



How to Use *Horizons Magazine*

Why This Issue Is Important

Why is the Bible important to Presbyterians—to Presbyterian Women? One response might begin with the PW Purpose. When you look at the Purpose, you see that the first commitment listed is “to nurture our faith through prayer and Bible study.” Looking to the *Book of Confessions*, Presbyterians find these statements, among others, about the foundational nature of scripture in our communal and individual lives:

- “As we believe and confess the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make perfect the man of God, so do we affirm and avow their authority to be from God” (Scots Confession, Chapter XIX, 3.19)
- “We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men.” (Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 1, 5.001)
- “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony or any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.” (Westminster Confession, Chapter 1, 6.004)
- “The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel.” (Confession of 1967, Part I, Section C2; 9.27)

The *Book of Order* offers this succinct statement: “The church confesses the Scriptures to be the Word of God written, witnessing to God’s self-revelation” (W-2.2001). Those ordained to office in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) must be able to affirmatively answer this question: “Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God’s Word to you?” (G-14.0207)

Presbyterians do not worship the Bible itself, but we can agree with this quote from an anonymous Disciples of Christ pastor: “We do not bear witness to the Bible, but to the God to whom the Bible bears witness in Jesus Christ.” The Bible is our story, and our authoritative guide for living out our personal and communal parts in God’s ongoing story. Jesus, the master storyteller, said that to love God completely and neighbor as self is the most important thing in this life. Recall that Jesus certainly knew his scripture and quoted it even in the face of severe temptation and persecution. Being followers of Jesus, let’s take him as our role model in knowing our own story.

General Resources on the Bible, Biblical Interpretation, and Bible Selection

- The Kerygma Program (the adult Bible study used by many members of the PC(USA)) mentions these Bible translations as reliable study Bible versions:
 - *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha* (New Revised Standard Version)
 - *The Oxford Study Bible with Apocrypha* (Revised English Bible)
 - *The New Jerusalem Bible* (with complete study notes, not the reader's version)
- Other versions to consider:
 - *New Interpreter's Study Bible* (NRSV)
 - *Today's New International Version Study Bible*
- If you have members of your circle or small group for whom English is a second language or who would like extra "helps" in using the Bible, consider:
 - *Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version*
 - *The Access Bible* (NRSV with Apocrypha)
- Computer software is available for just about every conceivable Bible use: translations/versions, research tools, commentaries and interpretive helps, and much more. If you have a personal digital assistant (PDA) or cell phone/PDA such as a Blackberry or Treo, downloadable Bible software is also available. Some sources to check:
 - www.cokesburytexts.com/software.aspx or www.amazon.com for computer software
 - www.olivetree.com or www.gmpsoft.com for PDAs and cell phones
- International Bible Society: www.IBSDirect.com or 800/524-1588
- American Bible Society: www.bibles.com or 800/322-4253
- See p. 7 of the April 2007 issue of *Presbyterians Today* ("Go Figure") for some interesting survey results about Bible translations and versions preferred by Presbyterians.
- Find a copy of the April 3, 2007 issue of *The Christian Century* magazine and read "The Bible in First Person" (p. 5) and "Memory Verses: Teaching Children the Bible" (pp. 10–11).
- From the April newsletter of *The Thoughtful Christian* (www.thethoughtfulchristian.com): "Mid-May we will release the **Interpreting the Bible Study Pack**. This will include a three-session study entitled "Biblical Interpretation 101" and a four-session study called "Great Themes of the Bible." As with all studies, subscribers will have free access to this premium study pack. If you are planning ahead, consider combining this study pack with the Expanded Bible Basics Study Pack. These studies are great for beginners and also longtime Bible students who need a refresher course."

