à Kempis
 - German-Dutch priest
- **Summary:** A devotional guide emphasizing inner spiritual life and the imitation of Jesus Christ's humility and love.
- **Quote:** "Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be."



Reformation Revolutionaries

1500s – 1600s



95 Theses (1517)

- **Author:** Martin Luther
 - German, Augustinian monk
- **Summary:** Luther's formal challenge to the Catholic Church's sale of indulgences sparked the Protestant Reformation by questioning papal authority and calling for spiritual reform.
- **Quote:** *"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."*



Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536)

- **Author:** John Calvin
 - French theologian, moved to Geneva
- **Summary:** A systematic presentation of Protestant theology covering God's sovereignty, salvation, and Christian living.
- **Quote:** "Nearly all the wisdom we possess consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."

JOHN CALVIN

INSTITUTES of the
CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Translated by Henry Beveridge



The Pilgrim's Progress (1678)

- **Author:** John Bunyan
 - English Puritan preacher
- **Summary:** An allegorical tale of Christian's journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, representing the soul's path to salvation.
- **Quote:** “To go back is nothing but death; to go forward is fear of death, and life everlasting beyond it. I will yet go forward.”

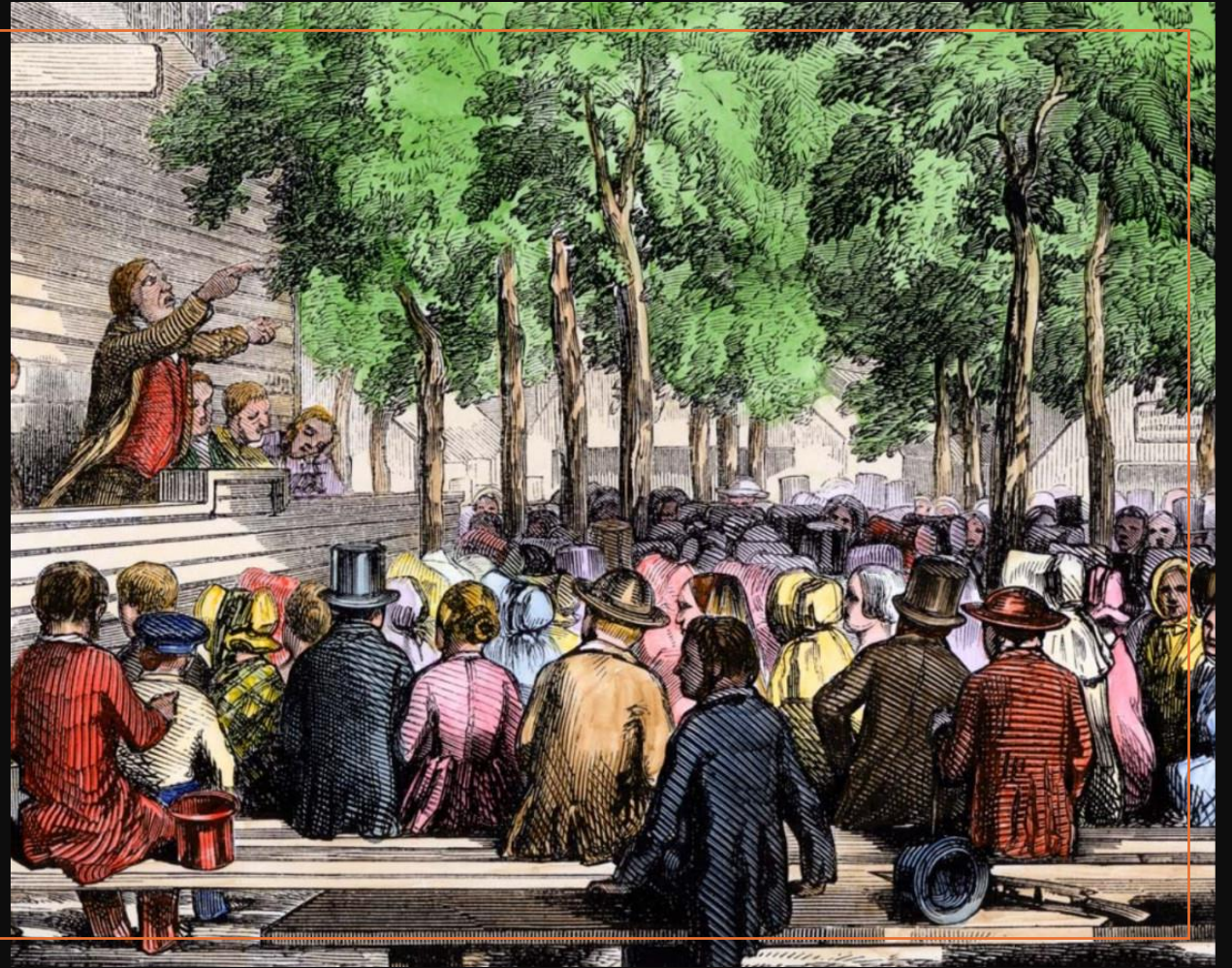
Pilgrim's Progress



John Bunyan

Great Awakening Giants

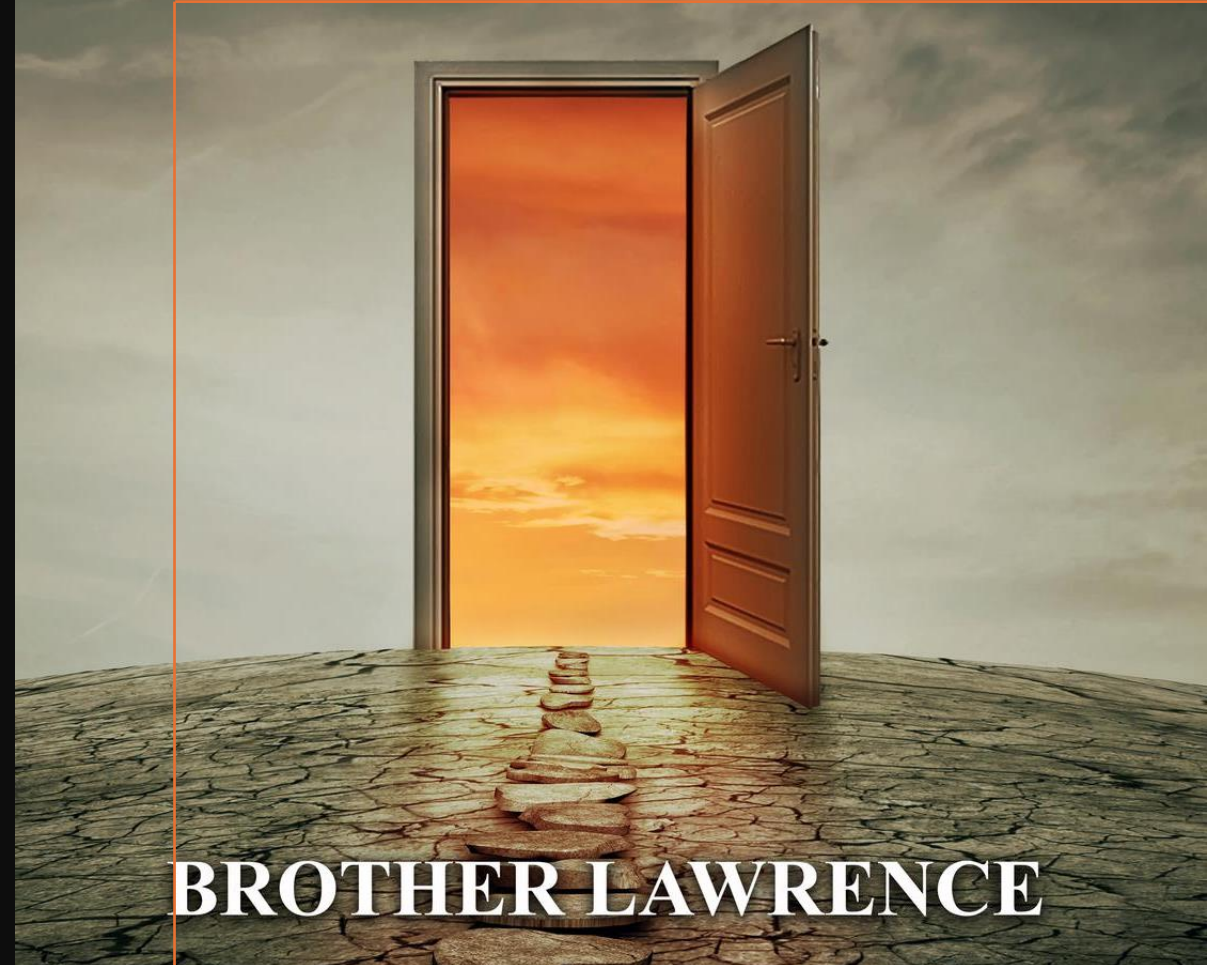
1700s – 1800s



The Practice of the Presence of God (1692)

