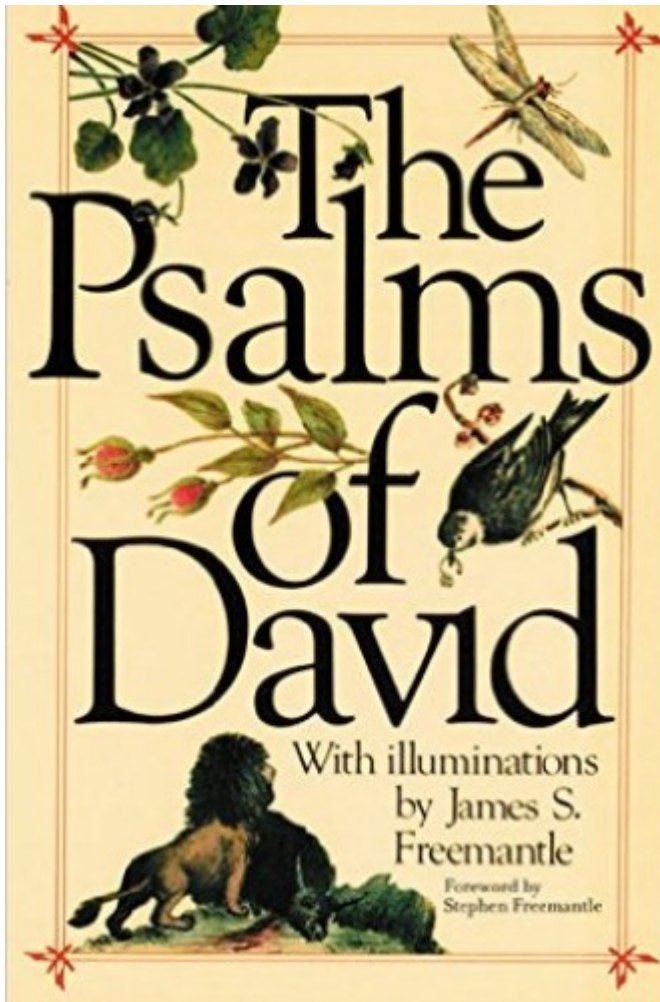


Sara Miles's Christmas picks

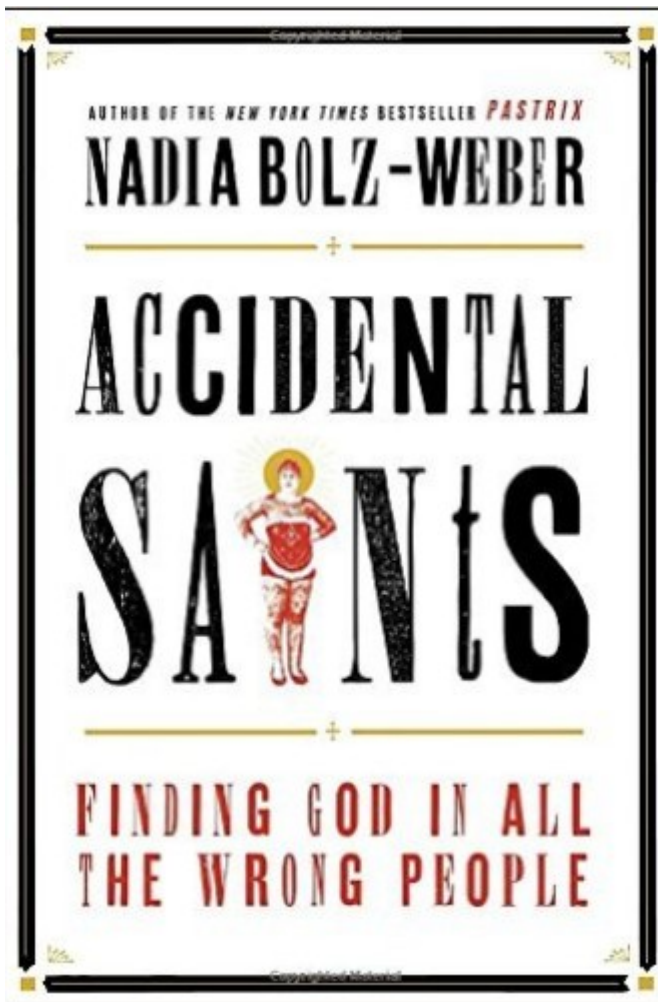
selected by [Sara Miles](#) in the [December 9, 2015](#) issue