- *Reading the Bible and the Confessions the Presbyterian Way*
By Jack Rogers
Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2005
ISBN-10: 0664500463
ISBN-13: 9780664500467
- *Bible Teacher Kit* (comprehensive resource for teachers with 8 maps, glossary, 60-min. video, timeline, and articles in a 3-ring binder).
Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994
ISBN-10: 0687780063
ISBN-13: 9780687780068
- *Experiments with Bible Study*
By Hans-Ruedi Weber
Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989
ISBN-10: 2825406872
ISBN-13: 9782825406878
- *Telling Our Stories: Personal Accounts of Engagement with Scripture*
Edited by Ray Gingerich and Earl Zimmerman
Telford, Penn.: Cascadia, 2006
ISBN-10: 1931038368
ISBN-13: 9781931038362
- *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation (Revised Edition)*
By M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.
Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room, 2001
ISBN-10: 0835809366
ISBN-13: 9780835809368
- *Chapters Into Verse: A Selection of Poetry in English Inspired by the Bible from Genesis through Revelation*
Edited by Robert Atwan and Laurance Wieder
New York: Oxford University Press, 2003
ISBN-10: 0195136764
ISBN-13: 9780195136760
- *What They Don't Tell You: A Survivor's Guide to Biblical Studies*
By Michael Joseph Brown.
Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2000
ISBN-10: 066422220X
ISBN-13: 9780664222208

- *Places of the Bible: A Photographic Pilgrimage*
 Edited by Robert Sullivan.
 New York: LIFE Books, 2007
 ISBN-10: 1933821094
 ISBN-13: 9781933821092

- *The Bible Makes Sense* (Revised Edition)
 By Walter Brueggemann
 Cincinnati, Oh.: St. Anthony Messenger Press and Franciscan, 2003
 ISBN-10: 0867165588
 ISBN-13: 9780867165586

- *Journey Through the Word: Exploring Biblical Themes*
 By James E. Davison and Sara Covin Juengst
 Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007
 ISBN-10: 0664226167
 ISBN-13: 9780664226169

- For sound Bible study curricula that offer both comprehensive overview studies and in-depth studies, see:
 - The Kerygma Program, www.kerygma.com or 800/537-9462
 - Disciple Bible Studies, www.disciple.cokesbury.com or 800/251-8591

- *Presbyterians Today* offers a Bible study called “Bible Explorations” in each issue. If you don’t have print copies, you can access them online at www.pcusa.org/today.

- Check out Presbyterian curricula, including resources from The Kerygma Program, in the PC(USA) 2007–2008 Curriculum Catalog, or go to www.pcusa.org/curriculum.

- Basic resources to help you form or guide a small group ministry that will provide a supportive and hospitable space for Bible study and for participants’ questions (and can also enhance your PW circle experiences):
 - *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups*
 by Abigail Johnson.
 Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2004
 ISBN-10: 1566992923
 ISBN-13: 9781566992923
 - *Starting Small Groups: Building Communities That Matter*
 By Jeffrey Arnold.
 Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press
 ISBN-10: 0687018560
 ISBN-13: 9780687018567

- *Know and Be Known: Small Groups that Nourish and Connect*
By Brooke B. Collison
Publisher: Alban Institute
ISBN-10: 1566993350
ISBN-13: 9781566993357
- Free resources from *The Thoughtful Christian* (www.thethoughtfulchristian.com) that are useful in any adult learning setting:
 - “The Art of Asking Good Questions: The Role of Questions in Discussion”
 - “Making Adult Group Study Relevant”
 - “Ways to Get Adults to Talk: Improving the Quality and Quantity of Participation in Adult Discussions”

Focusing on the Issues

“Devotional” by Kathleen Long Bostrom

- Bostrom cites a “best phrase or logo” contest she entered with the winning entry, “Jesus died to take away your sins, not your mind.” This original quote from Church Ad Project can be viewed in poster form: www.churchad.com/PreviewPosters.cfm?Name=792P
- Can you or your group come up with a slogan or statement that summarizes the main idea of this devotional?
- In your circle, PW, or other group, discuss (or to ponder in your own mind):
 - To what limits, if any, can questioning or doubt go with regard to Christian faith?
 - Are you comfortable voicing your own questions in your faith community? with your pastor or Christian educator? in your Sunday school class or small group? in your circle or PW? in your own family setting?
- Working individually or in a group, write a prayer of thanksgiving for faith that can question, and be specific about the content of the questions. Share with your group if you are comfortable doing so.
- “God gave us brains and expects us to use them” is the slogan of the Austin College ACTivators, a group of college students who lead and facilitate church-related youth retreats and other youth events, under the leadership of the college’s chaplain. What’s your opinion of this slogan as it applies to youth and young adults who may be experiencing doubts about or questioning their faith? How do you respond to this statement as it relates to what cannot be tangibly experienced or scientifically proven?

