

## **BUILDING UP THE MIND OF THE METHODIST**

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I am under the impression that Methodism is a religion of head, heart, and hand. We use our head to study scripture, tradition, experience and use our reason to come to a knowledge of God's word and grace reflected in the saving work of God in Jesus Christ. This knowledge transforms our hearts and moves and empowers us to use our hands to do God's work in the world. The problem is that in today's world, there are a multitude of voices from secular and competing religious sources vying for our attention and allegiance. If our minds are not prepared, these sources can sow confusion and doubt, which can lead to indifference to the Christian life or even non-belief.

In my church, the Adult Education committee has been wrestling with this issue and trying to come up with a plan to deal with it. We are searching for a way to build up the minds of the Methodists among us, so that they can effectively and knowledgeably sort out the competing world views and fortify their Christian faith. We have concluded that there is no easy way to properly prepare adults (or our youth for that matter) without extensive study and training preferably in a small group setting. They would need to develop a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith, Bible and Christian theology and history, comparative religion and apologetics, and Christian worldview and ethics. Such a program would require a year or more and, our adults are too busy with their lives and responsibilities to be able to commit and devote to such an extensive small group study. The next best thing is to provide a recommended reading program in which an adult could undertake in their own time and at their own pace. Toward this goal, we have formulated a 10 topic reading program which should go a long way to build up the mind of any Methodist. It is presented below. We recommend that anyone who undertakes this program read at least one book, but preferably 2 from each topic in the order from 1 to 10. Such a program could be completed in a year, but more modestly over a two year period.

In order to enhance our ability to proclaim and defend the Christian faith in today's world, we need to empower our minds. Hopefully, the suggested program here will help many Methodists to work toward this goal.

### **1 Introduction of the Christian Faith**

- **Beginnings, An Introduction to Christian Faith, Andy Langford, Mark Ralls**  
*This introduction to Christian faith, which is part of a small group curriculum, provides a spiritual journey for seekers, new believers, and longtime Christians who want to explore the basics of Christianity in a relaxed, nurturing environment.*
- **Questions of Life, A Practical Introduction to the Christian Faith, Nicky Gumbel**  
*This book, which is part of the Alpha series curriculum, has helped a multitude of men and women around the world to find answers to the most compelling questions of life: What is the purpose of life? What happens when we die? Why did Jesus have to die? What relevance does the Bible have for our lives today? In it, the author points the way to an authentic Christianity that is exciting and relevant to today's world.*

### **2 Bible Overview**

- **Understanding the Bible, John Stott**  
*This foundational introduction to the Bible gives an essential grasp of the Bible's message in the context of its geographical, historical, and ancient Jewish religious settings. More importantly, it enlarges our vision of Christ by revealing him as the focal point of the entire Bible.*
- **Knowing the Bible 101: A Guide to God's Word in Plain Language, Bruce Bickel, Stan Jantz**  
*This book provides easy-to-understand explanations about facets of the Christian walk in a style that invites believers and seekers to discover God, His Word, and His promises for daily living. At the same*

time it offers a memorable and manageable approach to understanding God's written message with a fresh contemporary perspective.

### 3 Christian Theology Basics

- **Basic Christianity, John Stott**

*This book is listed among Christianity Today's Top 100 Books of the 20th Century, Basic Christianity has had huge impact on countless readers worldwide over the past fifty years. This special new edition continues the Stott legacy. The author presents a compelling study that first defends the basic claims of Christianity and then defines the proper outworkings of those main beliefs in the daily lives of believers. The book is a sound, sensible guide for all who are seeking an intellectually satisfying presentation of the Christian faith.*

- **Christianity 101, Your Guide to Eight Basic Christian Beliefs, Gilbert Bilezikian**

*This book bridges the gap between biblical scholarship and people who want to understand the Christian faith, and presents the Christian theology in vibrant, dynamic language designed to communicate biblical truths to contemporary believers. It presents eight basic doctrines of Christianity---the Bible, God, Christ, Holy Spirit, Human Beings, Redemption, The Church, and The Last Things---in clear, simple language that gives seasoned Christians a fresh understanding of the Bible and its teachings and puts new Christians on familiar terms with Christian doctrine.*

### 4 Christian Discipleship

- **Wesleyan Essentials in a Multicultural Society, Ted Campbell, Michael Burns**

*This book will help readers understand United Methodist beliefs and tradition and what it means to function as a Christian in the context of a multi-cultural society. It covers the Wesleyan essentials of original sin, the saving work of Christ, atonement, resurrection, salvation by grace through faith, trinity, prevenient grace, sanctifying grace, doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and living a transformed life.*

- **Beginnings, The Spiritual Life, Andy Langford, Mark Ralls**

*This book, which is part of a small group curriculum, explores spiritual "habits of the heart," including centering, loving, serving, questioning, and engaging.*

### 5 Christian History

- **The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders Religion, Rodney Stark**

