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# Study Guide for *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*

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The purpose of this Study Guide is to enable readers and teachers of *A Brief History* to read about, reflect upon, and discuss the Presbyterian experience, especially in the United States, in the context of the history of the larger Christian community along with the geographical, cultural, political, economic, social, scientific, and theological challenges through which Presbyterians have passed and helped to shape. This plan includes having those involved in the study read the text chapter by chapter in a course of about twelve weeks. This guide includes suggestions about opening and closing prayers and hymns selected from our Reformed heritage to enrich the text and study. It also includes suggestions about how those in charge of the study may guide the discussion and invite those involved to participate in the class and relate it to present experiences. While a weekly schedule would involve a time period of twelve weeks, the class might wish to spend more time on each chapter.

The class may want to have on hand for reference and use by class members documents of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): *Book of Confessions* (Louisville, Ky.: Office of the General Assembly, 1955); *Book of Order* (Louisville, Ky.: Office of the General Assembly, 1995); *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1990); *Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1990); Howard Rice and Lamar Williams, eds., *A Book of Reformed Prayers* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), and Donald K. McKim, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith* (Louisville, Ky.; Westminster/John Knox, 1992). Members may also wish to consult larger encyclopedias to broaden the context and study from time to time.

# 1

## From the Acts of the Apostles to the Age of the Reformation

### Prayer

*“You are great, Lord, and greatly to be praised. Great is your power, and of your wisdom there is no end. And man, who is a part of what you have created, desires to praise you. Yes, even though he carries his mortality wherever he goes, as the proof of his sin and testimony of your justice, man desires to praise you. For you have stirred up his heart so that he takes pleasure in praising you. You have created us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”*

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Bishop, theologian, author of the *City of God*

**Hymn:** “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence,” Liturgy of St. James (fourth c.).

### Offer a brief review of the chapter

1. Consider and discuss how ancient Greek, Roman, and Christian empires may continue to shape our lives. How conscious are we of these influences? What does it mean that we are now called an American Empire?
2. How do the Hebrew Scriptures continue to shape our consciousness about God as Creator, Provider, and Redeemer, and with arch types, such as Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Moses, David, Bathsheba, Joshua, Isaiah, Micah, et al?
3. Discuss the implications for the Christian community in the Constantinian establishment followed by a Holy Roman Empire. How did this history increase the extent of the church’s reach, authority, and power? What were and are the potential dangers to the Christian community by such a close relationship between religious and political power?
4. In this light reflect on the emergence of monasticism of the early and medieval churches, for example, Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) and the positive and negative

impact of such movements. Class members may wish to read a classic such as Thomas A. Kempis, *Imitation of Christ* (c. 1418) and make a report.

5. With the *Book of Confessions*, compare and contrast the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, especially having to do with the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. Compare these statements with the contemporary in a Brief Statement of Faith of the denomination.
6. Reflect on the emergence of reformation movements in this period of Church history and the emergence of Martin Luther. Focus on the importance of Luther emphasis on "justification by faith" and "faith" alone. Study Paul's affirmation in Romans 1:16–17. Analyze and sing "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."
7. The instructor may wish to invite a member of the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, or other Reformation tradition to discuss the impact of Reformation on their traditions.

**Hymns:** "Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace," Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226); "O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High," Thomas á Kempis (1380–1471); "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (1529), Martin Luther (1483–1546), German reformer.

## Prayer

*"God of love, help us to remember that Christ has no body now on earth but ours, no hands but ours, no feet but ours. Ours are the eyes to see the needs of the world. Ours are the hands with which to bless everyone now. Ours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good."*

St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), Spanish Carmelite mystic and reformer

# 2

## The Birth of the Reformed Tradition in Europe

### Prayer

*“My heart I give you, Lord, eagerly and entirely.”*

*“Deign, O most gracious and most merciful God and Father, to bestow your mercy on us in the name of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Effacing our faults, and all our sinfulness, daily increase on us the gifts of your Holy Spirit that we from our inner hearts, acknowledging our sin, may be more and more displeasing to ourselves, and become truly repentant, and that your Holy Spirit may produce in us the fruits of righteousness and holiness, through Jesus Christ, our Savior.”*

John Calvin (1509–1564), Geneva pastor, reformer theologian

**Hymn:** “I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art,” attr. John Calvin, *French Psalter*, Strassburg, 1545.