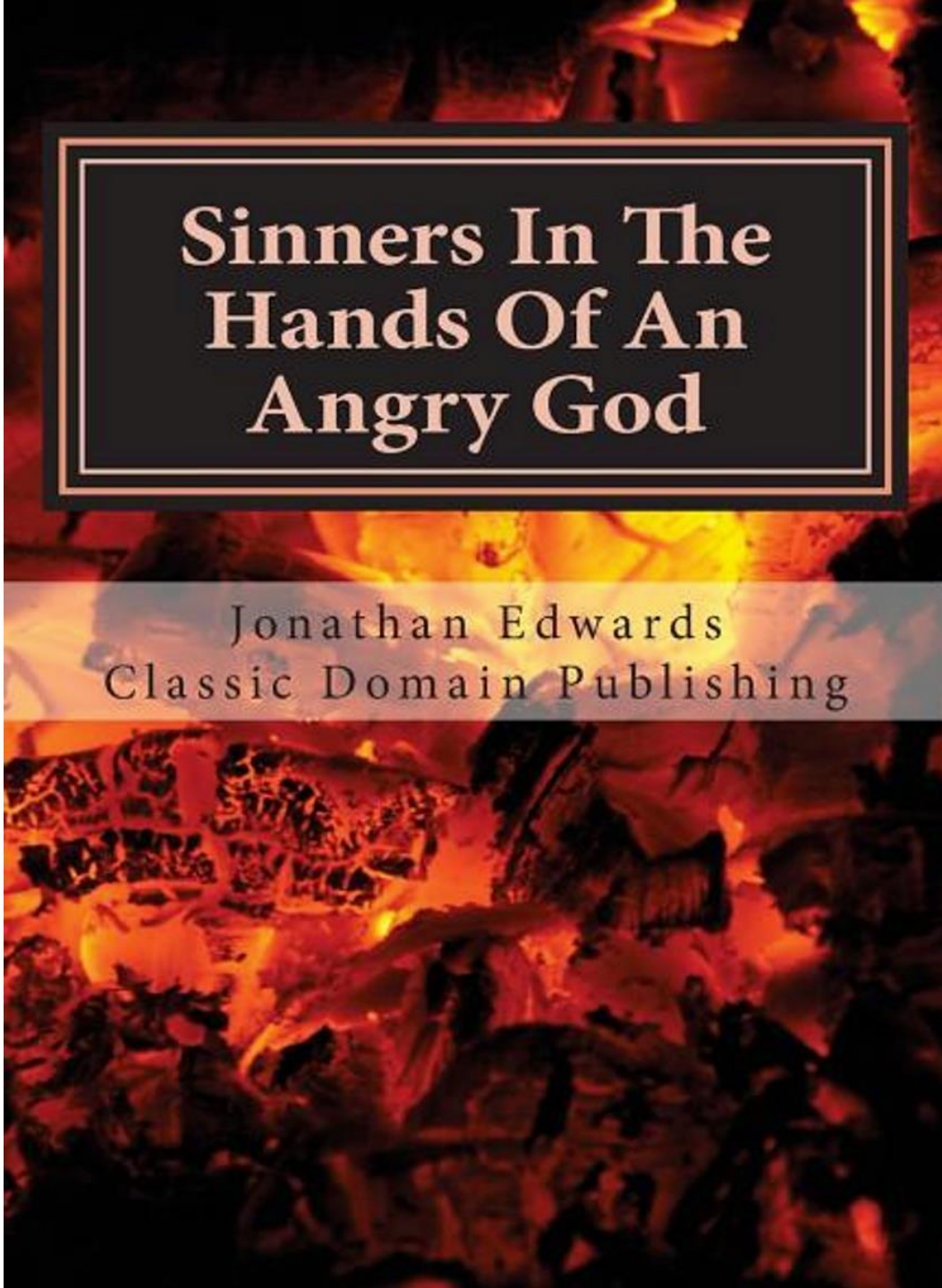
- **Author:** Brother Lawrence
 - Born Nicolas Herman
 - French Carmelite friar (the monastery cook)
- **Summary:** Simple teachings on maintaining continuous awareness of God's presence in everyday activities and work.
- **Quote:** "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees."

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD



Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God (1741)

- **Author:** Jonathan Edwards
 - American Puritan preacher, theologian, intellectual, and philosopher
 - Yale at 13, president of Princeton, launched the first Great Awakening
- **Summary:** A powerful sermon depicting humanity's precarious position before God's judgment and the urgency of repentance.
- **Quote:** "There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God."



Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God

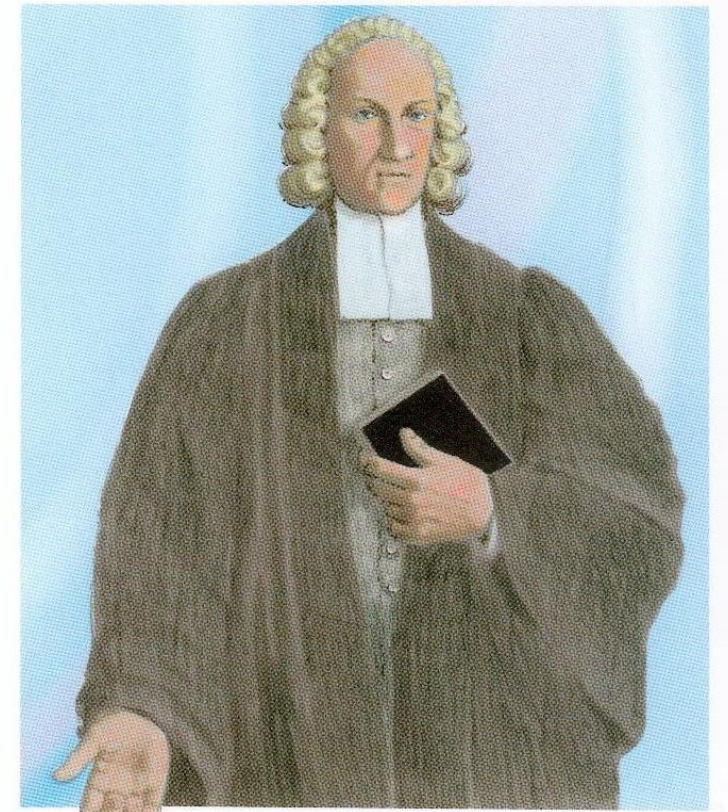
Jonathan Edwards
Classic Domain Publishing

Religious Affections (1746)

- **Author:** Jonathan Edwards
- **Summary:** An analysis of true versus false religious experience, emphasizing genuine spiritual emotions rooted in understanding.
- **Quote:** "The degree in which our experience is productive of practice shows the degree in which our experience is spiritual and divine."

THE RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS

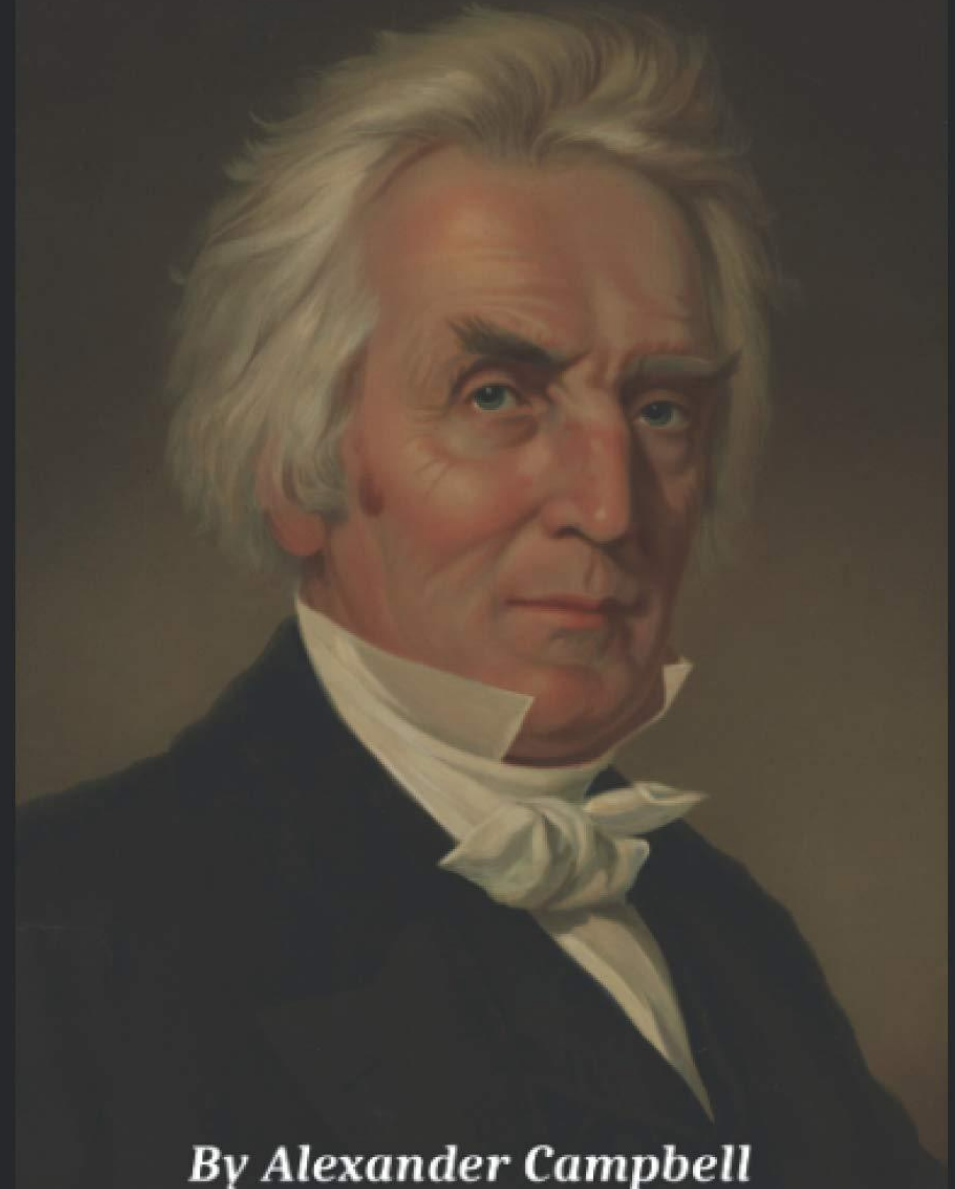
JONATHAN EDWARDS



The Christian System (1835)

