



CBF Peer Learning Groups

Resource list with annotated bibliography:

The [Enneagram](#) is an ancient tool for helping us better see ourselves as God sees us, with all of our potential, tendencies, and temptations. The self-awareness it offers opens us up to opportunities for spiritual transformation. If you are looking for a good introduction to the Enneagram, check out [The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery](#). Written by Ian Morgan Cron (an Episcopal priest) and Suzanne Stabile (an Enneagram master), this book breaks down the nine Enneagram types and the nuances within them, making the reading fun with lots of stories and humor.

This book would be a great read for your PLG, as your members could discover their types, identify the implications for ministry, and hold one another accountable for growth goals. This book would also work well as a small group study in your setting or as an aspect of leadership training.

In [Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved](#), Duke Divinity School professor Kate Bowler takes on our need to make faith a math equation. Bowler is known for her research on the prosperity gospel, an approach to life that says the most spiritual people will be rewarded with health and wealth. She did not recognize her own affinity with this outlook until a cancer diagnosis exploded her world. A young mother and emerging scholar burdened with an incurable, stage 4 disease, Bowler was forced to realize how forcefully she had drawn a line connecting right belief, right practice, and a good life and how inexplicably senseless some circumstances are.

Many people - clergy and lay – wrestle with the question of why bad things happen to good people. This book walks readers through a lived account of examining this dilemma from the point of view of a person of faith and an academic. It would provide good fodder for discussion in your PLG or a small group in your ministry setting, and it might also give helpful background for a sermon series.

Published in January, [Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible](#) is the newest go-to resource for ministry with children ages 4-8. Edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell (author, curriculum consultant, and adjunct faculty member at Vanderbilt Divinity School) and Carol A. Wehrheim (author, curriculum consultant, and lay leader in a Presbyterian congregation), this volume offers 150 Bible stories with engaging, culturally-accurate illustrations organized by 13 themes. Each story ends with developmentally-appropriate questions that allow children to connect more deeply to the scripture and apply it to their lives. This story Bible draws from the passages traditionally emphasized in children's ministry and adds in many lesser-known characters and their accounts as well. The elimination of pronouns for God (handled in an unobtrusive way), the greater focus on women than many story Bibles offer, and the inclusion and deft handling of such difficult passages as the binding of Isaac set this volume apart from most children's Bibles. This resource is great for church use – e.g., Sunday School, children's messages – and home

devotional use. It could also be very helpful for sermon study as a way to think through the proclamation of the Word in ways that children can grasp.

The traditional time of year for stewardship campaigns will be here before you know it. Are you looking for a fresh approach? Or is your church ready to make the shift toward year-round stewardship? If your answer to either of these questions is yes, check out [*Drawing on Holy Currencies: Awesome, Amazing, and Animated Activities for Stewardship*](#). Prolific author and Episcopal priest Eric H. W. Law has partnered up with his nephew Dave Law to publish a graphic interactive book with pictures to color, spaces in which to draw and write, questions, invitations, songs, meditations, and more for readers to engage over the course of 52 weekly openings. In a year's time readers will experience and develop 6 holy currencies – gracious leadership, relationship, truth, wellness, money, and time and place – for their personal lives and for their church and neighborhood communities. Chalice Press has also published accompanying volumes [*Holy Currencies: 6 Blessings for Sustainable Missional Ministries*](#) and [*Holy Currency Exchange: 101 Stories, Songs, Actions, and Visions for Missional and Sustainable Ministries*](#). Check out one or all of these resources with your PLG or your leadership team for use in your ministry setting.

Are you considering initiating significant shifts in your church? [*Farming Church: Cultivating Adaptive Change in Congregations*](#) by Mark Tidsworth includes a readiness indicator that can help you determine the church's openness to making moves and seven key cultivations for preparing the soil for fruitful change. This book would be a great subject of PLG conversation as well as a useful tool to use with congregational leaders.

In addition to *Farming Church*, Mark Tidsworth and his colleagues at Pinnacle Leadership Associates have published other volumes about adaptive change and offer regular webinars and helpful thoughts about ministry on the [Pinnacle website](#). Note as well that CBF of South Carolina is hosting a day-long Farming Church conversation with Mark Tidsworth on September 6 in Spartanburg. You can find more information on the event and register [here](#).

Sometimes it all seems like too much: personal exhaustion, congregational lethargy, the weight of a world in turmoil. As ministers we must keep showing up, but how? In [*The Age of Overwhelm: Strategies for the Long Haul*](#), trauma stewardship expert Laura van Dernoot Lipsky defines "overwhelm" and names its many insidious causes. She then helps the reader learn to be curious, focus on what is within the reader's control, and be intentional about both creating proactive plans and responding in the moment to stress. Throughout the book she guides the reader toward flourishing and away from distraction, disconnect, unhealthy attachment, and depletion.