### Offer a brief review of the chapter

1. Discuss various geographic, scientific, intellectual, economic, and political revolutions that took place at about the time of the Reformation and how these challenges may have influenced the Reformation, especially what we call the Reformed movement we associate with Geneva.
2. Encourage members of the class to discuss what they know about Calvin and what his reputation may be among them. How did *A Brief History* expand their knowledge?
3. Consider the shape of worship in Geneva and how it may compare or contrast with the congregation's forms from Sunday to Sunday. What elements did Calvin consider most essential? Consult the *Book of Common Worship* and church bulletin here.
4. Encourage persons to read and compare the style, differences, and usefulness of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and the

Second Helvetic Confession (sixteenth century). Select some sections for insights, for example, the treatment of the sacraments.

5. Also encourage class members to study and reflect on the treatment of these documents on Christian behavior, for example, as guided by the Ten Commandments or other suggestions that the authors make.
6. Underscore and have the class discuss the significance of the developments of church structure under Calvin, such as the responsibilities of teachers, ministers, elders, and deacons and the division of labor within the body of Christ. What political significance did this have?
7. Ask if any members of the class have roots in French, Dutch, Hungarian, or Reformed churches. Discuss some differences of these traditions. Students might be invited to research these bodies in an encyclopedia and make a report to the class. A member of some other Reformation body might be invited to speak about another historical perspective with the class. Share insights and explore similarities and differences in our historical experiences.
8. Explore how the church might be reformed today.

**Hymn:** “All People That on Earth Do Dwell,” William Kethe, perhaps Scottish Reformer, exiled in Geneva; trans. from Geneva Bible.

### **Prayer**

*“Eternal God, gracious Father: Thy will is that we gather in thy name to hold pious assemblies, and that we institute schools among thy people in which thy law and doctrine may be preserved and propagated. Grant thy help to us who are gathered here in thy name, so that all we say or do may serve to make thy glory known and contribute to the good of thy church. Through thy Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.”*

Martin Bucer (1491–1551), Reformer of Strasburg and Cambridge; worked to bring Lutherans and Reformed together.

# 3

## The British Isles: Scotland, England, and Ireland

### Prayer

*“Give unto us, O Lord, that presently are assembled in thy Name, such abundance of thy Holy Spirit, that we may see those things that shall be expedient for the advancement of thy glory, in the midst of this perverse and stubborn generation. Give us grace, O Lord, that universally amongst ourselves, we may agree in the unity of true doctrine. Preserve us from damnable errors, and grant unto us such purity and cleanness of life, that we be not slanderous to thy blessed Evangel. Bless Thou so our weak labors, that the fruit of the same may redound to the praise of Thy Holy Name, to the profit of this present generation, and to the posterity to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom with Thee and the Holy Spirit be all honor and praise, now and ever. So be it.”*

*Book of Church Order*, John Knox (c. 1514–1572),  
Scottish Reformer and Presbyterian pioneer in the British Isles

**Hymn:** “The Lord’s My Shepherd, I’ll Not Want,” *Scottish Psalter* (1650)

### Offer a brief review of the chapter

1. Explore why British leaders found it difficult to unify the Reformed movement in the British Isles, especially with regards to national identities. Include a discussion of the rise of Puritanism and our understanding of the movement.
2. Study the Scots Confession affirmation about the “True Kirk” (XXIII), “General Councils” (XX), and the “Civil Magistrate” (XXIV), and discuss what may be the significance of these statements for ecclesiastical and political life today.
3. Discuss the emergence of the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational polities, and the political implications of the conflict among adherents of these approaches to church government for the future in Britain and elsewhere.

