

10 books worth the return visit

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Last week [our new hosted blogger](#), Drew Hart, [took up a challenge](#) to name “10 books that have ‘stayed’ with me or have had a long lasting impact.” The week before Richard Lischer [lamented how readers often](#) “read too many books and return to too few.” As for the books worth revisiting, they’re those that “probe the heart or expand the reader’s vision.”

I got inspired to create a list of books that have stayed with me that I’ve also come back to because they’ve probed my heart and expanded my vision.

1. *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe. Achebe has educated me at several points in my life on the entanglement of Christianity and colonialism, as well as the dangers of glorifying any culture.
2. The Westmark trilogy, by Lloyd Alexander. I’ve recommended these novels both to the teenagers they are aimed at and to colleagues working on moral injury. Amid adventure and romance, they describe a young man’s attempts to be an ethical person. He acts in ways he thought he was above doing, yet finds a way to live with himself and continue to strive toward the good.
3. *Another Country*, by James Baldwin. Baldwin offers an unflinching look at race, love, and friendship in the U.S.—and the way none of us can escape the effects of our history in our relationships.
4. *Sensual Orthodoxy*, by Debbie Blue. This collection of [Blue's](#) sermons was a Christmas present years back from CC associate editor Steve Thorngate. It started me on a journey of embracing the way the doctrine of incarnation affirms women, the body, and God-with-us (which, as many of us know, is not always the way it is taught and shared).
5. *I and Thou*, by Martin Buber. Buber’s ideas about dialogue and human relationships are so compelling that they’ve drawn me back, and continue to do so.

6. *The Long Loneliness*, by Dorothy Day. Day is the only person I've never met whom I consider a hero—and, [yes, a saint by some definitions](#).
7. *Les Misérables*, by Victor Hugo. Hugo tells as moving a story as I've read about the power of grace and the potential for redemption in each of us.
8. *The Last Temptation of Christ*, by Nikos Kazantzakis. I first read this in a Lenten Bible study at my home church when I was in my early twenties (which tells you something about [my home church](#)). I later re-read it while writing a sermon on Judas' betrayal of Jesus—the imagined relationship between those two interested me more than the [controversy-generating one](#) between Jesus and Mary Magdalene.
9. *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, by Henri J.M. Nouwen. This may be the only book I've read two times within as many years. The insights Nouwen gleans from exploring each character in the story, and [Rembrandt's painting of the parable](#), were just what I needed for my first and third years of divinity school.
10. *Trauma Stewardship*, by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky with Connie Burk. This is my favorite book on pastoral care, yet it isn't just for pastors. Rather, [it's for all those](#) who through their work are exposed to pain and brokenness in the world, including that of the earth itself.

One of the things that surprised me as I finished this list was that it is half fiction. Maybe it's that I love the power of a good story, which seems fitting for a journalist and chaplain.