

What to Read over the Holidays

15 Stanford business professors recommend books for those long winter nights.

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Read something memorable as you relax over the holidays. | iStock/Vladins

As you set up your out-of-office notifications and make plans for the upcoming holidays, be sure to update your reading list for those long plane rides or quiet evenings at home. To help flesh out your list, we asked several Stanford GSB professors to recommend the one book they hope to read — or reread — during the winter break. From obscure biographies to beloved fantasies to a 44-year-old rumination on the psychology of death, this list surprises with its range.

Jennifer Aaker, the General Atlantic Professor of Marketing

Engine of Impact: Essentials of Strategic Leadership in the Nonprofit Sector ↗, by William F. Meehan and Kim Starkey Jonker, 2017

“Meehan and Jonker provide a much-needed synthesis of the best strategic thinking among nonprofit leaders, and — perhaps more important — lay out a clear roadmap of how we can collectively align our interests and goals to achieve something bigger than ourselves. It is an imperative read right now.”

Anat Admati, the George G.C. Parker Professor of Finance and Economics

The Influential Mind: What the Brain Reveals About Our Power to Change Others ↗, by Tali Sharot, 2017

“Economists tend to think that beliefs and behavior are guided by incentives and rational processing of information, but I know that there is more to it than this simple model and that other disciplines have much to say. Neuroscience can provide useful insights — such as why economists believe and act on the basis of narrow and sometimes flawed models.”

David Broockman, assistant professor of political economy

Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson ↗, by Robert A. Caro, 2002

“An engaging and insightful volume chronicling how the most consequential president of the 20th century transformed the U.S. Senate as its majority leader while representing my native state of Texas.”

Glenn Carroll, the Laurence W. Lane Professor of Organizations

The Upstarts: How Uber, Airbnb, and the Killer Companies of the New Silicon Valley Are Changing the World ↗, by Brad Stone, 2017

“A fascinating inside look at the early days and scale-ups of Uber and Airbnb. Stone has great access.”

Darrell Duffie, the Dean Witter Distinguished Professor of Finance

The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain ↗, by Maria Rosa Menocal, 2002

“I chose this because this of my interest in history in general and in particular because of my curiosity about this time period in Spain, during which those practicing Islam, Christianity, and Judaism somehow managed to get along so well.”

Lindred L. Greer, associate professor of organizational behavior

Oathbringer: Book Three of the Stormlight Archive ↗, by Brandon Sanderson, 2017

“I love reading fantasy novels for their creative insights into alternative ways in which human societies and even interpersonal interactions can be structured. Brandon Sanderson is one of the best at creating unique, complex, thought-provoking worlds.”

Szu-chi Huang, associate professor of marketing

The Book of Separation: A Memoir ↗, by Tova Mirvis, 2017

“You can never go wrong with a book that has a famous mathematical constant in its title.”

— Stefanos Zenios

“This book is a memoir about a woman who left her religion, her upbringing, and her whole community behind in order to pursue her own truth and herself. I picked this book because I want to learn from her courage and compassion; with courage and compassion, we may be able to find a way to allow fundamentally different beliefs to coexist beautifully in one society.”

Jonathan Levin, Dean of Stanford GSB and the Philip H. Knight Professor

The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion ↗, by Jonathan Haidt, 2012

“Right now I'm reading *The Righteous Mind*, after hearing many enthusiastic recommendations. For winter break, I'm looking forward to reading Amor Towles' novel, *A Gentleman in Moscow* ↗, which I just received as a birthday present.”

Neil Malhotra, the Edith M. Cornell Professor of Political Economy

Why Did Europe Conquer the World? ↗ by Philip T. Hoffman, 2015

“I am fascinated by business and economic history. This book makes the provocative argument that Europe won the world not because of structural features like geography, but because internal competition forced it to develop advanced military capabilities.”

Margaret Neale, the Adams Distinguished Professor of Management

I Am Pilgrim ↗, by Terry Hayes, 2014

“It is an awesome and engaging thriller (that grabs the reader from the start) about a spy who wants to lead a ‘normal’ life. Lucky for us, he does not get his wish. Make sure you buy a hard copy of this work, as you will want to pass it along to your friends when you are done.”

Jeffrey Pfeffer, the Thomas D. Dee II Professor of Organizational Behavior

The Denial of Death ↗, by Ernest Becker, 1973

“It’s an old book that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1974. Social psychologists built terror-management theory on Becker’s insights: ‘The basic motivation for human behavior is our biological need to control our basic anxiety, to deny the terror of death.’ Out of this comes narcissism, heroics (both false and real), and many artifacts of contemporary culture and life.”

Paul Pfleiderer, the C.O.G. Miller Distinguished Professor of Finance

The Infidel and the Professor: David Hume, Adam Smith, and the Friendship That Shaped Modern Thought ↗, by Dennis C. Rasmussen, 2017

“Rasmussen recounts the 27-year intellectual friendship that developed between Hume (the infidel) and Smith (the professor), much of which is revealed by letters that Hume wrote to Smith. Smith, while generally known as the first ‘modern’ economist, contributed much to philosophy and in his Theory of Moral Sentiments built on many of Hume’s ideas. At the same time, Rasmussen shows that a fair amount of Smith’s thinking about economics was influenced by Hume. This is a story of two lives intertwined and well lived.”

Sarah Soule, the Morgridge Professor of Organizational Behavior

Cutting for Stone ↗, by Abraham Verghese, 2009

“I want to reread this book, not only because it’s beautifully written and the plot is so compelling, but also because I work with Abraham on our Innovative Health Care Leader program. I look forward to rereading the book now that I know the author well and have had the unbelievable opportunity to hear him speak so passionately about his work.”

V. “Seenu” Srinivasan, the Adams Distinguished Professor of Management, Emeritus

Astrophysics for People in a Hurry ↗, by Neil deGrasse Tyson, 2017

“I think it is wonderful to learn a bit more about the cosmos. I enjoyed reading it on a long flight from the U.S. to India.”

Stefanos Zenios, the Investment Group of Santa Barbara Professor of Entrepreneurship and Professor of Operations, Information & Technology

Life of Pi ↗, by Yann Martel, 2001

“Present from my daughter for Father’s Day. Great book about resilience and finding peace in the midst of adversity. You can never go wrong with a book that has a famous mathematical constant in its title.”

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