

Make the  Most of Your
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Magazine

How to Use *Horizons* Magazine

by Joyce MacKichan Walker

Bible 201

This *Horizons* issue is just as fabulous as the May/June 2007 issue, *Bible 101*. It also is just as useful to those engaged in group Bible study and to individuals reading and studying the Bible at home. In addition, this issue has immense value beyond PW and beyond those who subscribe to *Horizons*; it is important to get it into the hands of others. So this Make the Most will offer a design for a three-session adult education series on studying the Bible using the first three feature articles as the basis of the sessions. You also will find ideas for places to distribute particular articles so that others can learn and grow too. You might need multiple copies of this issue—when you discover the difference you can make for someone’s study of the Bible, it’s worth it!

① OUTLINE FOR AN ADULT EDUCATION SERIES

*Enriching Bible Study*¹

Session 1: *How Do I Read the Bible?* by Earl S. Johnson, Jr. (pages 4–7)

- Ask participants to recall a time they have heard a verse from the Bible quoted out of context or as a definitive illustration to support a position or argument. Allow some silence for thinking, and ask for a couple of examples. Then ask:
 - Do you find it frustrating when scripture is treated this way? Why?
 - What are some of the reasons single verse “proofs” might be misleading?
 - What are some of the issues that people of faith have disagreed about?
 - Which issues rise to the surface now as divisive amongst people of faith?
- Read aloud the author’s statement (page 5, column 1, paragraph 2), “Discerning reading and understanding are needed, not because believers are unfaithful or skeptical, but because the writings themselves—with all their diversity—require careful study and informed interpretation to help us understand what God is saying to us today.” Then assign participants to each guideline for understanding scripture from a Reformed perspective (as found in the historical Presbyterian document *Biblical Authority and Interpretation*, and identified on page 5, column 2, items a. through g.). Ask participants to consider their assigned guideline and take five minutes to talk about it and present it to the group. They should be prepared to restate their assigned guideline, as well as offer an example of how their assigned guideline might be applied. Hear reports.

¹ This series plan assumes that copies of this issue of *Horizons* are made available for class participants so they can read the articles before class and have access to them during class. To order call Presbyterian Distribution Service, 800/524-2612, and ask for *Horizons* encore issues, or visit <http://horizons.pcusa.org/archives/encore/encore2011.htm>.

- A 1983 position statement from the 123rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (page 6, column 1, indented quote) claims that interpretation of biblical texts requires that we ask 1) what the text says—the meaning of the language, and 2) for what purposes the text may be used and to what situations the text may be applied. Ask participants to discuss together what tools churches and individuals have to answer these two key questions.
- Read aloud the definition of revelation offered on page 6, column 2, paragraph 1, lines 6–21. Ask participants, “How do you see yourself engaged in conversation with God when you read the Bible?” Allow time for discussion
- Ask participants to read silently page 6, column 2, paragraph 2, then turn to a partner and discuss how it helps them to read the Bible through the lens of the centrality of Christ, and what challenges that presents in today’s pluralistic world. Invite the pairs to share their reflections with the group.
- Say, “The author claims ‘scripture invites and requires new interpretation’ In what ways does this ring true for you? How does it challenge your thinking?”
- The author reminds us we still have much to learn when it comes to reading and understanding the Bible. Read aloud the last paragraph of the article on page 7, column 2. Ask participants to sit in silence with these words and ponder what they most need to learn about or from the Bible, and how it might best guide their words and actions in the world.
- Close with a prayer asking for increased and renewed knowledge of the Bible. Invite participants to offer a prayer phrase arising from their reflection and identifying their need. For example, “Lord, give me the ability to listen to others’ interpretations,” “Give me an open mind to see new ways of understanding your word,” etc.

