Hello Ninja by N. D. Wilson. An imaginative young “ninja” prances and hops through this bedtime romp that will delight older siblings as much as it will please younger kids. A good title for new readers to read to a younger sibling.

A Light for My Path by Carman and Ratterree. God’s Word is affectionately described with adjectives in alphabetical order, accompanied with nature drawings. A beautiful tribute to Psalm 119 in the form of an ABC book.

Christmas Is Here by Lauren Castillo. A sweet retelling of the Christmas story using the text of Luke 2 and a contemporary family’s visit to a live nativity scene. Read our review here.

Three Bears in a Boat by David Soman. Three bear siblings set off across the sea on a quest to replace their mother’s beautiful seashell that they broke in this sweet tale of teamwork, sibling love, and forgiveness.

Flora and the Penguin by Molly Idle. A soft palette, occasional flaps to lift, and wordless storytelling combine in this picture book to tell an endearing story of friendship, creativity, teamwork, and wintry fun. (Companion to author’s 2014 Caldecott Honor-winning Flora and the Flamingo)

Mama Built a Little Nest by Jennifer Ward and illustrated by Steve Jenkins. A bedtime book that looks at the variety of nests and homes for many different birds through rhyming text and colorful collage art before settling down in the “nest” of a child: his or her bed. Note: This can double as a nonfiction text due to the extra information on each bird included. Read our review here.

Tea with Grandpa by Barney Salzburg. Ideal for grandparents who want to maintain a relationship with grandchildren who live far away (especially those who have some technological savvy).

Choo Choo by Virginia Lee Burton. Choo Choo the engine decides to run away and causes all kinds of trouble before he is brought back by those who really care for him. Illustrated in charcoal, this is rather different than Burton’s other classics, but great for any child who loves trains.

Jesus Is Most Special by Sally Michael. Using Scripture verses, key words, and a simple explanation, this is a nicely written and illustrated book designed for young children to learn to tell the story of the coming of Jesus Christ to others. (Watch for our GIVEAWAY of a copy the first week of December!)
• **A Library Book for Bear (Bear and Mouse)** by Becker. Really, who needs more than seven books anyway? Certainly not Bear, even though his friend Mouse drags him to the library, where he is faced with an extravagant excess of books. But he had promised to go.

**AGES 4-8 GIFT PICKS (by Betsy)**

**Picture Books (3)**

• **(BOTB) Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel** by Virginia Lee Burton. Mike Mulligan and his trusty steam shovel, Mary Anne, are 75 years old this year! It’s a perfect time to introduce the newest generation to this classic tale of hard work and friendship.

• **The Girl and the Bicycle** by Mark Pett. A marvelous story of motivation, perseverance, sacrifice, generosity, gratitude, and heartwarmingly sweet relationships. And a green bicycle. All without words.

• **The Snow Queen** by Hans Christian Andersen and illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline. Andersen’s “Snow Queen” comes to new life in Ibatoulline’s deft hands. We reviewed it [here](#). “The Snow Queen” has many elements that lend itself to Christian undertones and is worth owning. For younger children, consider Mary Engelbreit’s cheerfully illustrated version.

**Easy/Leveled Readers (3)**

• **Waiting Is Not Easy! (An Elephant and Piggie Book)** by Mo Willems. In this 22nd installment of Gerald and Piggie’s adventures, Piggie has a magnificent surprise to share with Gerald, but they must wait…all day. New readers will empathize with the agony of a long wait even as they will enjoy being able to read a book on their own. ([Our Review](#))

• **Fix This Mess! (I Like to Read)** by Tedd Arnold. A young dog tries unsuccessfully to get his new robotic cleaner to “fix this mess!” in this humorous easy reader (picture book format). See the [Review](#).

• **Number One Sam** by Greg Pizzoli. Will Sam’s drive to win at all costs be enough to drive a permanent wedge between him and his closest friends? A great story about winning and losing both contests and friendships by a Geisel award-winning author. Reviewed [here](#).

**Chapter Books (3)**

• **Leroy Ninker Saddles Up: Tales from Deckawoo Drive, Volume One** by Kate DiCamillo. Leroy Ninker lacks only a horse to complete his cowboy dreams…until Maybelline enters his life in this chapter book. Boisterous illustrations sprinkled throughout complement this story perfect for wannabe cowboys and fans of the Mercy Watson series.