4. Examine the long-range consequences of the beheading of Charles I, an execution that finally led to the coming of William and Mary to the British throne.
5. Study and then discuss the structure of the Westminster Confession, concentrating on one subject, such as a doctrine, worship, marriage, or the civil magistrate, and relate these subjects to the historical context and our own time. Discuss these matters.
6. Comment on the Ten Commandments as treated in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the relevance, if any, to our own times. You might want to focus on one particular commandment, such as “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” “Thou shalt not steal,” “Thou shalt not bear false witness,” or “Thou shalt not kill.” Are instructions in the matters helpful today?
7. Comment on the provisions for observing Sunday? How should Presbyterians observe a day of rest in our own time?
8. Ask the class if we face some of the same problems that Presbyterians faced in Great Britain at the time of the Reformation? Explore with the class wisdom we may gain from this era of change.

**Hymn:** “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past” (1719), Isaac Watts (1674–1748), English Congregationalist and hymn writer. See other hymns by Watts in the hymnbook in use by the congregation.

### **Prayer**

*“O God, who hast so greatly loved us,  
and mercifully redeemed us;  
give us grace that in everything  
we may yield ourselves,  
our wills and our works,  
a continual thank offering unto thee;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”*

Presbyterian Directory for Worship, 1647,  
Westminster Divines

# 4

## The First American Presbytery and an “Errand into the Wilderness”

Take some time to review the European sources of our American Presbyterian heritage suggested up to this time, and discuss questions class members may have about this material.

### **Prayer and Hymn:** “God Himself Is with Us”

*“Lord, come dwell within us:  
While on earth we tarry,  
Make us Thy Blest sanctuary,  
Grant us now Thy presence,  
Unto us draw nearer,  
And reveal Thyself still clearer.  
Where we are, near or far,  
Let us see Thy powers,  
Every day and hour.”*

Gerhard Tersteegen (1697–1769),  
German Reformed mystic

### **Offer a brief review of the chapter**

1. Have members of the class reflect on the importance of the British empire around the world, and especially in America, with a British emigration that settled in New England and the Middle and Southern colonies. Discuss Francis Makemie as a case study of this movement.
2. Discuss the significance of the establishment of the first presbytery, for example, its independence from the Old World, and the development of an indigenous leadership trained and ordained in America. What were some of the challenges in this American wilderness? For example, you might mention discipline, missions, etc.
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having an Adopting Act, making the seventeenth-century Standards of the

Westminster Assembly the measurement of orthodoxy in the eighteenth century. What are the problems with determining the “necessary and essential” articles of the faith for ordination? Who and how are these to be decided?

4. Review the trial of Francis Makemie before Lord Cornbury. Why was the trial of Makemie so important for toleration and, eventually, religious liberty in America? Remind the class that Presbyterians were still established in Scotland.
5. Discuss how Philadelphia has become the center of Presbyterianism that spread up and down the Atlantic seacoast. What debt do Presbyterians owe to William Penn as an example of religious behavior and love? You might want to consider inviting a Quaker to the class to discuss this history from a Quaker viewpoint.

**Hymn:** “This Is the Day the Lord Hath Made,” Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

### Prayer

*“Now the shades of night are gone;  
Now the morning light is come;  
Lord, we would be Thine today,  
Drive the shades of sin away.  
Make our souls as noonday dear,  
Banish every doubt and fear;  
In thy vineyard, Lord, today,  
We would labor, we would pray.  
Keep our haughty passions bound,  
Rising up or sitting down,  
Going out or coming in,  
Keep us safe from every sin.  
When our work of life is past;  
O! Receive us then at last.  
Labor then will all be o'er,  
Night of sin will be no more.*

Possibly by Samson Occum (1723–1792),  
Native American Presbyterian pastor

# 5

## Spiritual Awakening, Leadership, and Reunion

### Prayer

*We have abundant cause,  
O merciful Father  
To love thee ardently,  
And greatly to bless and praise thee,  
Thou hast heard us in our earnest request,  
And has so answered our prayer for mercy  
To keep me from decay and sinking.  
O, graciously, of thy goodness,  
Still continue to pity our misery,  
By reason of our sinfulness.  
O my redeemer,  
I commit myself,  
Together with my prayer and thanksgiving,  
Into thine Hand. (alt.)*

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758),  
Congregational Presbyterian pastor, theologian

**Hymn:** “God Is Our Refuge and Our Strength” (*The Psalter*, 1912; Hymnbook of the United Presbyterian Church); “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” (1707), Isaac Watts (1674–1748), Congregational hymn writer.