Full of stories and cartoons as well as practical advice, this book would be a great read for your peer learning group. If your ministry setting is in the middle of or just beyond a trauma, this could also be a useful tool with your lay leaders.

[*We Pray With Her: Encouragement for All Women Who Lead*](#) is a new release from Abingdon Press. Within its pages you will find prayers and devotions sifted into five sections: call, struggle, courage, resistance, and persistence. The pieces were written by more than 70 United Methodist clergywomen under the age of 40, and as such it contains topics not covered by most prayer and devotional books, including a “prayer for when someone asks, again, why you don’t have children,” a “prayer for when bedtime with children is stressful,” a “prayer for the courage to speak out against misconduct,” and a “prayer for postpartum mental illness.”

This book would be a great source of support and conversation starter for women and a peek inside a female perspective for men. You could use it in your PLG, employ the prayers (with credit, of course!) in worship, or gift it to the women in your life.

In her book [*Holy Clarity: The Practice of Planning and Evaluation*](#), Rev. Dr. Sarah Drummond explores developing and assessing ministry initiatives. Many congregations are hesitant to evaluate their ministries, often out of fear of what they’ll discover or because they are not sure how to go about this essential work. Drummond, Dean of Andover Newton Theological School and Visiting Professor of Ministerial Leadership at Yale Divinity School, provides tools for analysis and helps readers think about how to build checkpoints into new ministries. All the while she makes a case for evaluation as spiritual practice.

This book would be excellent material for discussion in your peer learning group as members think about current or potential ministry initiatives or for use with lay leaders, particularly at the start of a fresh calendar.

[Austin Channing Brown](#) is a leading new voice on racial justice, and she works with nonprofits, churches, and universities for the advancement of racial justice and reconciliation. Last year she published her first book, [*I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a Work Made for Whiteness*](#). In it she recalls her growing-up years and describes her professional life in majority-white schools, churches, and organizations. The book lays out the microaggressions she has encountered in these spheres and their cumulative effects, and Brown talks about the inner work it has taken to learn to love her blackness in a world that sets whiteness up as the standard.

This book is a fantastic introduction to the everyday ways that systemic racism impacts people of color. It would be an excellent read for your PLG, for small groups in your ministry setting, and potentially for entire congregations – especially majority-white congregations as the Church enters a season of repentance.

You’ve watched TED talks. You’ve marveled at how compelling the speakers are. You’ve wondered how you can draw in your hearers that effectively. In his book [*TED Talks: The Official TED Guide to Public Speaking*](#), head of TED Chris Anderson breaks down every aspect of a powerful talk. He covers how to hone in on a throughline, decide on a tone, construct a talk from an interesting opening through a call to

action, select visuals, decide how scripted to be and why, prepare for the actual delivery of the talk, deal with nerves, and choose clothes and accessories that don't distract from your message.

This would be a great book to read with your PLG to think about ways to increase the impact of your preaching. Your PLG could then provide safe space for experimenting with some modifications, and group members could hold one another accountable for trying some of these changes in the pulpit.

Deacons are the go-to lay leaders in most Baptist churches. It's not uncommon, though, for deacons to be unsure exactly what their role consists of and where to find the tools to live out that role. Noting those uncertainties across many congregations, Elizabeth Allen and former CBF executive coordinator Daniel Vestal have edited a volume to equip deacons for their essential ministry. [*Exemplars: Deacons as Servant and Spiritual Leaders*](#) offers readers a primer on whom deacons need to be (in touch with their own and others' belovedness), what deacons need to know (some basic church history and lenses for theological interpretation of scripture), and what deacons need to do (practice private prayer and public worship and give of their resources to the church). Each brief chapter concludes with questions for individual and group reflection. This book could be the basis for discussion in your PLG about actual and hoped-for deacon leadership in each minister's setting and/or a guide for deepening the leadership within each pastor's deacon board.

If you are struggling to understand the cultural landscape and its impact on the church, pick up [*The End of White Christian America*](#) by Robert P. Jones. In it Jones, the founder and CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute, defines White Christian America and uses statistics to show how its composition has changed drastically over the past 50+ years. He reflects on the ways that the intermingling of church and politics, changing (or in some cases, doubling down on) opinions around LGBTQ inclusion and gay marriage, and the diversifying population within the church and the country at large have impacted the numbers. And while he eulogizes White Christian America and the nostalgia for it, he offers the clarity needed for the church to move forward with authenticity, faithfulness, and energy.

This would be a great discussion centerpiece for your PLG. Your members might reflect on where they see the statistics with-flesh-on and what they mean for how we do ministry in the 21st century.