## In Review



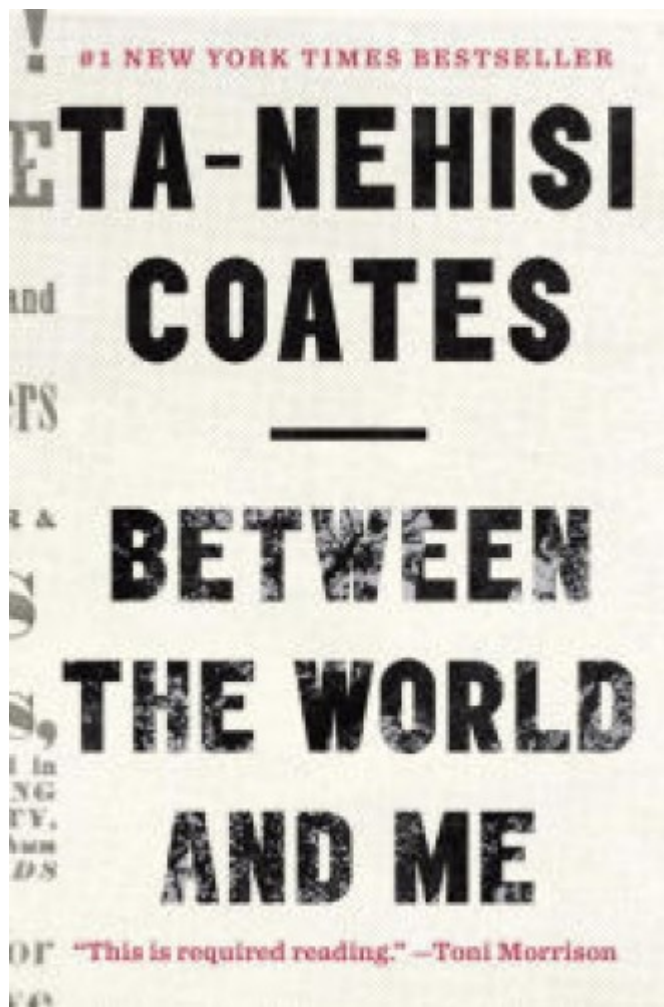
## The Psalms Of David

by James S. Freemantle  
HarperCollins Narnia



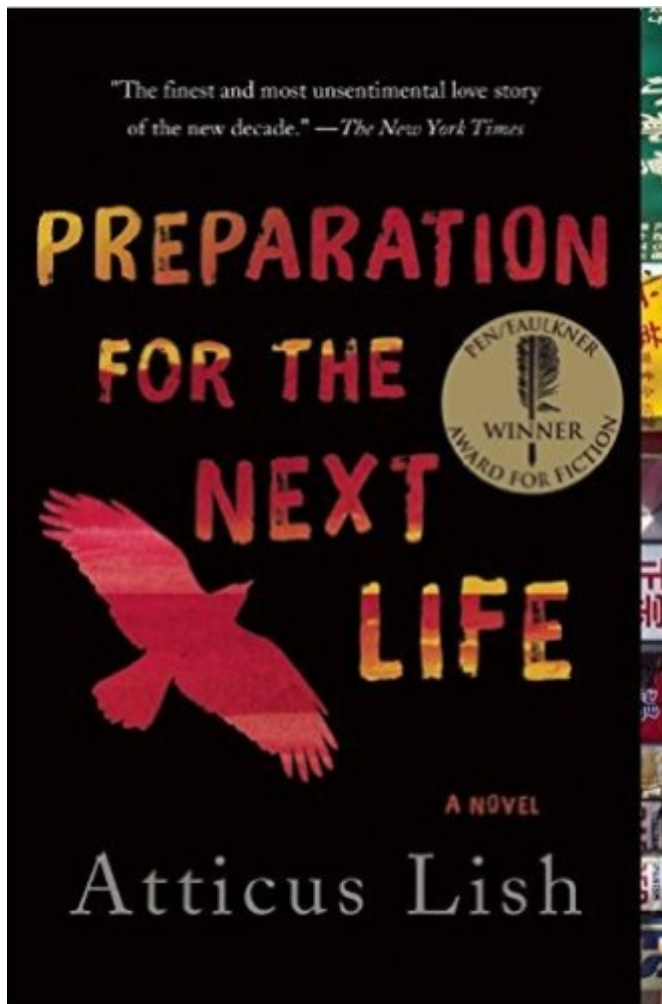
## **Accidental Saints**

By Nadia Bolz-Weber  
Convergent



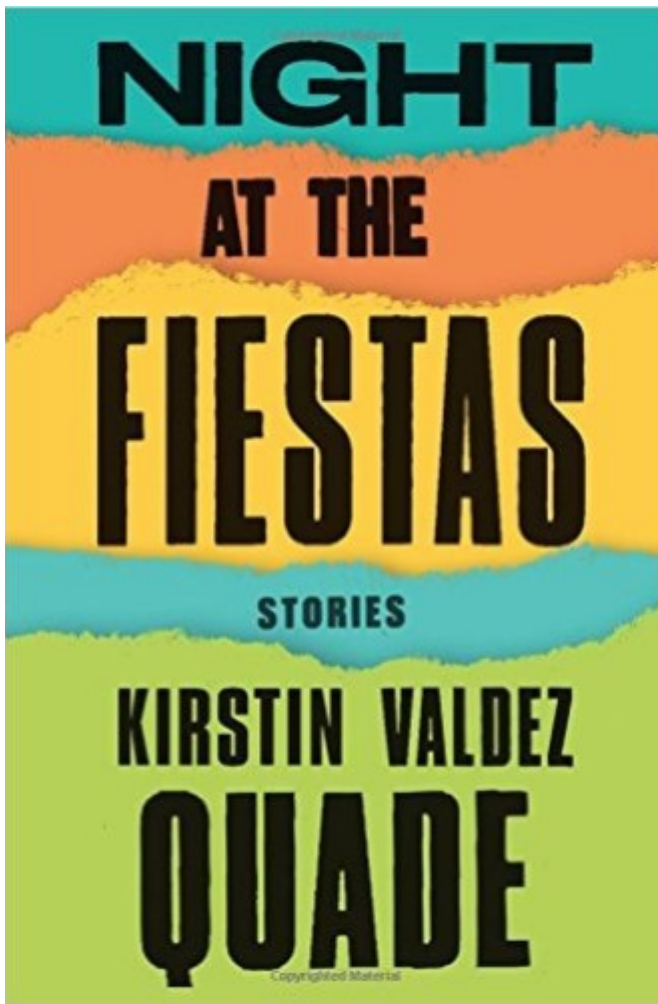
## **Between the World and Me**

By Ta-Nehisi Coates  
Spiegel & Grau



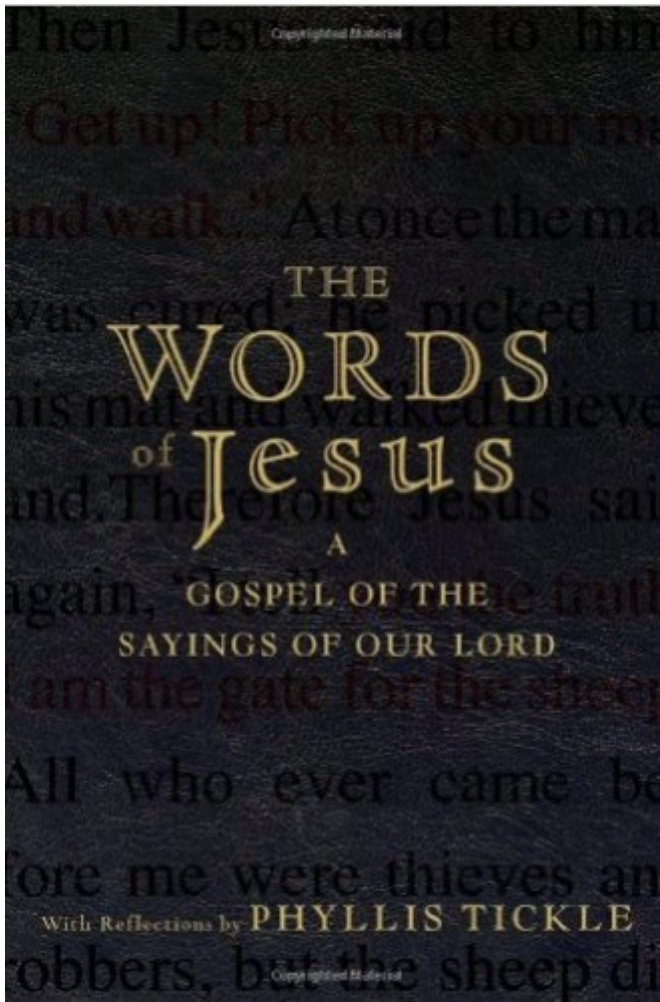
## **Preparation for the Next Life**

by Atticus Lish  
Tyrant Books



## **Night at the Fiestas**

by Kirstin Valdez Quade  
Norton



## The Words of Jesus

by Phyllis Tickle  
Wiley

Christmas has never been my favorite of the ostensibly Christian feast days; its manic gift-giving enterprise fills me with a mixture of crabbiness, confusion, and despair. That said, there's never anything but happiness to be found in giving, or unwrapping, a copy of the classic *The Psalms of David* (HarperCollins Narnia), the illuminated psalter hand-lettered by