### Offer a brief review of the chapter

1. Discuss the importance of the frontier wilderness into which European immigrants poured and its challenges to them and their faith. Remind the class of the anxiety that such a pilgrimage must have caused in the hearts of these ordinary human beings, and the cost to them in taming the American wilderness.
2. Discuss what this immigration must have meant to the Native Americans such as Samson Occam. Consider having someone report on the life and work of David Brainerd, a missionary whose autobiography inspired the missionary movement.

3. Review and discuss how Presbyterians stressed the need for an educational ministry and laity together with the beginning of an educational system that led to the founding of the College in Princeton, New Jersey. Encourage the class to learn about some Presbyterian university and college, and when, why, and by whom they were founded.
4. Ask how important it is for Christian faith and life to have some kind of memorable religious experience? Encourage class members to share some of their own experiences with the others.
5. Have several class members consult a good encyclopedia and make reports on Samuel Davies and Jonathan Edwards, two noted Presbyterians often mentioned in American textbooks for their contributions to colonial life.
6. Discuss with the class issues that have divided Presbyterians. Does the Presbyterian system of government provide an adequate structure for dealing with conflict. Episcopalians and Congregationalists have divided also. Explore differences.

**Hymn:** "My Soul in Silence Waits for God," Psalm 62 *The Psalter*, 1912.

### **Prayer**

*"Lord, I am Thine, entirely Thine  
Purchased and saved by blood divine.  
With full consent Thine I would be,  
And own Thy Sovereign right in me.  
Grant one poor sinner more a place  
Among the children of Thy Grace  
A wretched sinner lost to God,  
But ransomed by Immanuel's blood.  
Thine would I live, Thine would I die,  
Be Thine through all eternity;  
The vow is passed beyond repeal"  
Now will I set the solemn seal.  
Here at the cross where flows the blood  
That bought my guilty soul for God;  
Thee, my new Master, now I call,*

*And consecrate to Thee my all.  
Do Thou assist a feeble worm  
The great engagement to perform;  
Thy grace can full assistance lend,  
And on that grace I dare depend.*

Samuel Davies (1723–1761),  
Virginian Presbyterian pastor,  
early president of the College of New Jersey,  
now Princeton University.

## Revolution and Constitutions: Civil and Ecclesiastical

### Prayer

*“Most merciful Father, we entreat thee for our brothers and sisters throughout the earth. Pity and deliver the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor. Succeed every effort in favor of virtue and liberty. Dispel the dark clouds of ignorance, both political and religious. And hasten the time we beseech thee, in the revolution of human things, in the improvement of the human mind, in the progress of knowledge in the perfection of society, and above all, in the extension and obedience to the gospel of Christ, when liberty, civil and religious, shall be universally enjoyed and rightly approved; when the reign of peace shall commence on earth, when Redeemer’s kingdom shall fully come, when there shall be one sheepfold and one Shephard.”*

Ashbel Green (1762–1848), Presbyterian minister, Chaplain to Congress, president of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University.

**Hymn:** “Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound” (1779), John Newton (1725–1807), ex-slave runner, Anglican-Evangelical convert who became a clergyman.

### Offer a brief review of the chapter

1. Emphasize that the American Revolution was known as a “Presbyterian” rebellion. This point should be discussed in the light of the number of denominations, that is, the Congregationalists, the Dutch Reformed, German Reformed, and even some Anglicans, that were liberal Calvinists. Discuss whether or not the rebellion was a just one.
2. Reread the “Declaration of Independence” and discuss what has been called the “glittering generalities” of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” and also the list of grievances against the King. What is the relation of the two parts? Consider this matter in the light of the Bible as did revolutionaries in citing Moses, the deliverer. But along with this discuss Paul’s admonition, for example, in Romans 13:1–7.