*This book addresses the question of how a tiny messianic movement of the edge of the Roman Empire became the dominant faith of Western civilization. In a book that addresses beliefs as well as historical facts, the author brings a sociologist's perspective to bear on the puzzle behind the success of early Christianity. He provides a wealth of historical evidence on many issues--such as the social background of converts, the mission to the Jews, the status of women in the church, the role of martyrdom--to provide a vivid and unconventional picture of early Christianity.*

- **Christianity on Trial, Arguments Against Anti-Religious Bigotry, Vincent Carroll, David Shiflett**

*In this book, the authors show how in fact the Christian tradition has not only injected morality into our political order, but softened brutal practices and confining superstitions, created the foundation for intellectual inquiry, and cultivated the charitable impulse. In the end, they challenge readers to reevaluate the role of Christianity not only as a source of consolation but of enlightenment and human liberation as well.*

### 6 Comparative Religion

- **Christianity's Family Tree: What Other Christians Believe and Why, Adam Hamilton**

*In this book, the author presents a welcoming, inspiring vision of eight Christian denominations and faith traditions. Comparing the Christian family to our own extended families, he contends that each denomination has a unique, valuable perspective to offer on the Christian faith. The traditions he*

examines are Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, Anglicanism, Baptists, Pentecostalism, and Methodism.

- **Christianity and World Religions: Wrestling with Questions People Ask, Adam Hamilton**

*This book, which is also part of a small group curriculum, explores four major world religions- Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism – and compares the beliefs of each with those of Christianity. It deals openly and honestly with questions people ask about other religions, including why we should believe the claims of Christianity over those of other faiths.*

## **7 United Methodism**

- **Why I am a United Methodist, William Willimon**

*In this book, the author examines United Methodism and the ways it has made and continues to make a difference in his life. In an inspiring and enlightening way, he writes of his pride in being part of a church that has grown from one man's experience to a worldwide movement covering the globe with its message. The book is structured to address: religion is of the heart; the Bible is our book; religion is practical; Christians are to witness; Christians are to grow ; and religion is not a private affair*

- **A Way of Life in the World, Spiritual Practices for United Methodists, Kenneth Carter**

*In this book, the author addresses the question "What does it mean to be a United Methodist?" His answer is to live a particular way of life and follow a particular form of discipleship. The distinctive aspects of that way of discipleship are contained in what has recently come to be known as "the practices." Christian practices are things done together, over time, in response to God's grace. The author contends that there are 6 essential practices in the United Methodist tradition: (1) searching the scriptures, (2) generosity with the poor, (3) testimony, (4) singing, (5) Holy Communion, and (6) Christian conferencing.*

## **8 Why Believe (Christian Apologetics)**

- **Reason for Faith in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller**

*In this book, the author responds to the questions of open skeptics and ardent believers. he draws from literature, philosophy, reason, and real-life conversations to explain how faith in a Christian God is a soundly rational belief. Some specific questions, he addresses: How could a loving God send people to hell? Why does he allow suffering? Can one religion be "right" and the others "wrong"?*

- **What's So Great about Christianity, Dinesh D'Souza**

*In this book, the author challenges the assumptions of believers and skeptics alike, and other leading critics of the church to show how Christianity is at home with science and philosophy---and how it can offer lasting happiness in a disillusioned world.*

## **9 Evangelism**

- **Witness, Learning to Share Your Christian Faith, Ron Crandall**

*This book, which is part of a small group curriculum, guides a person to learn more about their faith and to speak invitationally with others about beliefs. It will help one identify their gifts for ministry and learn to witness to others in a natural and effective way.*

- **Transforming Evangelism, The Wesleyan Way of Sharing Faith, Henry Knight**

*This book expounds on John Wesley's ideas about evangelism. The key to Wesley's way of sharing the faith is to relate to others in love, compassion and gratitude for God's divine grace.. A true transformative act of evangelism is R.E.L.A.T.I.O.N.A.L.: Renewal; Enter; Listening; Acceptance; Testimony; Inviting; On-Going; New Beings; Assurance; Live-It. As Christians, we are not to keep the gift we receive through evangelism; we are to live out what we learn in community and study, by inviting others into this grace. Finally, the authors express that evangelism should not be viewed as an ugly word or act that most fear to live out, but as a way for one friend in Christ to welcome another friend in Christ to the faith.*

## 10 Christian World View

- **Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White, Thoughts on Religion, Morality, and Politics, Adam Hamilton**

*In this book, the author challenges thinking persons of faith to model for the rest of the country a richer, more thoughtful conversation on the political, moral, and religious issues that divide us. He encourages readers to reject the easy assumptions and sloppy analysis of black and white thinking, seeking instead the truth that resides on all sides of the issues, and offering a faithful and compassionate way forward. In the end, he invites those who resonate with his thinking to join the movement to pursue a middle way between the left and the right - to make their voices heard - and to model for our nation and for the church, how one can listen, learn, see truth as multi-sided, and love those with whom we disagree."*

- **God and Government : An Insider's View on the Boundaries Between Faith & Politics, Chuck Colson**

*This book is a must-read for people interested in politics and the relationship between church and state. In it, the author addresses the question, "What do the Bible and history say about the proper relationship between faith and culture?"*