



DEMOGRAPHICS & CULTURE

7 holiday book recommendations

Christopher Thomsen, Anne-Marie Peterson, John Queen, Paula Campbell Roberts and Diana Wagner

November 19, 2025

With the holiday season rapidly approaching, you may be looking for a few good books as thoughtful gifts and for your own reading pleasure. Well, we've got you covered. Year after year, book recommendations from Capital Group team members rank among our most popular articles.

This year, the lineup includes powerful memoirs, page-turning narratives and well-loved bestsellers. In short, there's something for everyone, including podcast listeners.

1. *Red Roulette*

Understanding the intersection of government and business in China is a priority for Chris Thomsen, portfolio manager for [CGXU – Capital Group International Focus Equity ETF](#) and [CGNG – Capital Group New Geography Equity ETF](#). For that reason he recommends *Red Roulette: An Insider's Story of Wealth, Power, Corruption, and Vengeance in Today's China*, calling it "a fascinating memoir, especially if you want to understand how China works from a local businessman's perspective."

Author Desmond Shum offers a rare, behind-the-scenes look at China's elite, recounting his rise alongside his wife, Whitney Duan, through high-stakes real estate deals and deep political connections. But as the political landscape shifts and Xi Jinping comes into power, their fortunes crumble, culminating in Duan disappearing under mysterious circumstances. Shum's account is riveting and provides important insights on Chinese business culture.

Thomsen regularly reads books focused on different regions of the world. "They help me think about investments in countries where sometimes things work differently than in the West," he explains. "It's critical to understand how companies navigate those environments and what the risks are for some of our investments."

2. *Chasing Hope*

Cheryl Frank, a portfolio manager for [CGCV – Capital Group Conservative Equity ETF](#) and [American Mutual Fund®](#), recommends *Chasing Hope: A Reporter's Memoir* by veteran *New York Times* journalist Nick Kristof.

"Every chapter is brilliantly crafted. The book takes you through his life as a reporter covering Tiananmen Square, India, Cambodia and other parts of the world," Frank says.

Kristof draws readers in immediately as he describes the crash-landing of a small plane he's aboard into the Congolese jungle. The book tackles hard subjects with surprising optimism and weaves in career milestones like becoming an editor and starting a column.

3. *The Wager*

John Queen, principal investment officer for [Capital Group KKR Core Plus+](#), is reading *The Wager: A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and Murder* at the suggestion of a colleague. "Being a seaman on a British naval ship in 1740 was not a pleasant experience, even when everything goes well. As it's clear from the title, everything did not go well for the men on The Wager!"

Journalist David Grann draws on historical records for his gripping book about a shipwreck off Patagonia and the ensuing mutiny among castaways from the HMS Wager. Grann recounts the wreck, struggles to survive, and conflicting tales survivors brought back to England.

4. *Listening in the Raw*

For Anne-Marie Peterson, portfolio manager on [CGGO – Capital Group Global Growth Equity ETF](#), *Listening in the Raw: Coming Home to Receptivity*, was an unexpected revelation. "It's a little unconventional," she admits, but deeply impactful.

Written by clinical psychologist Randall Alifano, the book offers insights into how to grow your capacity to listen by being present. "It's about listening, but not the typical active listening of writing down what you hear. Instead, it covers the art of listening by being fully present for the person without judging the content in real time or waiting for an edge or angle in an argument," Peterson says.

5. *Joy Ride*

Susan Orlean's *Joyride: A Memoir* is an essential read for anyone interested in the craft of storytelling, according to content manager Will McKenna.

Orlean is most known for her bestselling book *The Orchid Thief*, which formed the basis of the delightfully eccentric movie, *Adaptation*. She brings the same curiosity and wit to this deeply personal work.

In *Joyride*, Orlean blends personal anecdotes about marriage and motherhood with lessons about the creative process, including how wandering around city neighborhoods sparks most of her ideas. One memorable chapter recounts the moment she opened her apartment door and came face to face with an African lion.

6. *Super Agers*

In a recent [Capital Ideas webinar](#), KKR's chief investment strategist Paula Campbell Roberts shared her top book pick, *Super Agers: An Evidence-Based Approach to Longevity*. She praised its data-driven insights into health and aging, adding "because I want to live forever."

The book by cardiologist Eric Topol explores case studies of near-centenarians and combines them with analysis of science breakthroughs in diagnostics, genomics, drugs and vaccines. Topol emphasizes a proactive approach and argues that longevity can be achieved with interventions like resistance training. According to Roberts, "It gives tactical ways to lead a healthier life while we're all doing our best to deliver for our firms and our families."

7. *Speaking Soundly*

Portfolio manager Diana Wagner recommends *Speaking Soundly*, a podcast hosted by David Krauss, Principal Trumpet of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Episodes feature candid conversations with leading musicians about their lives and creative process.

"The host is incredibly articulate and asks great questions that are accessible to non-music geeks. I especially love his interviews with conductors because conducting an orchestra has parallels to being a CEO, and it's interesting to hear famous conductors share leadership lessons," Wagner says.

[Read important disclosures](#)



Christopher Thomsen is an equity portfolio manager with 31 years of investment industry experience (as of 12/31/2024). He holds an MBA from Columbia and a bachelor's degree in international economics from Georgetown University.



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