3. Read the Constitution again. Focus attention on the Preamble and the purposes. Discuss whether this summarizes the responsibilities of good government.
4. Discuss the implications of the complex system of checks and balances in the Constitution, and how this relates to Reformed concerns for human sinfulness as well as for good government with citizen participation.
5. In the light of a Declaration that had to do with “human” liberties, the Founding Fathers neglected women and perpetuated slavery, counting African Americans as only three-fifths of a human being and postponing the end of the slave trade for twenty years. How do we deal with this aspect of our past now?
6. Invite the class to discuss issues respecting what we call the “separation of church and state,” a phrase not found in the Constitution. In light of what happened in the Middle Ages, discuss the importance of America’s experiment with “checks and balances” in this area of our life together.
7. Read for the class “The Historic Principles of Church Order” in the *Book of Order* (G-i,0300-g-1.0308) adopted in 1788, 1797. Discuss ideas about church power, authority, and discipline and how this relates to us and to “secular” power.

**Hymns:** “How Firm a Foundation, You Saints of the Lord,” “K” in *A Selection of Hymns* (1787), ed., John Rippon; and “I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord, the House of Thine Abode” (1800), Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), Congregational Presbyterian minister, president of Yale.

### Prayer

*“God grant that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable, and that unjust attempts to destroy the one may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both.”*

John Witherspoon (1723–1794), Presbyterian minister,  
president of the College of New Jersey

## Revivals, Voluntarism, and “Freedom’s Ferment”

### Prayer

*“I confess this day before thee, my God. . . .  
Oh, may I hear thy voice saying,  
‘Turn, thou backsliding child,  
For I am married to you!’  
Betroth me thyself in an everlasting covenant.  
Suffer me never again to cherish  
An evil heart of unbelief  
In departing from the living God.  
I desire to take afresh hold of my covenant  
Ordered in all things and sure  
For myself, my children, my children’s children.  
Oh grant that we may all be guided here  
Here by thy counsel  
And hereafter received to thy glory. . . . (alt.)*

Joanne Bethune (1770–1860), Presbyterian,  
also called “Mother of the Sunday School”

**Hymn:** “More Love to Thee, O’ Christ, More Love to Thee” (1856), Elizabeth Prentiss (1818–1878), Presbyterian author of popular religious novels.

### Offer a brief review of the chapter

1. Raise questions and discuss how the “frontier” to the West toward the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean shaped America and challenged Presbyterians and other denominations of the period. Where and what are “frontier” challenges today?
2. Underscore the development of “voluntary societies,” which helped Christians cooperate in meeting challenges of the period. Discuss this pattern of doing good, and identify how we continue to work together in our own time in this way with Christians as well as with non-Christians.

3. Review some of the causes Christians championed and those that caused tensions, such as the temperance and the anti-slavery movements. Do we face these contentions about some issues today and how do we deal with them?
4. In discussing these matters focus on Presbyterians and their difficulties in cooperating with more “liberal” Congregationalists in the Plan of Union, and also in remaining unity. How would the class handle problems we face today in the light of this past?
5. Describe aspects of the “Second Great Awakening,” including physical and psychological phenomena of the movement as well as “fire and brimstone” preaching. Ask some class members to make a report on the life and work of Charles G. Finney, one of the most important Presbyterians of the period.
6. Identify a Presbyterian seminary or another educational institution and explore the historical origins and purposes of these schools. How have they changed? Perhaps a representative or graduate of one of them might be asked to report on the past and present educational challenges. How should Presbyterians support higher education today?

**Hymn:** “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?” (n.d.) and “When Israel Was in Egypt’s Land” (n.d.). African American spirituals.

### Prayer

*“O Thou, who hast characterized thyself as the hearer of prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come: . . . Bless the services in which we have been engaged this past day. Let a savour of divine things be left on our spirits, and be diffused in our conversation. Let those around us take knowledge of us, that we have been with Jesus and may our profiting appear unto all men. May we be manifestly the disciples of Christ. May we put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forgiving one another. May we be followers of God, as dear children; may we be perfect, as our Father, who is in heaven is perfect.” (alt.)*

