1. ***The Life You Can Save*** by Peter Singer - nonfiction

Wikipedia: The author argues that citizens of affluent nations are behaving immorally if they do not act to end the poverty they know to exist in developing nations. The book is focused on giving to charity, and discusses philosophical considerations, describes practical and psychological obstacles to giving, and lists available resources for prospective donors (e.g. charity evaluators). Singer concludes the book by proposing a minimum ethical standard of giving.

Singer writes in a very approachable, easy-to-read style. The book is not long and packs a lot of punch!

1. ***Night*** by Elie Wiesel - memoir

Wikipedia: A work by Elie Wiesel about his experience with his father in the Nazi German concentration camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald in 1944–45, at the height of the Holocaust toward the end of the Second World War. In just over 100 pages of sparse and fragmented narrative, Wiesel writes about the death of God and his own increasing disgust with humanity, reflected in the inversion of the parent–child relationship as his father declines to a helpless state and Wiesel becomes his resentful teenage caregiver.

Read this if you ever feel like your life is hard, if you want to see the strength of human faith, if you want to see the depth of human depravity

1. ***The Kite Runner*** by Khaled Hosseini - fiction, based on author’s childhood in Afghanistan

Goodreads: The unforgettable, heartbreaking story of the unlikely friendship between a wealthy boy and the son of his father’s servant, The Kite Runner is a beautifully crafted novel set in a country that is in the process of being destroyed. It is about the power of reading, the price of betrayal, and the possibility of redemption; and an exploration of the power of fathers over sons—their love, their sacrifices, their lies.

A beautiful, tragic story of guilt and redemption built on a father/son relationship. I sobbed so much while reading this book, in school even. Had to face the corner, so no one would see all my crying.

1. ***East of Eden*** by John Steinbeck - fiction

Goodreads: Set in the rich farmland of California’s Salinas Valley, this sprawling and often brutal novel follows the intertwined destinies of two families—the Trasks and the Hamiltons—whose generations helplessly reenact the fall of Adam and Eve and the poisonous rivalry of Cain and Abel. Here Steinbeck created some of his most memorable characters and explored his most enduring themes: the mystery of identity; the inexplicability of love; and the murderous consequences of love’s absence.

This is my favorite book. It’s very long since it’s an epic, telling the stories of two generations. Steinbeck paints both good and evil and everything in between. The story made me appreciate religion and humans and love a lot more. I like to think of this book as if the Cain & Abel story was novelized and set in our modern times. However, there’s a very significant focus that differs from the Biblical telling -- we all have a choice, “timshel.” Anyway, you probably will never read this, but it means a lot to me. If I ever have a son, I will name him Samuel (my favorite character from the book).