“Using the Bible for Daily Devotions” By Eugenia Gamble

- Share your experiences of devotional Bible reading (methods, circumstances, any supplemental resources you use, etc.) in your circle, PW, or other group. Others may find your practices helpful, and you may hear some methods or ideas that will bring new meaning to your own Bible reading.
- Take a look at the scripture citations in *The Presbyterian Hymnal*—have you ever noticed these or paid attention to them? (Not every hymn has a scripture citation, but you may find interesting how some of the hymns relate to particular scriptures—some may surprise you!)
- If visual images work better for you than words, rather than keeping a written journal of your meditations on scripture, compile a “picture” journal. Use personal photos; magazine photos, graphics, or illustrations; used calendars; postcards; your own sketches or artwork; or any other visual source that captures your thoughts and feelings.
- Gamble mentions several book titles that may help you get started with devotional reading of the Bible. There are many excellent books and other resources available, so if you wish to begin your devotional time with one, in addition to checking with your pastor or Christian educator, call your presbytery resource center for suggestions. Your resource center is a treasure trove of Bible study and devotional resources of all kinds. Two resources to consider as starters:
 - *The Mission Yearbook for Prayer & Study* (daily lectionary at the bottom of each page; daily pages also available at www.pcusa.org/missionyearbook). Available from Presbyterian Distribution Service, www.pcusa.org/marketplace or 800/524-2612; request item #1571530711, \$8.50 plus shipping.
 - *Openings: A Daybook of Saints, Psalms, and Prayer*
By Larry J. Peacock
Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room, 2003
ISBN-10: 0835898504
ISBN-13: 9780835898508
- See the section “The Word in Prayer” in *Lord, Teach Us to Pray: A Guide to Prayer* for more ideas on devotional reading and praying and with scripture. Available from Presbyterian Distribution Service, www.pcusa.org/marketplace or 800/524-2612; request item #70-440-04-01, \$10.00 plus shipping
- See Chapter 10, “Something to Savor,” in *Loving Jesus*
By Mark Allan Powell
Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004
ISBN-10: 0800636767
ISBN-13: 9780800636760

“Which Bible Should I Buy?” By Steven M. Sheeley

- Which translation of the Bible is most often used by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and Presbyterian Women in documents and resources?
(Answer: The New Revised Standard Version)
- Do you have a family Bible? How old is it; what’s the history? Will you pass it on to your children or grandchildren, or some other family member?
- How many Bibles do you own? How many different translations or versions? Do you own any in a language other than English?
- Share in your circle, PW or other group each person’s favored Bible translation or version, including any specific likes or dislikes. Choose one short passage or a couple of verses for each person to read aloud from her/his preferred version.
- Have a fun outing with your circle, PW, Sunday school class or other group: take a field trip to a local bookstore (either “Christian” or general) and visit the Bible or religious texts section. Make note the variety of translations, the cover material and bindings, the font styles and sizes, the thickness and weight and prices.
- Is there a prison ministry or other such outreach ministry in your community that will accept good-quality used Bibles? Do some investigating; it’s possible that there are circle or congregation members who have Bibles they’d like to donate.
- Does your Christian Education Committee present Bibles to the children or youth of your congregation? If so, at what points or milestones in life, e.g., in third grade, upon high school graduation, etc.? What translation/version is presented, and how and by whom is that decision made (pastor, Christian Education Committee, Christian educator, session, other)?
- See www.wycliffe.org to learn more about the mission and work of Wycliffe Bible Translators.
- If you want to be able to compare several translations in one volume, consider purchasing a parallel Bible. There are several varieties available, so check with a local or online bookseller to see what best meets your needs.
- The Bible has often been viewed as so precious that texts with special scripts and beautiful illuminations were produced. Perhaps most familiar is the Book of Kells (see www.tcd.ie/info/trinity/bookofkells and www.snake.net/people/paul/kells for information and some images; also see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Kells for an extensive history of this rendering of the Gospels.) One modern-day effort to produce such an illuminated Bible is now in progress. See www.sjbible.org for information about The Saint John’s Bible—it’s truly gorgeous! You might also check with your public library to see if they have copies of The Saint John’s Bible volumes that are currently available.
- For more information and some historical perspective, see:
 - *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions*
By Bruce M. Metzger
Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001
ISBN-10: 0801022827
ISBN-13: 9780801022821