Albert Barnes (1798–1870), New School Presbyterian pastor, Philadelphia

## Continental Challenges and the Irrepressible Conflict

### Prayer

*“We rejoice, O Lord our God, to believe that those confusions and turmoils of life that seem to us strange and mysterious, are before thee simple; and those things which, to our uninteresting eye, are evils, mischiefs, and wastes, to thine eye are messengers of mercy, guiding and conducting influences; for thou art bringing many sons and daughters home to glory; and we are not large enough nor wise enough to understand the footsteps of that way which thou treadest in dealing with humanity. We forget that thou art the king of time and the God of all the earth; that thou dwellest in eternity, in light, unapproachable, that all power and wisdom are with thee. Endless and diversified means are thine, and thou art, through many ways which seem to us to reverse all good, bringing good to pass, light out of darkness, good out of evil, and order out of confusion; so that all the earth doth serve thee, even hates, and wastes and wars. Thou dost restrain the wrath of humanity, and cause the remainder thereof to praise thee.*

*We go forward in our journey of life knowing that we are journeying onwards to sunrise. That the darkness is behind us, and the light more and more before us. And we desire to be more faithful and courageous, and enduring unto the end.”*

Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887), Presbyterian ordained, popular preacher

**Hymn:** “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know” (1859), Anna Warner (1820–1915), Presbyterian novelist of New York.

### Offer a brief review of the chapter

1. Invite class members to relate, if they can and wish to do so, family history connected with migration westward across the country, and especially religious connections of nineteenth-century ancestors. Did they have connections with Presbyterianism? If not, then with what denomination?
2. Discuss modes and moods of worship and liturgy in your congregation, and high, low, or forms that combine different worship traditions.

3. Discuss this period as one in which both the revivalism of Charles G. Finney and Horace Bushnell's ideas in *Christian Nurture* in which persons should always know herself or himself as always a Christian. How do we relate Christian education to Christian experiences today?
4. In light of the history of polity in the Presbyterian church how do the laity in the church serve as officers, not simply as managers of administrative affairs, but in terms of the overall mission of the congregation?
5. Ask a class member to give a brief review of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, exploring why it moved a nation to question the institution of slavery and may have contributed to the Civil War. Another member might explore Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* for its reflection on the religious spirit and approach to race of the age. The latter author came out of the Dutch Reformed tradition.
6. Given the conflict over slavery, how would members of the class suggest that Christians discuss and deal with heated public questions?
7. Have a class member read aloud Abraham Lincoln's *Second Inaugural Address*. Discuss the president's use of the Bible and theology about judgment, and the power of this plea.
8. Lead a discussion about why Presbyterians should widen cooperation with other Christians. Why could they not reunite with one another after the Civil War?

**Hymn:** "Still, Still with Thee, When Purple Morning Breaketh,"  
Harriet Beecher Stowe.

## Prayer

*When the bird waketh, and the shadows flee;  
Fairer than morning, lovelier than daylight,  
Dawns the sweet consciousness, I am with Thee.  
Alone with Thee, amid the mystic shadows,  
The solemn hush of nature newly born;  
Alone with Thee in breathless adoration,  
In the calm dew and freshness of the morn.  
Still, still with Thee! As to each new-born morning  
A fresh and solemn splendor still is given,  
So does this blessed consciousness awaking,  
Breathe each day nearness into Thee and heaven.  
So shall it be at last, in that bright morning,  
When the soul waketh and life's shadows flee;  
O in that hour, fairer than daylight dawning  
Shall rise the glorious thought, I am with Thee." (1855)*

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896),  
Presbyterian Congregationalist, Episcopalian author

# 9

## The “Gilded Age” and an “Errand into the World”

### Prayer

*“Lord, help us to understand thy word, as we read it, and to live it. May we make it a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. May its great ideals and principles build themselves into our character and be exemplified in our lives. Only as we follow thy lead can we hope to be happy or to develop as we ought to. Be thou ever with us, and keep us ever under thy control. Amen.”*

Francis J. Grimke (1850–1937), African American pastor,  
Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C.

**Hymn:** “O Master Let Me Walk with Thee” (1879), Washington Gladden (1836–1981), Congregational minister, leader of the “Social Gospel.”