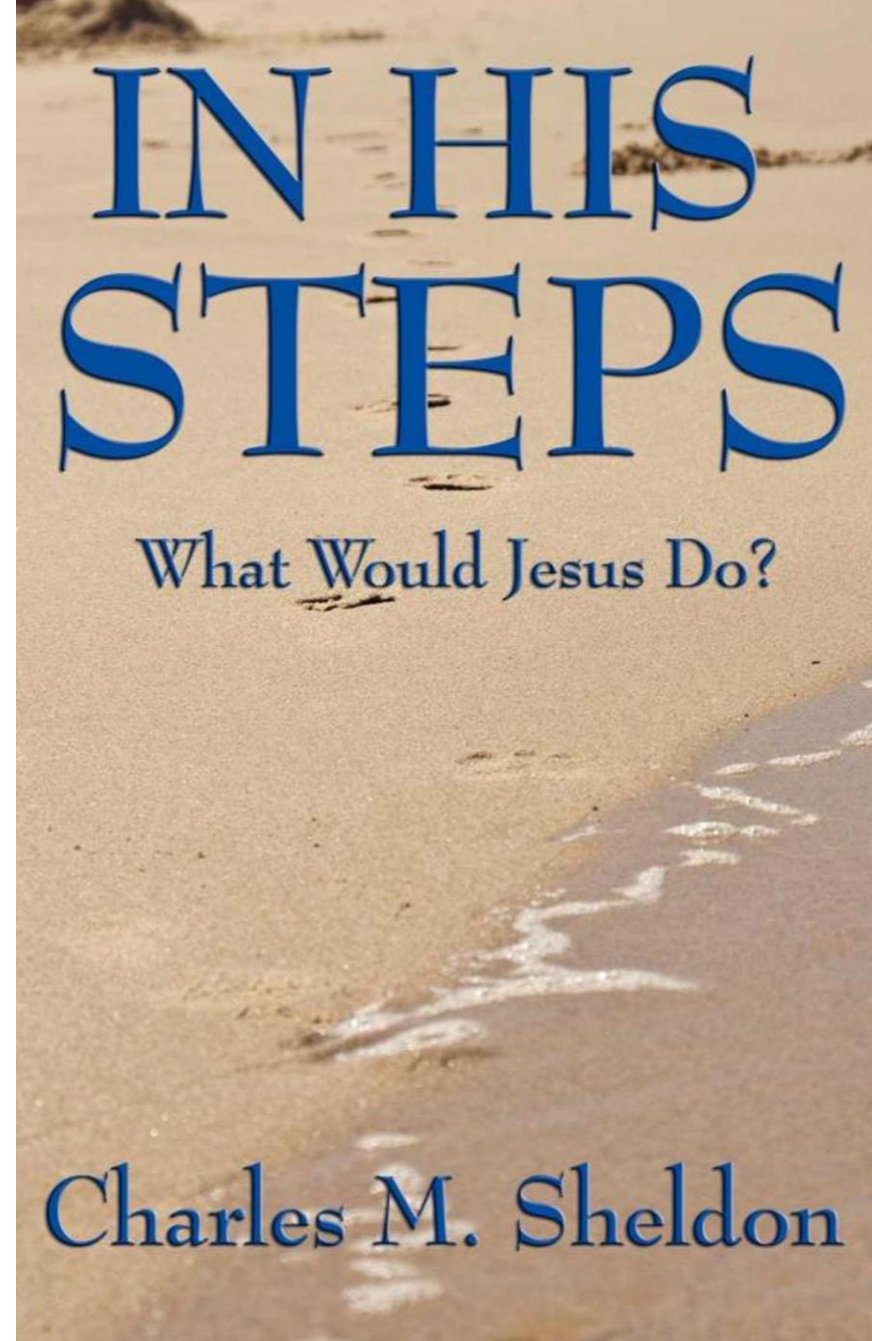
- **Author:** Alexander Campbell
 - Scots-Irish American, Restoration Movement
- **Summary:** Campbell's systematic presentation of New Testament Christianity advocated for Christian unity based solely on biblical authority, rejecting denominational creeds and traditions.
- **Quote:** "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent."

The Christian System



In His Steps (1896)

- **Author:** Charles Sheldon
 - American Congregational minister
- **Summary:** A novel challenging readers to live by asking "What Would Jesus Do?" in every decision and circumstance.
- **Quote:** "What would Jesus do? He turned and asked himself this question, and it opened up a world of possibilities."



Modern Defenders

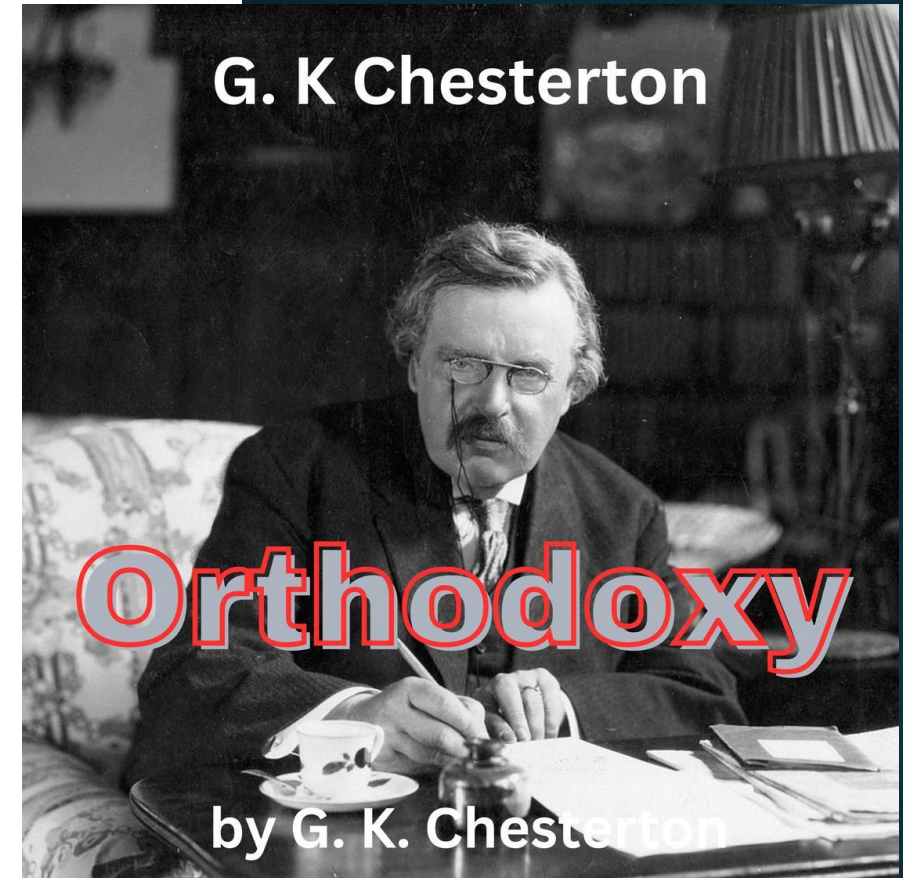
1900s



The Inklings at Oxford

Orthodoxy (1908)

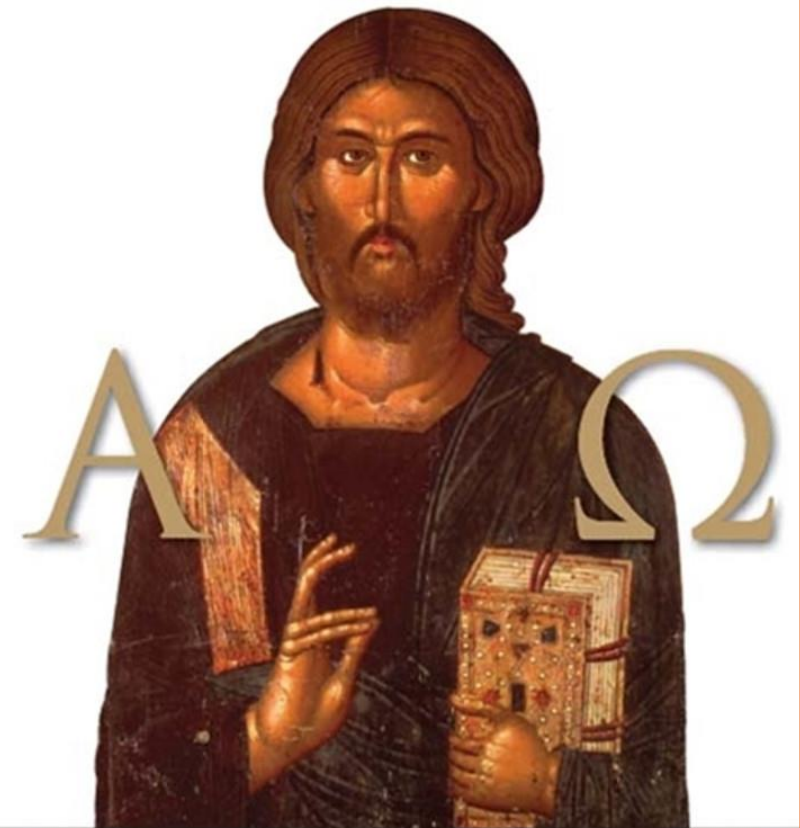
- **Author:** G.K. Chesterton
 - English writer, philosopher, apologist
- **Summary:** Chesterton's intellectual and spiritual autobiography defending Christian orthodoxy with wit and paradox.
- **Quote:** "The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man."