- *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired*
By Benson Bobrick
New York: Penguin, 2002
ISBN-10: 0142000590
ISBN-13: 9780142000595
- *The History of the Bible in English* (DVD or VHS, 37 min.)
Available through Kerygma, www.kerygma.com or 800/537-9462
- *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*
By Alister McGrath
New York: Anchor, 2002
ISBN-10: 0385722168
ISBN-13: 9780385722162
- *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*
By Adam Nicolson
New York: Harper Perennial, 2005
ISBN-10: 0060838736
ISBN-13: 9780060838737
- *How the Bible Came to Be*
By John Barton
Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998
ISBN-10: 0664257852
ISBN-13: 9780664257859
- *Whose Bible Is It? A History of the Scriptures Through the Ages*
By Jaroslav Pelikan
New York: Viking, 2005
ISBN-10: 0670033855
ISBN-13: 978-0670033850
- *Essential Guide to Bible Versions*
By Phillip W. Comfort
Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2000
ISBN-10: 084233484X
ISBN-13: 9780842334846
- *A User's Guide to Bible Translations: Making the Most of Different Versions*
By David Dewey
Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005
ISBN-10: 0830832734
ISBN-13: 9780830832736
- *Choosing a Bible: For Worship, Teaching, Study, Preaching, and Prayer*
By Donald Kraus
New York: Seabury, 2007
ISBN-10: 1596270438
ISBN-13: 978-1596270435

- Check your presbytery resource center or public library for these titles (or purchase a used copy online):
 - *The Making of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*
By Bruce M. Metzger, Robert C. Denton, Walter Harrelson
Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991
ISBN-10: 0802806201
ISBN-13: 9780802806208
 - *How to Choose Your Bible Wisely*, 2nd Edition
By Alan S. Duthie
Colorado Springs: International Bible Society–Send The Light, 1997
ISBN-10: 0853646155
ISBN-13: 9780853646150

“What’s the Bible About?” By Dale Lindsay Morgan and “Sorting Through the Papers”
By Kay Huggins

- Dale Lindsay Morgan says “The reign of King David will always be seen as the best of times; in the time of Jesus, the people still looked back on those days with longing” (p. 9). Does this sound familiar to you? Do you hear people lamenting the current state of the world, the nation, the church or some other entity, and expressing a desire to return to “the good old days”?
- Kay Huggins uses the image of a hope chest in her article; have you ever thought of the Bible as a part of your “spiritual hope chest”? What other image occurs to you as descriptive of the Bible and its place in your life?
- Working through the proper session committee, and in cooperation with a local bookseller, your circle, PW or other group in the church might host a “Bible Fest.” Samples of various types of Bibles might be displayed after worship or in conjunction with another church event, giving people opportunity to peruse a select collection. The bookseller might agree to take orders and perhaps deliver the Bibles to the church by a specified date. You will want to work closely with your pastor, Christian educator, or other knowledgeable person to select Bibles whose features (e.g., study notes, illustrations) are compatible with principles of scriptural interpretation as understood in the Reformed tradition. This is important for all ages, and especially so for children’s Bibles and Bible storybooks.
- Purchase bookmarks or postcards showing the literary genres of biblical writings, and distribute these in your circle, PW or other group.
- Play a game with your group: divide people into at least two groups, then name a book of the Bible and have the groups classify according to literary type. This can be done with youth or intergenerational groups.
- Check your local Christian bookstore for Bible games (board games like Bibleopoly, card games, Bible trivia games, etc.). Also look at Internet sites such as <http://biblewordgames.com>, and <http://christianthings.com/games/bgames.html> for some board games. Some sites include online games as well as those you can print out.