### Offer a brief review of the chapter

1. Lead a discussion on the challenges of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization that shaped the challenges to Presbyterians during this period. Some class members might give a brief review of Mark Twain’s *The Gilded Age* (1873) to provide a fictional view of the period.
2. Ask members of the class to consult an encyclopedia and give brief biographies of one or more of the Presbyterian “tycoons” who were key industrialists at the end of the century, keeping an eye out for their religious opinions.
3. Discuss how rising economic prosperity influenced the places and patterns of Presbyterian worship? Ask students to cite Presbyterian architectural structures (e.g. Gothic, Romanesque) that may illustrate the trend toward liturgical developments.
4. Have the class reflect on the idea of evolution and why it must have jarred the religious community. Why does it still trouble some Christians today?

5. Given the critical study of the Bible that arose in this period, discuss with the class their view of life and world perspectives.
6. Discuss major strides in women's place in the church and society since the days of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the women's movement of the nineteenth century. Some member of the class might want to buy or borrow a copy of Stanton's *Woman's Bible* (1895) and offer her views of women rights in light of it.
7. Ask how well we have done in dealing with our relations with different races—Asian Americans, African Americans, and Middle Eastern Americans. What are our home and foreign missions responsibilities today in building self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating congregations?
8. Discuss why it took so long for Presbyterians in the South and Presbyterians in the North to deal with the division of the 1860s, and also our duties to deal with denominational differences that go back to European sources.
9. Have members of the class sing Patricia Hill's "Happy Birthday to You" to one another.

**Hymn:** "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" (1907, alt.), Henry Van Dyke (1852–1933), Presbyterian pastor, poet, author, professor at Princeton University.

### **Prayer**

*"O God, who hast given unto Thy servants diversities of gifts by the same Spirit, and has taught us by Thy holy apostle that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Be pleased to bless and prosper all who love and serve one another with a pure heart fervently, remembering the poor, healing the sick, comforting the sorrowful, teaching the ignorant, and lifting up the afflicted; let our prayers and alms come up for a memorial before Thee; and reward us plentifully with peace; through the merits of Jesus Christ our only Saviour. Amen."* (alt.)

*The Book of Common Prayer* (1906)

**Prayer**

*“Almighty God, Ruler of all Peoples of the earth; forgive, we beseech thee, our short comings as a nation; purify our hearts to see and love truth; give wisdom to our counselors and steadfastness to our people; and bring us at last to that fair city of peace whose foundations are mercy, justice, and peace.”*

Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), Presbyterian minister’s son and president of the United States (1912–1916)

**Hymn:** “God of Our Life, through All the Circling Years” (1916, alt. 1928), Hugh Thompson Kerr (1871–1950), Presbyterian pastor, Pittsburgh, PA.

**Offer a brief review of the chapter**

1. Read aloud and discuss why Presbyterians amended the *Westminster Confession of Faith* to include a statement on “Of the Love of God and Mission” in light of what was happening at the beginning of the twentieth century when America emerged as a world power.
2. Invite persons who may have been alive during this part of history (that is possible!) to share memories of the times, and their relations to the Christian community. Did any in particular play a part in their maturing as a Christian and citizen?
3. Ask someone to study the life of Woodrow Wilson in an encyclopedia and make a report on him as scholar and political leader and on his war aims, especially in his vision for a League of Nations. In this connection ask the class to investigate the church’s office near the United Nations today and discuss that aspect of our church’s mission. Have we made the world safer, if not “safe” for democracy?
4. Remind students of the church’s concern for social justice, not only with regard to slavery but also during industrialization

and the Depression of the 1930s. How should we deal with the challenges of the economic order as Christians? Should this discussion take place in church?

5. Discuss with the class the theological issues of the period having to do with the “essential and necessary” articles of faith. Can our Christian faith be reduced to five “Fundamentals”? Consult the *Book of Confessions*, especially the Confession of 1967, to see how we have expressed this faith for today. Explore with the class why it is important to use the ancient Apostles’ Creed to affirm the ancient faith of Christians with them.
6. Lead a discussion about how life has changed since the dawn of the Nuclear Age. What are our challenges to prevent the further use of “weapons of mass destruction,” as they are called? What role should the United Nations play?
7. Ask class members who may have been influenced by some nationally known Presbyterian minister or layperson (or from another of some other denomination) to share their experiences.