The Everlasting Man (1925)

- **Author:** G.K. Chesterton
- **Summary:** A philosophical outline of human history arguing for Christianity's unique place in human development.
- **Quote:** "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried."

G.K. CHESTERTON THE EVERLASTING MAN



IGNATIUS

The Cost of Discipleship (1937)

- - **Author:** Dietrich Bonhoeffer
 - German Lutheran pastor, anti-Nazi, martyr
 - **Summary:** A powerful call to authentic Christian discipleship, contrasting "cheap grace" with costly, sacrificial following of Christ.
 - **Quote:** "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

New Foreword by ERIC METAXAS

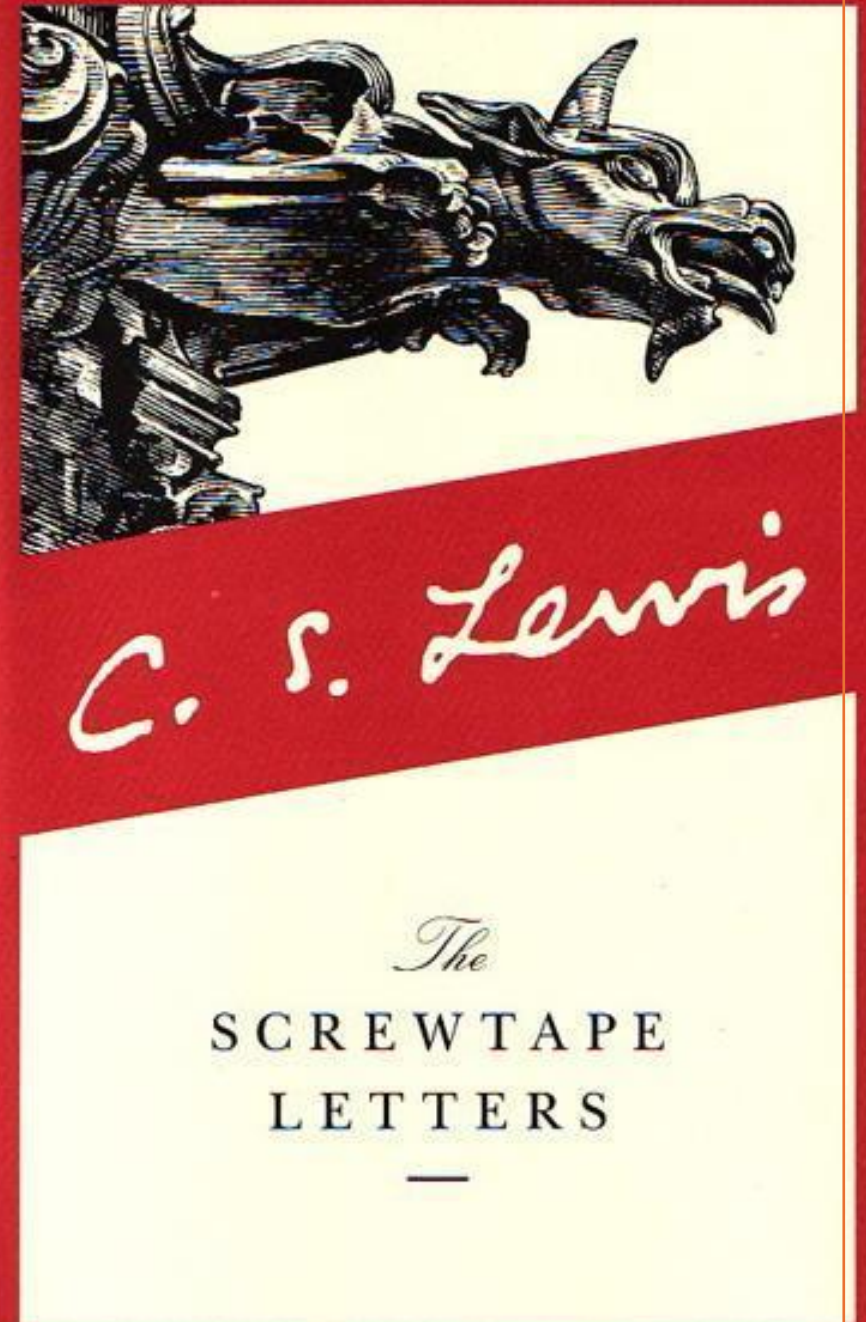
DIETRICH
BONHOEFFER

✠ THE COST OF ✠
DISCIPLESHIP



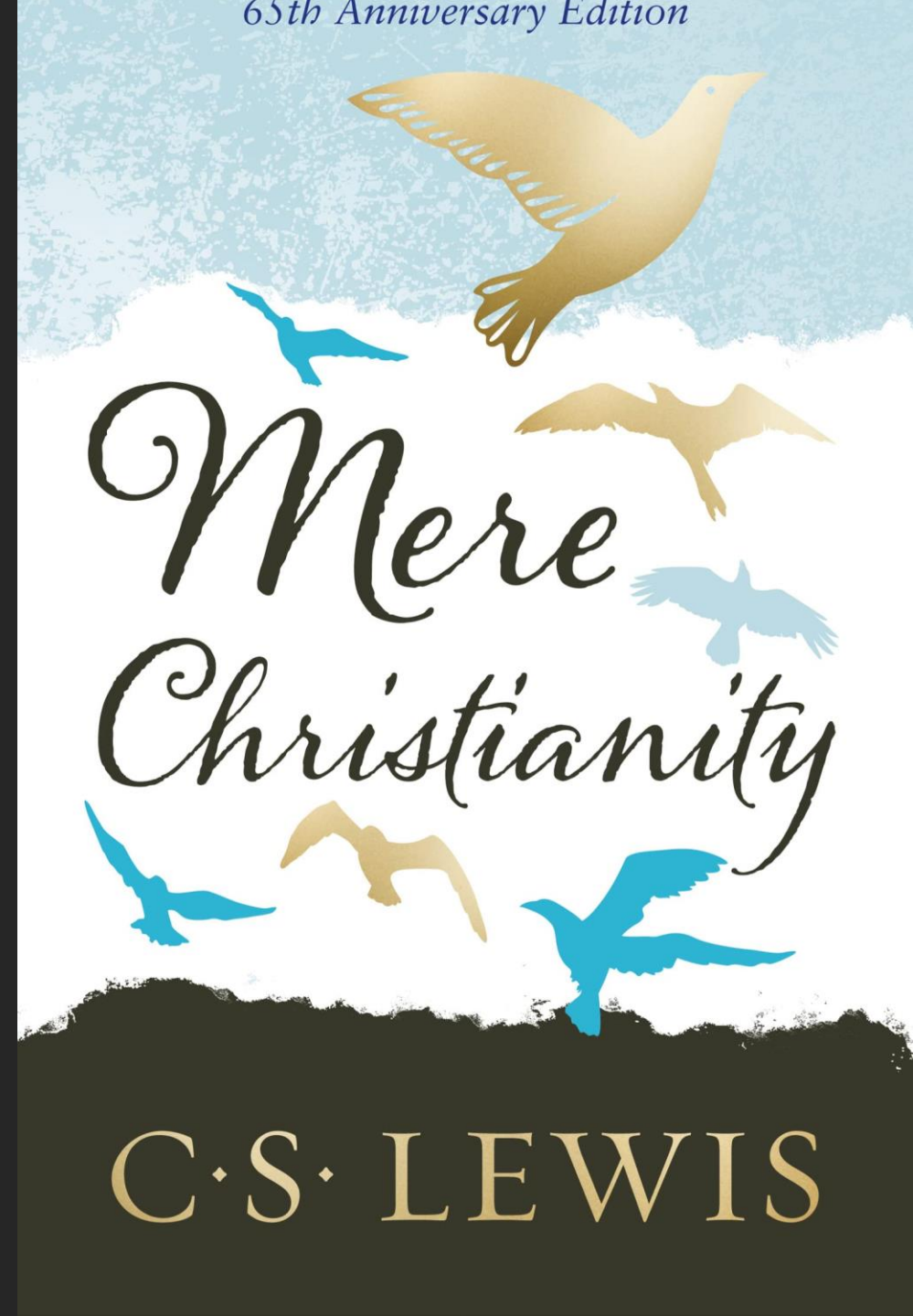
The Screwtape Letters (1942)

- **Author:** C.S. Lewis
 - British professor, writer, and apologist
- **Summary:** A satirical correspondence between senior demon Screwtape and his nephew Wormwood on tempting humans away from God.
- **Quote:** "Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."
- "Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys."