James Freemantle in the late 19th century. You also can't go wrong with Nadia Bolz-Weber's *Accidental Saints* (Convergent Books), a nonfiction account of messed-up characters whose stories, in all their unlikeliness, shout hope. This is one of the few best sellers you don't have to be embarrassed to give to people you love. Less obviously peace-on-earth-goodwill-to-men is *Between the World and Me* (Spiegel & Grau), by Ta-Nehisi Coates, whose furious and brilliant writing illuminates the pain and truth of black bodies and souls struggling to live in a world made by white supremacy. This is a powerful, spiritually necessary book by a

nonbeliever who understands resurrection as a verb. In Atticus Lish's first novel, *Preparation for the Next Life* (Tyrant Books), he delivers the harrowing, funny, and sickeningly violent story of a Chinese Muslim immigrant woman in Queens who's in love with a white veteran of the Iraq war. This book is astonishingly beautiful, with searing, accurate observations about class and an unspoken Marian subtext, but it carries more ugly truth than I can sometimes bear to share with others. Kirstin Valdez Quade's book of stories, *Night at the Fiestas* (Norton), is both truthful and generous. The author is one of the rare contemporary writers who engages compellingly with the real experiences of believers—in this case, Chicano Catholics in New Mexico—without condescension or cliché. These stories of lived religion, family, sex, and suffering are gorgeous, and as alive as Jesus. Which brings me to *The Words of Jesus* (Wiley), by Phyllis Tickle, who had the courage, genius, and heart to behold the one whose birthday we celebrate. As she writes, "The cost [of writing this book] has been in the nights I lay sleepless, and wrestling, like Jacob, with new perceptions of what it is to be both Christian and a self at the same time."