- There are an ever-increasing number of Bible commentary series available. For those that consistently reflect theology compatible with a Reformed viewpoint, see those available from Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (Westminster John Knox Press and Geneva Press). See www.ppcbooks.com; order from your local or online booksellers or call PPC's official distributor, Cokesbury, at 800/672-1789. Also check your church library, presbytery resource center or public library for *The New Interpreter's Bible* (12 volumes plus index) from Abingdon Press.
- Some "read the Bible through" plans and resources:
 - *The Year of the Bible: A Comprehensive Congregation-wide Program of Bible Reading*, by James E. Davison. Available from Presbyterian Distribution Service, www.pcusa.org/marketplace or 800/524-2612; request item # 095511 for the Leader's Manual (\$19.95 plus shipping) or item # 095512 for the Participant Book (\$5.95 plus shipping).
 - Put "one year Bible" into an online bookseller search engine, and you will see many versions available.
 - See these Web sites for Bible reading plans:
www.heartlight.org/devotionals/reading_plans/
www.biblegateway.com/resources/readingplans/
- Remember that your presbytery resource center and public library are excellent places to search for Bible commentaries and study aids if your church library doesn't have what you're looking for. Here are some helpful resources for both general and specific Bible study and reference materials:
 - *The Bible from Scratch: The Old Testament for Beginners*
By Donald L. Griggs
Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002
ISBN-10: 0664225764
ISBN-13: 9780664225766
 - *The Bible from Scratch: The New Testament for Beginners*
By Donald L. Griggs
Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003
ISBN-10: 0664225772
ISBN-13: 9780664225773
 - *Introducing the Bible* (25th Anniversary Edition)
By William Barclay
Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1997
ISBN-10: 0687365902
ISBN-13: 9780687365906
 - *A Guide Through the New Testament*
By Celia Brewer Marshall
Publisher: Westminster John Knox
ISBN-10: 0664254845
ISBN-13: 9780664254841
 - *A Guide Through the Old Testament*
By Celia Brewer Marshall
Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1989
ISBN-10: 0804201242

- ISBN-13: 9780804201247
- *Understanding the Old Testament* (5th Edition)
By Bernhard Anderson, Steven Bishop, and Judith Newman
Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2007
ISBN-10: 013092380X
ISBN-13: 9780130923806
 - *Anatomy of the New Testament* (6th Edition)
By Robert A. Spivey, D. Moody Smith, and Clifton Black
Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006
ISBN-10: 0131897039
ISBN-13: 9780131897038
 - *Creation to Revelation: A Brief Account of the Biblical Story*
By James O. Chatham
Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006
ISBN-10: 0802863221
ISBN-13: 9780802863225
 - *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Expanded)
Edited by Sharon H. Ringe and Carol A. Newsom
Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998
ISBN-10: 066425781X
ISBN-13: 9780664257811
 - *Westminster Guide to the Books of the Bible*
By William M. Ramsay
Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994
ISBN-10: 0664220614
ISBN-13: 9780664220617
 - *HarperCollins Bible Commentary* (Revised Edition, one volume)
By James L. Mays
New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000
ISBN-10: 0060655488
ISBN-13: 9780060655488
 - *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*
By Paul J. Achtemeier
New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996
ISBN-10: 0060600373
ISBN-13: 9780060600372
 - *Oxford Bible Atlas*
By Adrian Curtis.
New York: Oxford University, 2007
ISBN-10: 0191001589
ISBN-13: 9780191001581
 - *The Concise Concordance to the New Revised Standard Version*
Edited by John R. Kohlenberger
New York: Oxford University, 1993
ISBN-10: 0195284100
ISBN-13: 9780195284102

“Out of the Mouths of Educators”

- Pose the article’s focus question to participants in your circle, PW, Sunday school class, or other group, and be sure to include your pastor, Christian educator and Sunday school teachers. Also don’t overlook young adults in your congregation—their responses may be particularly enlightening. Ask permission to print or share the responses. You might put some in your church newsletter or on its Web site, or publish a pamphlet for your congregation. Such an undertaking is appropriate for any time of the year. Be sure to formulate your own response to this question! The compiled responses could make an excellent springboard for discussion in a variety of settings in your church: Sunday school, worship, women’s and men’s groups, youth groups, regular small groups, family night suppers, etc.