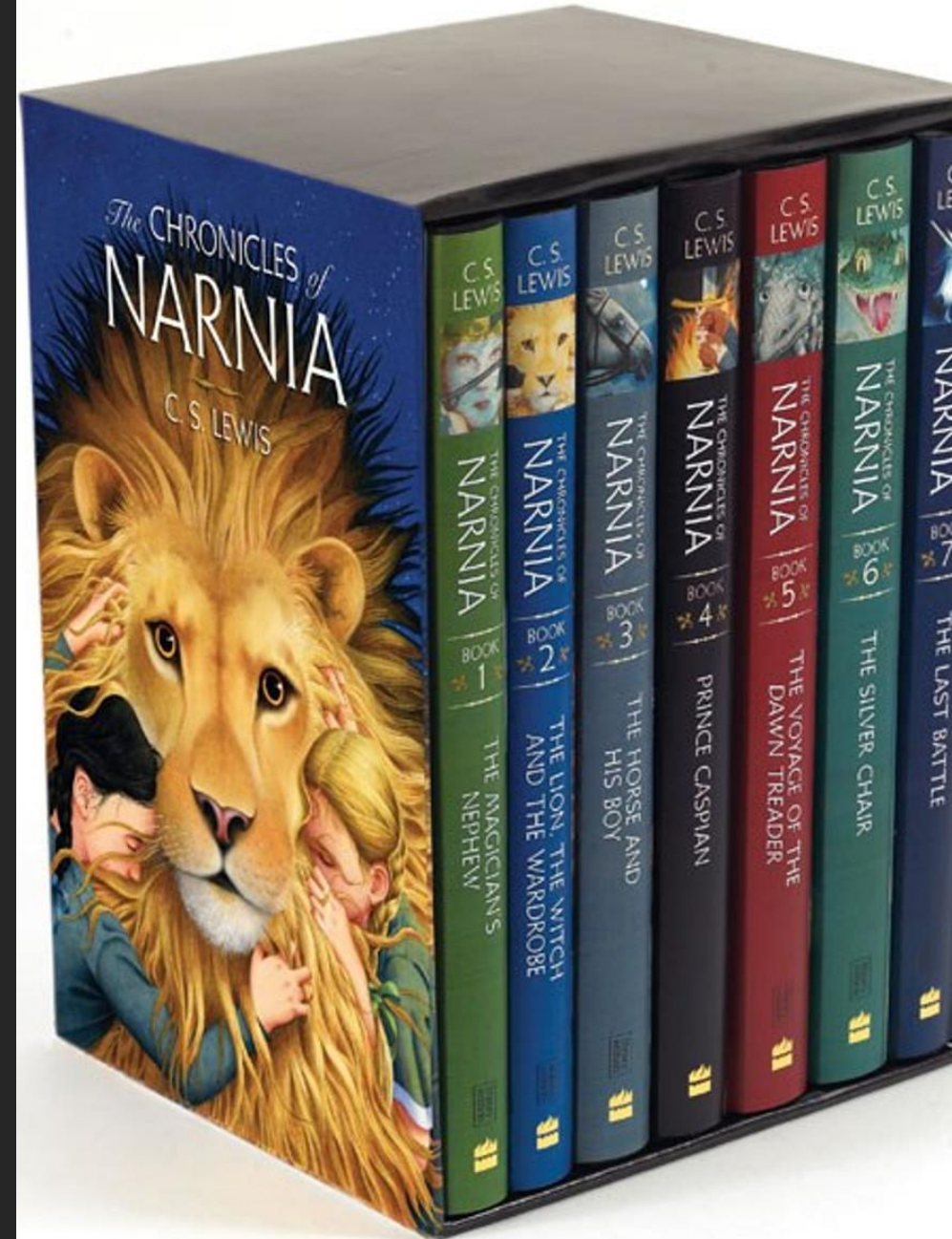
Mere Christianity (1952)

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- **Author:** C.S. Lewis
 - **Summary:** Lewis's logical case for Christianity, exploring common ground among Christian denominations and basic Christian beliefs.
 - **Quote:** "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic or else he would be the Devil of Hell."



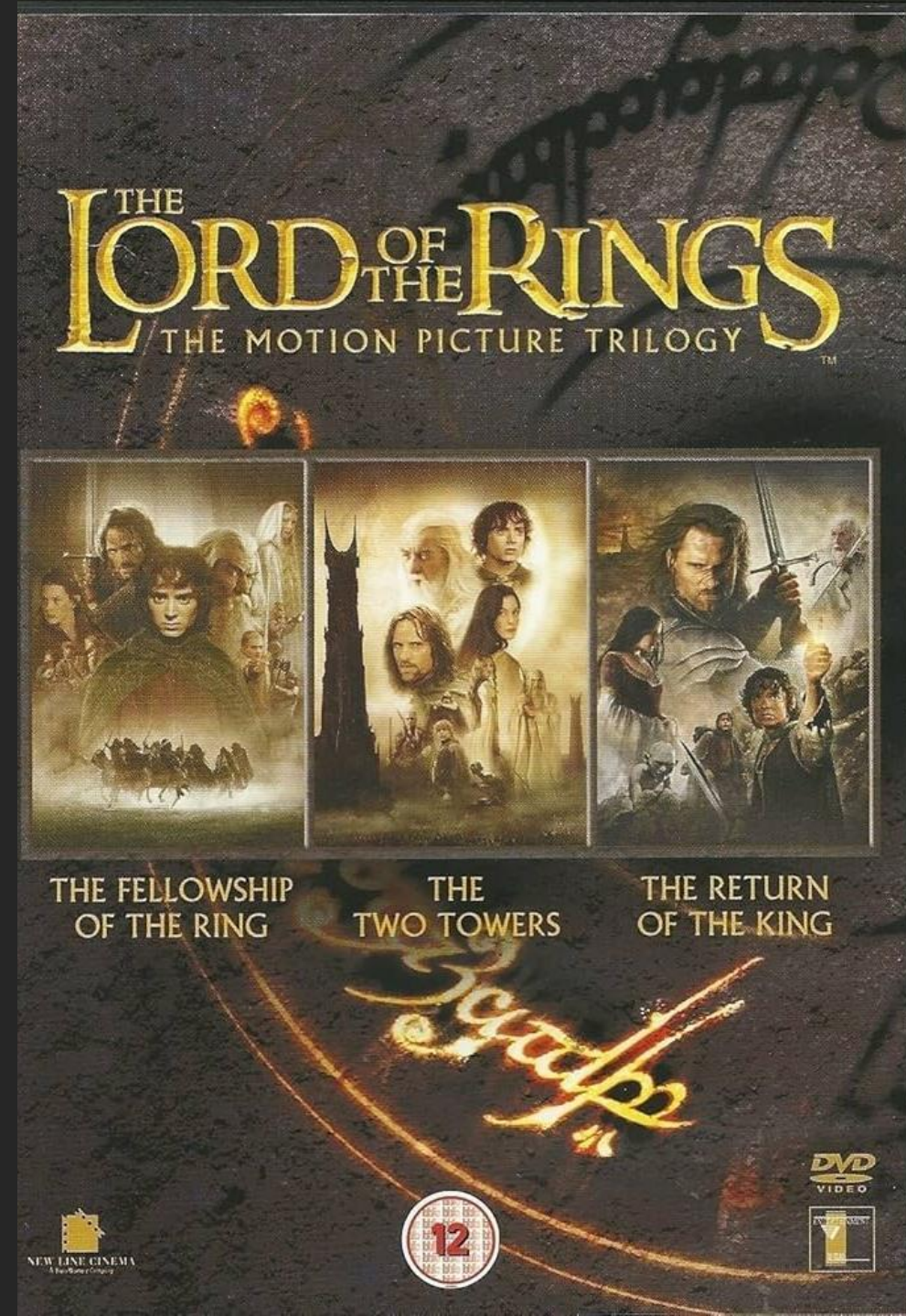
The Chronicles of Narnia (1950-1956)

- **Author:** C.S. Lewis
- **Summary:** Seven fantasy novels using allegory to explore Christian themes through the magical world of Narnia and Aslan the lion.
- **Quote:** "Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight, at the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more."