Session 2: The Canon of Scripture by Alexander Hwang (pages 8–10)

Use these questions, or ones of your own choosing and those of the participants, to explore the canon of scripture:

- When did you get your first Bible and from whom? What, if anything, is special about it to you?
- “Canon” means “rule” or “measuring rod.” In what ways do you think of the Bible as a “rule” or “measuring rod” for you? For the church? For Christians?
- Examine a chart of the canon. Many study Bibles contain charts or lists and you can search for a printable chart on the internet. Check it against the summary in the box on page 10 of your magazine. Review definitions and descriptions offered in this article, such as *deuterocanonical*, *apocryphal*, and the author’s definition of a *pseudo-canon*. Invite questions for clarification. Ask if anyone has a Bible with the apocrypha and make sure everyone understands the distinctions. Note: There is an error on page 9, column 3, the last paragraph. It should read “. . . but not as authoritative as the canon of 39 Old Testament books.”
- Read aloud the first paragraph of the section “Expanding the Canon” on page 10. Invite suggestions of noncanonical books that help us “understand the story of God’s love for humanity.”

- What pseudo-canonical (see page 10, column 1, paragraph 2) books might your church, denomination, generation, claim and why?
- What books might you list as part of your personal canon and why?

Session 3: Lectionary 101 by Mary Austin (pages 11–13)

- Ask participants to describe their understanding of the lectionary—definition only—no opinions about it at this point. Allow time for the group to share.
- Invite participants to stand on an imaginary continuum that stretches from one end of your meeting room to the other, where one end represents, “I want our preacher to preach from the lectionary every Sunday, and only the lectionary texts,” and the other end represents, “I want our preacher to choose her/his own texts every Sunday and never follow an imposed order.” Once they are standing some place on the line, ask participants to talk with the person beside them. Ask them to discuss why they chose this place along the continuum. Then pair them with someone standing at a very different position on the line, and ask them to discuss the same question.
- Provide copies of the Revised Common Lectionary. The box on page 13 tells you how to acquire it. Look at it together, making sure everyone finds the gospels in each year, and scans the other text suggestions as well. Invite questions and encourage all in the group to respond.
- Divide the group into two smaller groups. Ask one group to create a list of all the best reasons to use the lectionary, and the other group to create a list of the best reasons not to use the lectionary. Let them know they can draw ideas from the article but encourage them to have a careful conversation exploring their own ideas as well. Allow time for both lists to be read aloud.
- Ask participants to share what their experience has been with regards to the lectionary—in this congregation and in other congregation in which they have participated. Ask the group to discuss the following: “How did either experience inform and/or help you? What advantages of having a lectionary available to congregations and individuals do you see? How might it be useful to you for personal Bible study?”



② SHARING ARTICLES SO THAT OTHERS LEARN AND GROW

1. Suggest to your worship and/or education committees that they request permission of PW to reprint the first three articles in your church newsletter, one per issue. Accompany each with an invitation to subscribe to *Horizons* magazine and a link to do so: <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/pw/subscribe-horizons>.
2. Make your worship committee and pastors aware of the article, *Guidelines for Reading Scripture Aloud* by David Gambrell (pages 14–15). They could use it for training sessions with lay readers in the congregation. Make sure your PW worship leaders also notice this article.

3. Share the article on The Common English Bible by Elizabeth F. Caldwell (pages 16–18) with your worship and education committees. They may want to explore this contemporary new translation for educational purposes and for use in worship.
4. Make a list of all those in your PW who teach the Bible study. Make sure each of those leaders has a copy of the article *Leading an Interactive Bible Study* by Donna MacArt Havrisko (pages 19–21). You might reinforce the very useful ideas by using this article as the basis of a workshop for Bible study leaders in your church or presbytery, especially inviting those who are eager to gain more active participation and personal engagement in their studies. Make sure you use some of the ideas in the article to model good teaching practices!
5. Put the article *Don't Just Say It; Sing It! Studying the Bible Through Hymns* by Mary Louise Bringle (pages 22–24) in the hands of your organist/choir director. Although this may seem like “preaching to the choir,” it could be very useful for their teaching purposes, or for leading an adult education session on the usefulness of hymns for teaching and interpreting Bible stories.
6. Presbyterians love to eat together! And in most congregations you can name a few key people who organize or cook for food events, run the kitchen, head a hospitality committee and so forth. Put the article, *Biblical Feasting* by Lise Worthington (pages 25–27) in the hands of those people, offering it as a thank you, and as an opportunity to stimulate discussion around the questions of food justice and ethics, congregational food practices, and community opportunities to explore local food options.
7. And finally, don't miss the list of wonderful books on pages 28–29. Should some be added to your library, introduced in your newsletter, flagged for particular small groups? Survey the choices with your congregation in mind and select one or two to share with particular people or groups.