“Giving the Lesson” By Sara Covin Juengst

- Does your circle or PW experience difficulty in enlisting Bible study leaders? If so, try using this article, and this whole issue of *Horizons*, as an aid in assisting women (or men in settings other than PW) to claim a call to Bible study leadership.
- What is the most memorable Bible study session you’ve ever experienced, in any setting? What factors do you feel contributed to the success of the experience (e.g., your personal interest in the material, the leader’s expertise, your level of preparation for the session or something else)? Discuss this question in your circle, PW or other group, and make a list of the ideas and suggestions offered. Share the list in your PW, and consider offering it to your Christian Education Committee.
- Some additional resources to assist with your teaching or study leadership:
 - *7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Adults: Using Our Multiple Intelligences to Build Faith*
By Barbara Bruce
Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2000
ISBN-10: 0687090849
ISBN-13: 9780687090846
 - *Triangular Teaching: A New Way of Teaching the Bible to Adults*
By Barbara Bruce
Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2007
ISBN-10: 068764352X
ISBN-13: 9780687643523
 - *Transforming Bible Study: A Leader’s Guide*
By Walter Wink
Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1990
ISBN-10: 0687424984
ISBN-13: 9780687424986
 - *The Art of Teaching the Bible: A Practical Guide for Adults*
By Christine Eaton Blair
Louisville, Ky.: Geneva, 2006
ISBN-10: 0664501486
ISBN-13: 9780664501488

“When Is Bible Study Not Bible Study?” By Antoinette Clark Wire

- Do you agree with Wire’s assessment of ways the Bible is read other than for actual study? Which of her points “hits closest to home” for you personally?
- What resources (material, program or human) do you use to hear “God’s living word for our day”? Are you involved in Bible study beyond your circle, PW, or Sunday school, such as Community Bible Study (www.communitybiblestudy.org)?
- When you are personally leading a Bible study, about how much time do you spend in preparation? How do you prepare? Sharing your ideas in your circle, PW or other group will benefit everyone involved, so don’t hesitate to offer your own experience, while you glean insights from others.
- Before engaging in Bible study, do you have a favorite prayer you offer? What specifically do you pray as you grapple with the text of scripture? Sharing, collecting and publishing such prayers among your group or congregation could be a gift to many.
- Wire cautions us against “proof texting” with selectively picking and choosing only Bible verses or passages that support predetermined conclusions. Presbyterians say we “interpret scripture in light of scripture.” How do you respond to these quotes? (See Clifton Kirkpatrick’s column in this issue for more information on the two documents cited below.)
 - “The entire range of Scripture’s witness must be brought to bear on the question in an accurate and appropriate manner. If appeal is made to only one text or a selected few, rather than the whole of Scripture, conclusions may lack adequate foundation or qualification.” (*Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture*, II.B.)
 - “Seek to interpret a particular passage of the Bible in light of all the Bible.” (*Biblical Authority and Interpretation*, IV.1.g.)
- Wire notes that Bible paraphrases may be helpful but should not be given the same weight as translations produced by scholarly teams. One contemporary rendering of scripture currently enjoying tremendous popularity (at least in sales revenue) is *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, by PC(USA) pastor Eugene Peterson. If you’re unfamiliar with *The Message*, borrow a copy from your church or public library, your presbytery resource center, your pastor or a friend or go to a bookstore and take a look at it. What is your opinion of this version of scripture? Read this excerpt from an interview with Peterson by Michelle Bearden, and published in the October 9, 2000 *Publishers Weekly* (www.bible-researcher.com/themessage.html#pw1):

“Peterson wouldn’t recommend *The Message* as a study Bible because it has no concordance, and he doesn’t like to see fellow clergy use it for sermon preparation. ‘When pastors tell me they preach from it, I tell them they miss the connection with the past with this translation,’ he says. So what purpose does *The Message* serve? Peterson says it’s a comfortable entry point for those who have been turned off by the institutional feel of the traditional text. With a translation that speaks in contemporary language, there’s no reason for first-time readers to fear the Bible. He hopes *The Message* will only be a launchpad into the standard translations. ‘Get weaned from it,’ urges Peterson. ‘I actually prefer translations that are archaic and stay close to the syntax of the ancient language. It makes for awkward reading, but it preserves the uniqueness of the works.’