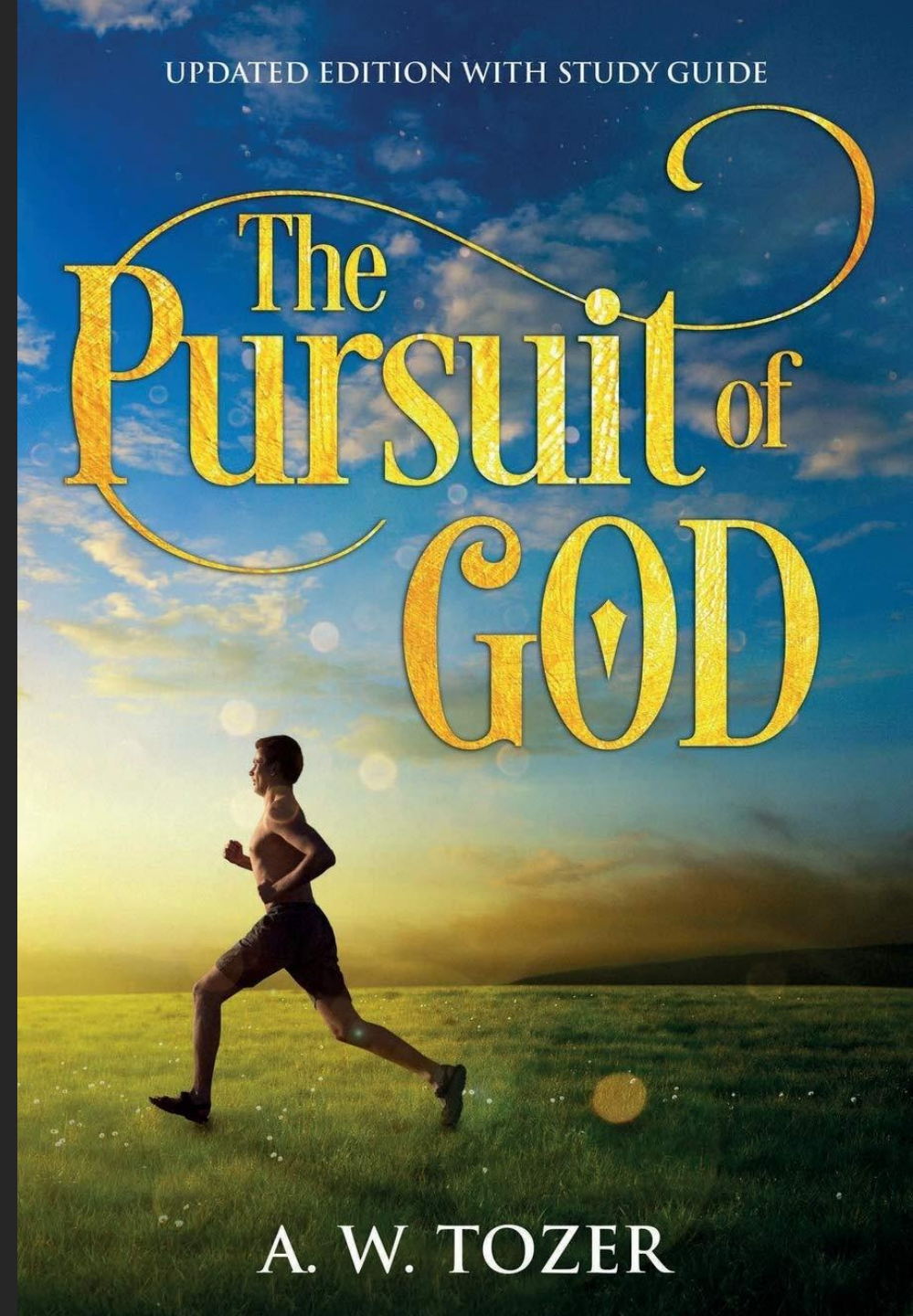
The Lord of the Rings (1950-1956)

- **Author:** J.R.R. Tolkien
 - English Philologist, professor, author
- **Summary:** An epic fantasy trilogy exploring themes of sacrifice, providence, and the battle between good and evil through Christian allegory and symbolism.
- **Quote:** "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."



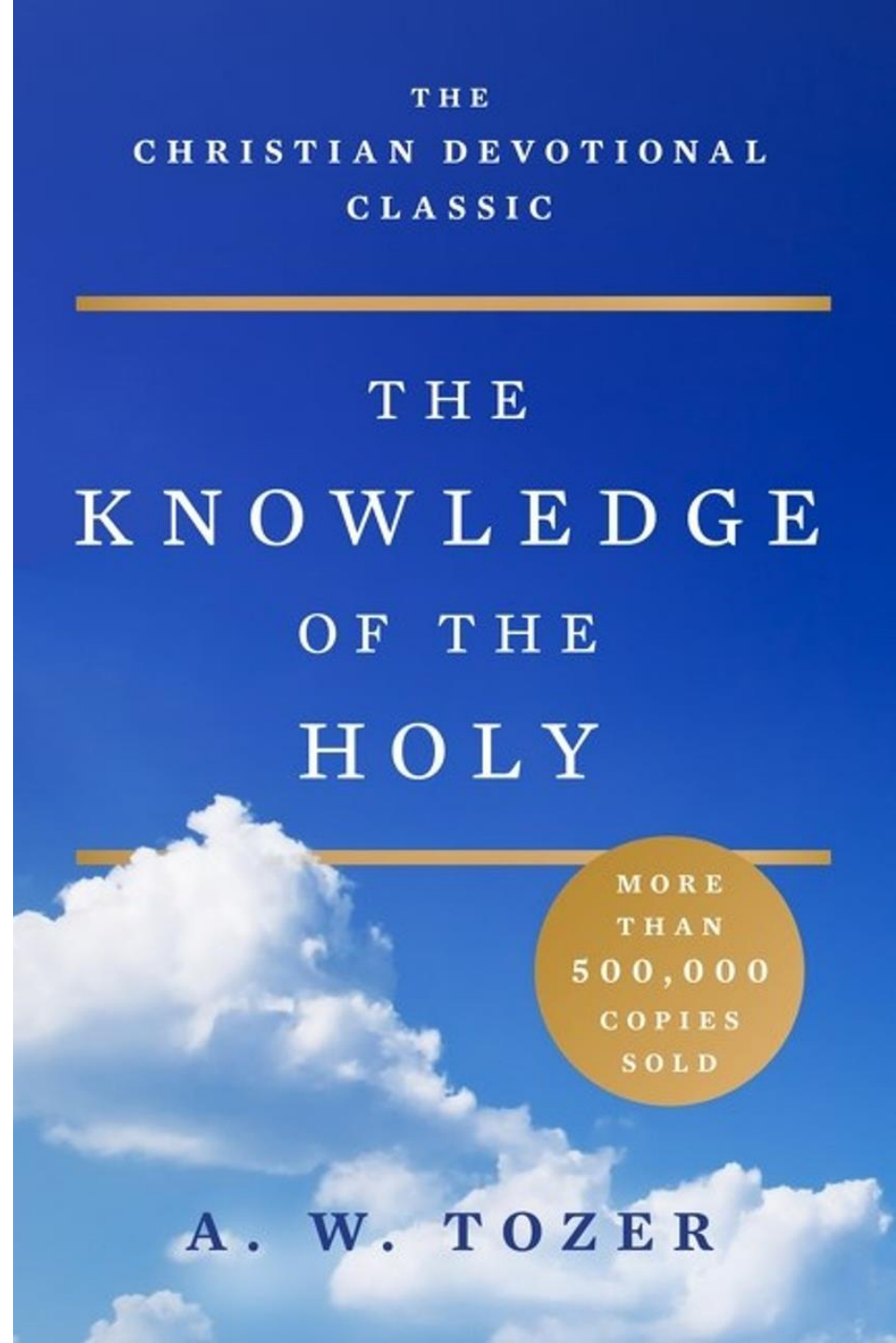
The Pursuit of God (1948)

- **Author:** A.W. Tozer
 - British-Canadian evangelical theologian
- **Summary:** A call to a deeper spiritual life and intimate relationship with God beyond mere religious observance.
- **Quote:** "God is looking for people through whom He can do the impossible."