• **Lulu and the Duck in the Park** (and others) by Hilary McKay. Lulu and her cousin Mellie try to keep a duck egg hidden in their classroom, but it starts to hatch! Young animal lovers will delight in this charming chapter book about Lulu and her adventures and will enjoy the sweet illustrations scattered throughout. Reviewed [here](#) and [here](#).
**Nuts to You** by Lynne Rae Perkins. According to the author, this story of adventure, danger, and rescue came straight from the squirrel’s mouth: a fun family read-aloud with humorous illustrations and insight into the squirrel mind and culture. Janie reviewed it this month.

AGES 9-12 GIFT PICKS (by Janie)

**Middle Grades**

- **Ophelia and the Marvelous Boy** by Karen Foxlee. An intricate re-imagined telling of the Snow Queen, *Ophelia and the Marvelous Boy* offers a compelling picture of heroic sacrifice and bravery for middle grades fantasy lovers. Betsy’s [review here](#).
- **The Crossover** by Kwame Alexander. The Bell family’s passion for basketball is surpassed only by their love for each other in this exuberant verse novel, even though conflicts abound on and off the court. See the [review](#).
- **The Desperate Adventures of Zeno and Alya** by Jane Kelley. Zeno the African grey parrot has lost his home; Alya the leukemia-stricken girl is losing hope, but they’ll eventually find each other, after some challenging experiences that stretch them both. [Review](#)
- **Tommysaurus Rex** by Doug TenNapel. While Ely is spending the summer at his grandpa’s farm, he discovers a dinosaur hibernating on the property—the perfect pet to replace his dog Tommy, who was killed in a traffic accident. This graphic novel is fun but also explores serious themes about fatherhood, friendship, and forgiveness. [Review](#)
- **National Wildlife Federation’s World of Birds: A Beginner’s Guide**. One doesn’t have to be a bird lover to enjoy this beautifully illustrated volume that divides the avian world into four major habitats, with close looks at the mating behaviors, diet, and peculiar quirks of 32 species. Check out [our review](#).
- **(BOTB) The Warden and the Wolf King (The Wingfeather Saga, Book 4)** by Andrew Peterson. Peterson concludes his Wingfeather Saga with this stirring adventure that combines humor, peril, sorrow, and ultimate triumph with strong Christian themes. We reviewed it [here](#).
- **I Survived True Stories: Five Epic Disasters** by Lauren Tarshis. Five dramatic true stories of schoolchildren surviving famous natural disasters or freak accidents make this a riveting read, especially for reluctant readers. Plenty of interesting extra information and suggestions for further reading accompany the text and historical photographs. Note the caution in our review ([link](#)).
- **Twelve Kinds of Ice** by Ellen Bryan Obed. The author mines her memories for this unique examination of winter in Maine and the successive “kinds of ice” that lead up to the glorious skating season—a beautiful celebration of life in God’s world, though God is not mentioned. [Reviewed here](#).
- **Somebody on This Bus Is Going to Be Famous** by J. B. Cheaney. (Review and blurb by Betsy!) Multiple characters—each in his or her own distinct voice—contribute to this quirky mystery that involves the regulars on Mrs. B’s bus to and from school during one school year. Who becomes famous? Here’s the [review](#).
- **The Westing Game (Puffin Modern Classics)** by Ellen Raskin. In this classic “puzzle” mystery with a wintertime setting, the fourteen heirs of Sam Westing must unravel a complex series of clues to claim their inheritance, but each will gain invaluable self-knowledge and compassion in the process.

AGES 12-up, GIFT PICKS (by Hayley)

- **(BOTB) MindWar: A Novel (The MindWar Trilogy)** by Andrew Klavan. While recuperating from a debilitating accident, Rick Dial’s video game prowess attracts the notice of a secret government agency, and Rick is recruited to engage in an advanced form of cyber warfare with deadly stakes.

- **(BOTB) Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream** by David Platt. Challenging cultural Christianity, Platt shows how biblical faith will manifest itself in a life radically different from the world and focused on proclaiming and living the gospel. (Worth noting that *Ordinary* by Michael Horton is a new “other side of the coin” book.)

- **Cinder: Book One of the Lunar Chronicles** by Marissa Meyer. Linh Cinder, a teenage cyborg mechanic in New Bejing, accepts a project from Prince Kai and is swept into an adventure that involves a mysterious plague, an evil stepmother, and—of course—a ball. See Hayley’s review.

- **(BOTB) What’s Your Worldview?: An Interactive Approach to Life’s Big Questions** by James Anderson. In a clever, “Choose Your Own Adventure” format, high-school and college-age teens are encouraged to answer questions that determine their own worldview, as well as those of their friends and acquaintances. More here.