“Bible Study Resource” By Nancy Benson-Nicol

- Have you ever spent time in the kind of reflection that Benson-Nicol writes about—looking back over the course of your life to see at what points you believe God’s providence is especially evident? Have fun in your circle, PW, or other group with this exercise: ask participants to draw a personal lifeline, and mark on it the top 2–3 events or circumstances they believe most meaningfully demonstrate God’s providence in their lives. Invite sharing as participants feel led. Conclude by offering a prayer for gratitude for all the ways God works in our lives to bring about God’s will for all creation, and for God’s loving care for us.
- What does the term “righteousness” mean to you? What does a “righteous life” look like? What makes it difficult to live and act righteously in *your* daily life?
- A song written by John McNally and sung by rock star Don Henley (formerly of the Eagles), “For My Wedding,” contains these lyrics:
 “To want what I have, to take what I’m given with grace,
 for this I pray...”
What is your reaction to these words? In your observation, is this a common attitude among people you know? What about our North American society as you experience it?
- Do you know the difference between a divinity school and a seminary? For one Presbyterian-related institution’s response, see www3.davidson.edu/cms/x17217.xml#seminary
- Do you agree with Benson-Nicol’s assertion that God does not *will* humanity’s bad choices or experiences? Discuss your answer and your reasoning with your circle, PW or other group.

“Exclusivism, Inclusivism or Pluralism?” By Brennan Hill, Paul Knitter and William Madges

- For discussion, ask yourself and others what you find most challenging, agreeable or disagreeable about this article? Are you able to articulate your reasons for feeling as you do?
- Do you participate in any kind of interfaith dialogue group? More and more communities are forming such groups. If you can’t locate one, consider whether you or your PW might approach the appropriate session committee and your pastor about your congregation serving as a catalyst for forming such a group.
- If you live, as many of us do, in an area where there are persons, especially religious leaders (rabbis, imams, etc.) of traditions or belief systems other than Christianity, invite representatives of these traditions to come and speak to your circle, PW, Sunday school class or other group. Ask each to outline the major tenets and practices of her/his tradition. If possible, share with each a copy of this issue of *Horizons* and ask for a response to this article during her/his time with your group.
- Are you familiar with the main symbols of major faith traditions of belief groups? See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion> for a chart displaying the major symbol of each of nine major religious traditions.

- Check your presbytery resource center or church library for audiovisual resources on the major religions and belief systems of the world—many excellent DVDs and videocassettes are available. Also look for these books:
 - *A Multitude of Blessings: A Christian Approach to Religious Diversity*
 By Cynthia M. Campbell
 Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007
 ISBN-10: 0664229565
 ISBN-13: 780664229566
 - *What Do Our Neighbors Believe?: Questions and Answers on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*
 By Howard R. Greenstein, Kendra G. Hotz and John Kaltner
 Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2006
 ISBN-10: 0664230652
 ISBN-13: 9780664230654
 - *A New Religious America: How A “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation*
 By Diana L. Eck
 New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002
 ISBN-10: 0060621591
 ISBN-13: 9780060621599
 - *In Good and Generous Faith: Christian Responses to Religious Pluralism*
 By Kenneth Cracknell
 Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006
 ISBN-10: 0829817212
 ISBN-13: 9780829817218
 - “Heart and Home: Being Christian in an Age of Pluralism” (Chapter 11), *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*
 By Marcus J. Borg
 New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004
 ISBN-10: 0060730684
 ISBN-13: 9780060730680
 - *The Phoenix Affirmations: A New Vision for the Future of Christianity*
 (See especially the chapter on Affirmation 1.)
 By Eric Elnes
 San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006
 ISBN-10: 0787985783
 ISBN-13: 9780787985783

“Strengthening the PC(USA)” By Clifton Kirkpatrick

- Were you as a child or young person presented a Bible by your congregation or parents? If so, do you still own it? What translation or version is it? What are your memories of your use of this Bible?
- Many of us own more than one Bible. If you have several, which is your favorite, and why?
- Do you mark or write in your Bible? Share why you do or don't, and your reasoning.
- Download and save for future reference (or just print out if that's easier) the two documents Clifton Kirkpatrick commends for further study. Spend time studying and discussing them in your circle, PW or other group. See if, in your group or individual study of these documents, you find some useful principles for biblical interpretation that are new and helpful for you.
- Do you and your family members know each other's favorite Bible verses or passages of scripture? If not, set aside time to begin sharing, perhaps on an informal, occasional basis verbally, or by trading written lists.