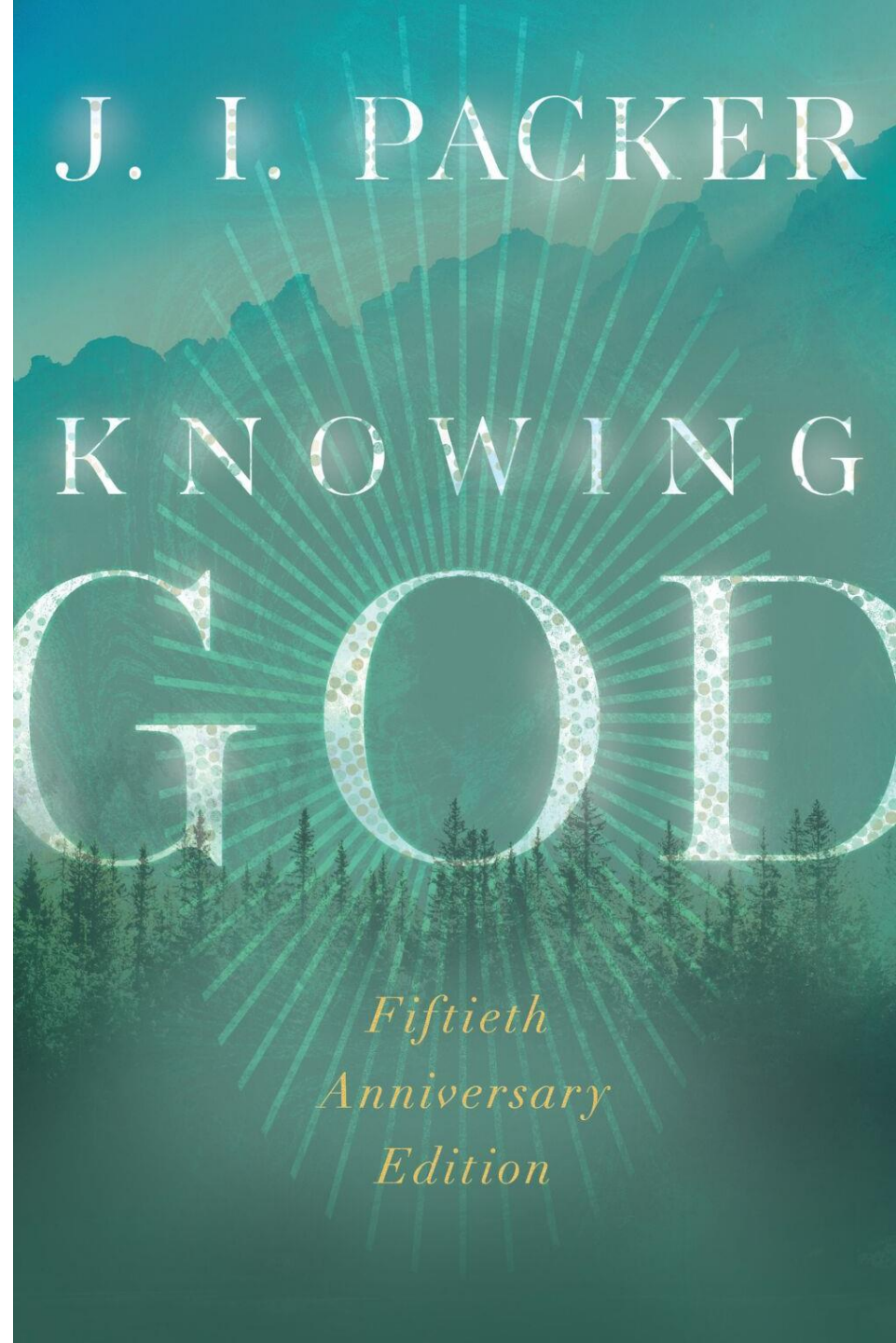
The Knowledge of the Holy (1961)

- **Author:** A.W. Tozer
- **Summary:** An exploration of God's attributes and the importance of having a proper understanding of God's character.
- **Quote:** "What we think about when we think about God is the most important thing about us."



Knowing God (1973)

- **Author:** J.I. Packer
 - British-Canadian evangelical theologian
- **Summary:** A theological and practical guide to understanding God's character and developing a personal relationship with Him.
- **Quote:** "We were made to know God, and until we know Him we are restless."



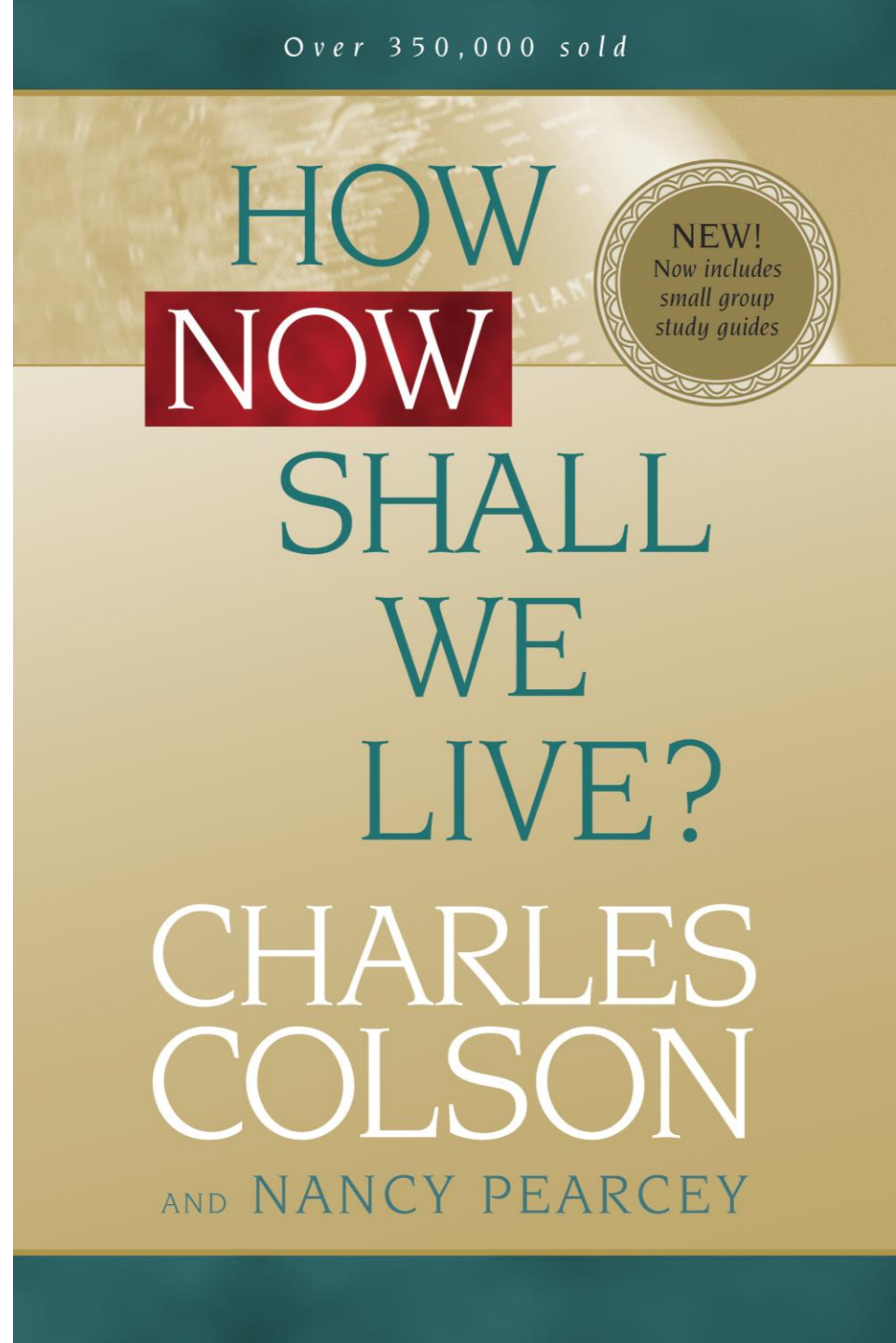
Contemporary Voices

2000s



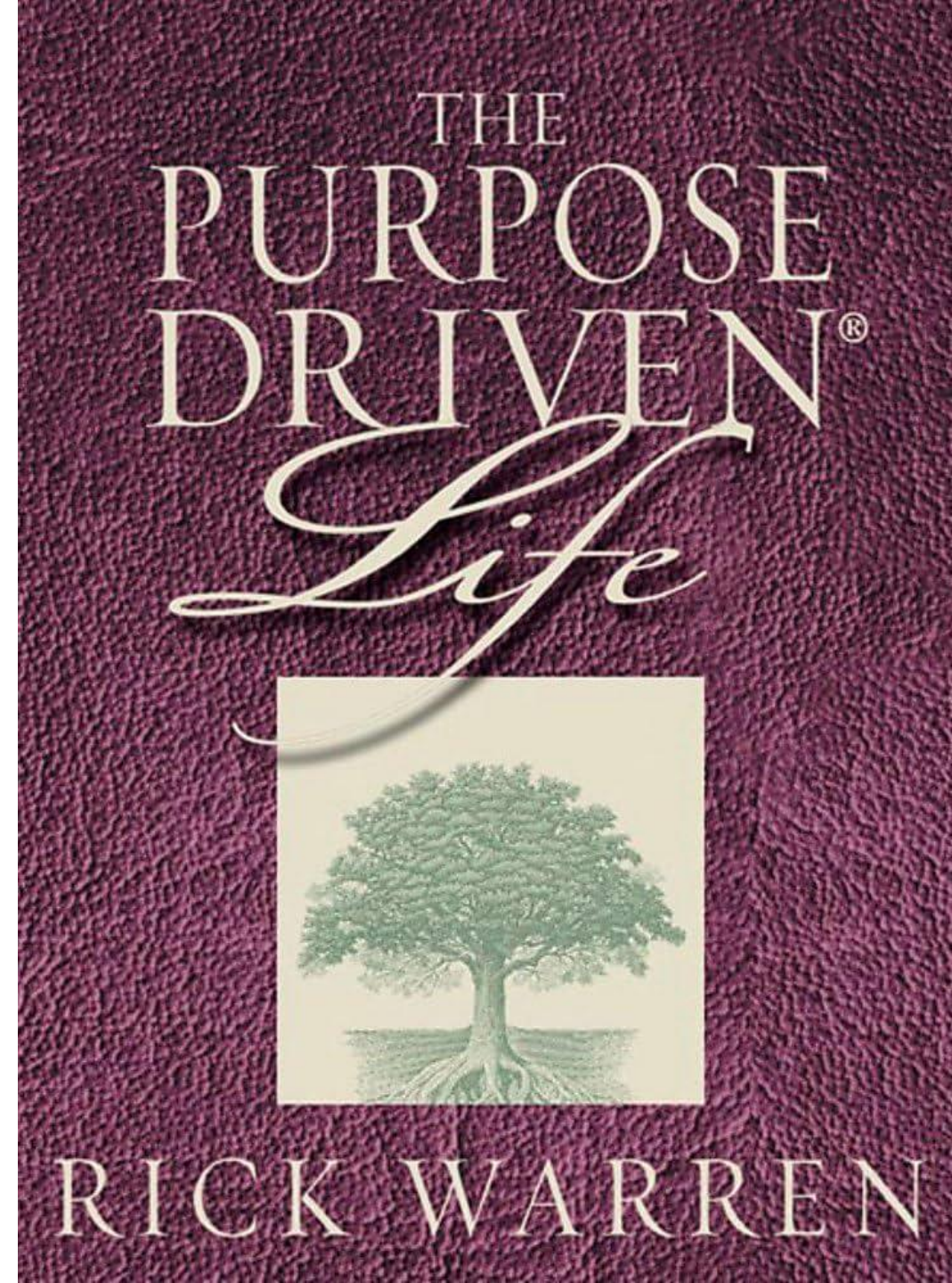
How Now Shall We Live (1999)