- **(BOTB) Unbroken (The Young Adult Adaptation): An Olympian’s Journey from Airman to Castaway to Captive** by Laura Hillenbrand. The true story of Louis Zamperini, Olympic athlete who endured unbelievable suffering as a POW during World War II, leading eventually to faith in Christ. Read more here.

- **The Perilous Gard** by Elizabeth Marie Pope. This historical romance pits ancient British paganism against Tudor-era Christianity as Kate Sutton learns what it will take to free the man she loves from a crushing burden of guilt. Janie reviewed it here.

- **Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity** by Nabeel Qureshi. A good fit for older YA/college, Qureshi tells his story of conversion from an Islamic background to Christianity.

- **If I Had Lunch with C. S. Lewis: Exploring the Ideas of C. S. Lewis on the Meaning of Life** by Alister McGrath. Excellent topical intro to Lewis’s thought, organized around imagined lunch-dates with the Christian thinker. Boils very difficult subjects down to a level that most teens 15 and up can appreciate.

- **Let’s All Be Brave: Living Life with Everything You Have** by Annie F. Downs. Teens and adults of any age, especially girls, will appreciate this encouragement to be brave in life and follow God no matter the risk.

- **The Most Of P.G. Wodehouse** by P.G. Wodehouse. This collection of short stories is a wonderful introduction to P.G. Wodehouse and his British humor; readers are introduced to a sampling of Wodehouse’s characters: from Jeeves and Wooster and
Mr. Mulliner to the eccentric Lord Emsworth of Blandings Castle and his beloved pig. The collection concludes with a short novel, *Quick Service*, which itself is enough reason to buy the book!

**GRAB BAG for ALL AGES! (Emily’s Best Buys!)**

- **The Redcoats Are Coming! (AIO Imagination Station Books)** by Marianne Hering. Adventures in Odyssey books are high-quality, kid-friendly, yet thought-provoking books, and this chapter book series is no different. This particular book combines great dramatic elements like snakes and bad guys with meaty Christian content. Highly recommended for beginning readers.
- **Eric Liddell: Are You Ready? (Little Lights)**. Ok, so these biographies by Catherine Mackenzie could use a little editing at times. But they are very kid-friendly, and they are filled with great spiritual/moral content. Great faith-builders that will inspire your kids to love God and follow him. Ages 4-8.
- **The Christian Girl’s Guide to Friendship** by Katrina Cassel. My girls love the casual, magazine-style writing and quizzes inside. As a parent, I love the Scripture verses and the author’s attempts to help them see how the Bible applies to everyday life. Ages 9-12.
- **Heaven for Kids** by Randy Alcorn. Based on his book Heaven for adults, this is a great Q & A primer on what heaven will be like. Especially important for kids who may have lost of loved one this year. Ages 8-12.
- **The Essential Calvin and Hobbes** by Bill Watterson. If your kids can handle reading about an anti-hero without picking up his selfish ways, this comic has lots of belly-laughs AND opportunities to discuss how we are tempted to twist truth to suit our whims. This one’s a classic in our homeschool family, and my nephew says he gained lots of spiritual maturity just by reading Calvin and seeing how silly our sin looks and sounds to God. Ages 7-12.
- **ESV Seek and Find Bible**. Great Bible for kids ready to graduate up from story Bibles to a real Bible text. Lots of pictures, plus stories that help elucidate the text. Ages 4-12. We reviewed it [here](#).
- **ESV Student Study Bible**. Teen study Bible based on the popular adult *ESV Study Bible*. The student version has all the same *kinds* of resources, just not quite so much. As a result, it’s somewhat easier to haul around in a book bag or Bible carrier. The theological slant, as in most ESV editions, is “classic evangelical orthodoxy in the historic Reformation stream.” Ages 12 and up. See the [review](#).
- **Caught Up in a Story: Fostering a Storyformed Life of Great Books & Imagination with Your Children** by Sarah Clarkson. Review coming soon! Great gift book for homeschool families or any one who wants to shape their child’s imagination in positive ways through literature. Ages 16 and up.
- **American Phoenix: John Quincy and Louisa Adams, the War of 1812, and the Exile that Saved American Independence** by Jane Hampton Cook. For older
teens and adults who enjoy David McCullough-style biographies, this history of John Quincy Adams and his wife Louisa is fascinating AND spiritually edifying. Perhaps my favorite book this year, despite the author’s clunky poetry at times. Ages 16 and up.