If you are a public radio listener, you might be familiar with journalist Krista Tippett's [*On Being*](#) interviews with artists, scientists, faith leaders, activists, and many other kinds of influencers. In her work she seeks to expand listeners' language, our curiosity, and our hospitality, which she defines as inviting people to bring their best selves into the room. She encourages us to love the questions that do not yet have answers, and this risk-taking is what a fractured world needs if the different sides are ever to relate to one another. In [*Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living*](#), Tippett shares in writing some of what she has learned about the humility, vulnerability, and generosity of spirit that embolden us to embrace hard, holy mystery.

This book would be a good basis for discussion in your PLG, in small groups in your ministry setting, or as fodder for a sermon series.

In [Holy Envy](#), beloved author and Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor recounts her evolving understanding of and relationship with faith traditions beyond her own as she teaches college students in the Blue Ridge Mountains. As professor for an introductory course on world religions, she seeks out people who connect with the Divine in different ways and experiences faith through their eyes and from the vantage points of her students.

As Amazon describes:

Troubled and inspired by what she learns, Taylor returns to her own tradition for guidance, finding new meaning in old teachings that have too often been used to exclude religious strangers instead of embracing the divine challenges they present. Re-imagining some central stories from the religion she knows best, she takes heart in how often God chooses outsiders to teach insiders how out-of-bounds God really is.

Throughout *Holy Envy*, Taylor weaves together stories from the classroom with reflections on how her own spiritual journey has been complicated and renewed by connecting with people of other traditions—even those whose truths are quite different from hers. The one constant in her odyssey is the sense that God is the one calling her to disown her version of God—a change that ultimately enriches her faith in other human beings and in God.

This story of spiritual struggling and of deepening understanding would be an excellent grounding point for PLG conversation. It could also be used as a book study on a small or large scale within your ministry context.

This is an ideal time of year to pick up a copy of Diana Butler Bass' book [Grateful: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks](#). In it she cites a survey that four out of five people report feeling grateful on a regular basis. If that is the case, why aren't those feelings of positive regard spilling over into the public sphere? Much of that has to do with our differing understandings or what gratitude is. Butler Bass takes readers through the various dimensions of gratitude, using stories, humor, theology, and research to illuminate the gratitude gap and suggest ways to bridge it.

This book could be used in your PLG or ministry setting, and it could also provide the basis for a sermon series that ties in stewardship season, Thanksgiving, and other themes.

The Church as we now know it is in a liminal state; it isn't what it was, and it is not yet what it will become. (We don't even know at present what that future looks like!) So how do clergy lead when the Church as a whole is in flux at the same time that our ministry settings and sometimes our own vocations are changing? Susan Beaumont has been consulting with congregations and their leaders for over twenty years, and before that she worked in corporate America, in academia, and with non-profits. Even with all of this experience she became – in her words – “stymied” a few years ago when the tools she had always used were not stopping the decline of the churches who contracted with her. Furthermore, she noticed that churches were leaning more into the secular aspects of their organizational lives to the detriment of their spirituality.

In response to her own disquiet over these observations, Beaumont decided to develop her spiritual direction skills. In doing so, she realized a shift in call to serving as a spiritual director to whole organizations. Her book [*How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going: Leading in a Liminal Season*](#) is an effort to capture and disseminate more widely a focus on helping leaders ground themselves spiritually and tending the soul of the institution so that churches can deepen their discernment, shape their institutional memories in more useful ways, clarify their purpose, and find resolution. This book would be a great read for PLGs of pastors.

We've all experienced it, whether while we were giving the Children's Message, teaching Sunday School, working alongside young people on a mission project, or praying with our own kids at bedtime. With genuine compassion and curiosity, a child lays a complicated question on us that we stumble to address in the moment. Later we think of what we wish we'd said. Luckily, a group of clergywomen has compiled a brand-new volume entitled [*When Kids Ask Hard Questions: Faith-Filled Responses for Tough Topics*](#). Edited by Bromleigh McCleneghan (a United Methodist minister serving in a United Church of Christ congregation) and Karen Ware Jackson (a Presbyterian Church USA pastor), clergy from a range of denominations write about how to talk with children about bodies, relationships, grief, courage, faith, and money. Along the way the authors help readers reflect on how to create environments that invite and honor the honest queries of kids. This volume would be greatly beneficial for ministers, parents, and anyone else who interacts regularly with children.

Your church has gone through a visioning process. You've done all the educating and communicating needed for the changes to stick. And yet, all that good, hard work gets derailed. Why? In her book [*Dynamic Discernment: Reason, Emotion, and Power in Change*](#), Sarah Drummond explains how leaders must be aware of and work within three key areas – those named in her book's subtitle – during times of transition. She offers critical tools, social theory, and theological perspective to equip leaders for making organizational change within "pockets of possibility." This is a great read for your PLG – and possibly a must-read for your church staff.