- **Author:** Chuck Colson
 - American attorney, political figure, and prison pastor
- **Summary:** A challenge to Christians to adopt a comprehensive biblical worldview, arguing that faith must shape every aspect of life—from politics to culture to personal ethics—in contrast to the secularism of modern society.
- **Quote:** "The church's singular failure in recent decades has been the failure to see Christianity as a life system, or worldview, that governs every area of existence."



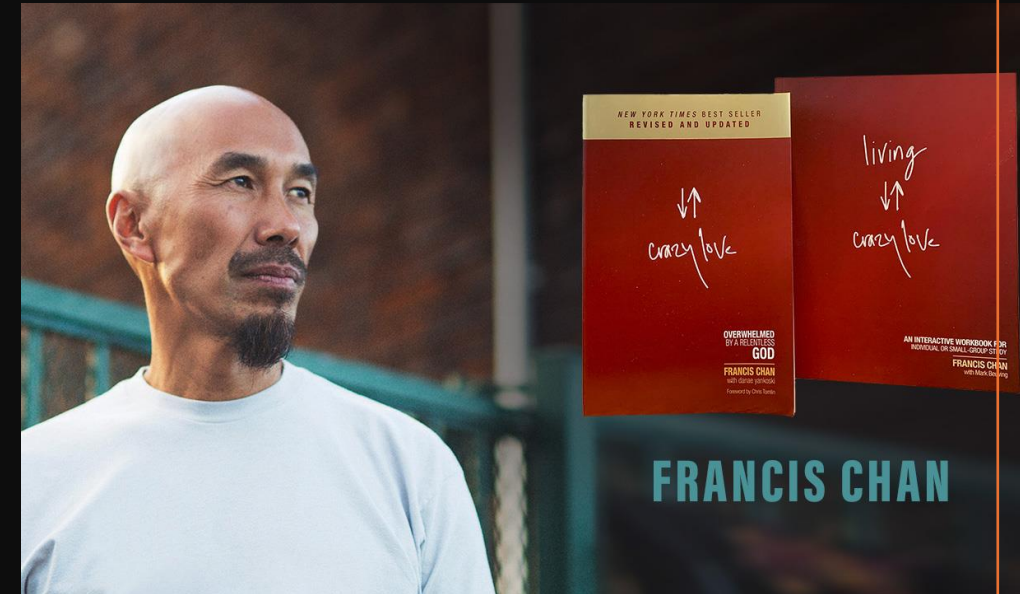
The Purpose Driven Life (2002)

- **Author:** Rick Warren
 - American evangelical pastor
- **Summary:** A 40-day spiritual journey exploring God's five purposes for human life: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission.
- **Quote:** "It's not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment."



Crazy Love (2008)

- **Author:** Francis Chan
 - American evangelical pastor and author
- **Summary:** A challenge to experience God's overwhelming love and respond with radical, wholehearted devotion rather than lukewarm faith.
- **Quote:** "Our greatest fear should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don't really matter."



Radical (2010)

-
- **Author:** David Platt
 - American, Southern Baptist pastor
 - **Summary:** A call to abandon comfortable Christianity and embrace the radical demands of following Jesus in a world of urgent spiritual and physical needs.
 - **Quote:** "We are settling for a Christianity that revolves around catering to ourselves when the central message of Christianity is actually about abandoning ourselves."

challenges Christians to wake up, trade in false values rooted in the American dream, and embrace a faith that each of us is blessed by God for a global purpose...This is a must-read for every Christian.

—WESS STAFFORD, president and CEO, Compassion International

TAKING BACK
YOUR FAITH
FROM THE
AMERICAN DREAM

R A D I C A L



DAVID
PLATT

READ BY THE AUTHOR
UNABRIDGED

Twelve Unifying Themes

1. **The Foundation of Faith** - What we believe and why
2. **Knowing God's Character** - His attributes and nature
3. **Authentic Conversion** - What real faith looks like
4. **The Cost of Discipleship** - Following Christ isn't easy
5. **Pursuing God's Presence** - Intimacy with the Divine
6. **Spiritual Warfare** - The battle for our souls
7. **Defending the Faith** - Christianity makes sense
8. **Engaging the World** - Faith and public life
9. **The Pilgrim's Journey** - Life as movement toward God
10. **Faith, Reason, and Wonder** - Christianity appeals to the whole person
11. **Life's Purpose** - Why are we here?
12. **The Unity of Truth** - How it all fits together

Great Christian Literature Course Schedule

Woodlawn Christian Church - Fellowship in Christ Class

Week	Date	Theme	Description	Texts		
1	July 13	The Foundation of Faith	Explore how the Reformation's call back to Scripture laid the groundwork for returning to biblical simplicity.	<i>Luther's 95 Theses</i>	<i>Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion</i>	<i>Campbell's The Christian System</i>
2	July 20	Knowing the Character of God	Discover God's attributes through three different eras showing He is both knowable and beyond full comprehension.	<i>Tozer's The Knowledge of the Holy</i>	<i>Packer's Knowing God</i>	<i>Aquinas' Summa Theologica (selections)</i>
3	July 27	The Journey of Conversion and Confession	Examine authentic spiritual experience from autobiography's father to America's greatest theologian.	<i>Augustine's Confessions</i>	<i>Edwards' Religious Affections</i>	
4	Aug. 3	The Cost of True Discipleship	Challenge comfortable Christianity through voices that demand everything in following Christ.	<i>Bonhoeffer's The Cost of Discipleship</i>	<i>Platt's Radical</i>	<i>Chan's Crazy Love</i>
5	Aug. 10	The Pursuit of God's Presence	Discover that God desires intimate fellowship with ordinary believers across three centuries of seeking.	<i>Tozer's The Pursuit of God</i>	<i>Brother Lawrence's The Practice of the Presence of God</i>	<i>Thomas à Kempis' The Imitation of Christ</i>
6	Aug. 17	The Reality of Spiritual Warfare	Explore the spiritual battle for human souls through wit and fire-and-brimstone warnings.	<i>Lewis' The Screwtape Letters</i>	<i>Edwards' Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God</i>	
7	Aug. 24	Defending the Faith	Witness the golden age of Christian apologetics demonstrating Christianity's intellectual credibility.	<i>Chesterton's Orthodoxy</i>	<i>Chesterton's The Everlasting Man</i>	<i>Lewis' Mere Christianity</i>
8	Aug. 31	The Christian Worldview and Society	Understand how Christians should engage the world through voices from Rome's fall to modernity's rise.	<i>Augustine's The City of God</i>	<i>Chesterton's Orthodoxy (selections)</i>	<i>Colson's How Now Shall We Live</i>
9	Sept. 7	The Pilgrim's Journey	Experience the Christian life as a journey toward God through cosmic vision, everyman allegory, and practical action.	<i>Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress</i>	<i>Dante's Divine Comedy (selections)</i>	<i>Sheldon's In His Steps</i>
10	Sept. 14	Faith, Reason, and Wonder	See how Christianity engages both mind and imagination through rational foundation and imaginative power.	<i>Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia (selections)</i>	<i>Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings (selections)</i>	<i>Aquinas' Summa Theologica (selections)</i>
11	Sept. 21	Purpose and Meaning in Life	Compare contemporary approaches to purpose with insights from earlier authors on life's fundamental question.	<i>Warren's The Purpose Driven Life</i>	<i>Selections from various authors</i>	
12	Sept. 28	The Unity of Christian Truth	Demonstrate the remarkable unity of Christian truth across 1,600 years of faithful witnesses.	<i>Synthesis of major themes</i>	<i>Brief readings from multiple authors</i>	