**Hymn:** “Great Are Your Mercies, O My Maker,” Tsu-chen Chao (1888–1979), trans. Frank W. Price (1885–1974), Presbyterian missionary. Chao was a Christian convert.

### Prayer

*“O God our Father, deliver us from the foolishness of self-confidence, from all boasting and vanity, from pride of energy and false notions of success. Teach us that our springs are not in ourselves but in Thee, that so far from being able to do what we will, we can neither will nor do any good except by Thy grace and with Thy help, that is when we are weak in ourselves that we are strong in Thee, that Thy power is made perfect in our conscious lack of power that compels us to lay our helplessness on Thy strength. Here may we find our rest and feel, pouring through our impotence, the tides of Thy mighty Spirit, for Thine is the kingdom, the power and glory.”*

From *Five Minutes a Day* (1943), Robert E. Speer (1867–1947), Presbyterian elder, mission executive, and ecumenical churchman



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## From the Flourishing 1950s to the Frustrating 1970s

### Prayer

*“O God, grant us serenity  
To accept what cannot be changed.  
The courage to change what can be changed  
And the wisdom to know the difference.”*

*“O Lord, who taught us that to gain the whole world and to lose our souls  
is great folly, grant us grace so to lose ourselves that we may truly find our-  
selves anew in the life of grace, and so to forget ourselves that we may be  
remembered in your kingdom.”*

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), Evangelical and Reformed  
Church minister, professor, Union Theological Seminary, New York

**Hymn:** “God, You Spin the Whirling Planets,” Jane Parker Huber  
(1926–), Presbyterian hymn writer.

### Offer a brief review of the chapter

1. Have members of the class, young and old, share the influences, including religious ones, that have shaped their lives. Do any persons stand out as providing insights into life’s adventure?
2. Discuss John A. Mackay, theologian and educator, who warned in his “Letter to Presbyterians” of 1953 in the “Age of McCarthysm” about a national obsession with Communism. In the light of what happened over these years did he speak a prophetic word and warning? Who are our religious prophets today and what are our international challenges?
3. Discuss the impact of the Supreme Court decision desegregating public schools in 1954 on the nation. How far have we come since those days and what else needs to be done in race relations, not only in relations to Caucasians to African Americans but to Asians and Middle Easterners.
4. Explore the implications of the emergence of a worldwide Christian family over the years. How should we be “fraternal

workers” involved in mission work, locally and on a global scale? Perhaps invite some representative of the denomination or another national representative to speak about contemporary challenges in some other country.

5. Ask some women of the congregation to discuss their views of the history of women’s work in the church, and how it may have changed over the years. Explore what still needs to be done with regard to men’s and women’s work in the congregation.
6. Read some portion of the Confession of 1967 and have the class discuss how clergy and laity may carry out a ministry of reconciliation in the home, the workplace, and the political order.
7. Review the effectiveness of pastoral care in the congregation and what role church members as well as professionals should play on this very personal level of congregational life.
8. Discuss what we call ecumenism, and whether or not denominational lines have so broken down in recent years that we Christians need to unite with fresh labels for our common faith and life. Does the congregation engage in cooperative Christian mission with congregations of other denominations?

**Hymn:** “When I Had Not Yet Learned of Jesus,” Yongchul (1927), para. by Jane Parker Huber.

### **Prayer**

*“Oh thou who dwellest in that light that is unapproachable and full of glory, who in the fullness of time didst send thy Son who is the light of the world, in His light may we see light clearly. . . . To that end bless us as we assemble here seeking thy light upon our work. Graciously grant, O Lord of light and glory, that this journey may ever be loyal to thy truth and to thy gracious purpose for the world, and may it too be ever relevant to the time in which we live and to its challenge. May the Holy Spirit of truth lead us into all truth. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is light and life and the way to both, graciously grant us a sense of His luminous presence that we may truly be guided in our deliberations, whether to explore thy will or to be challenged by human need, in the*

*name of Him who taught us to pray when we say, 'Our Father, who art in Heaven . . .'*

John A. Mackay (1889–1983), missionary to Latin America  
and president of Princeton Theological Seminary

## Reunion, Renewal, and Global Responsibilities

### Prayer

*“Thou God in Christ, there is no ground anywhere that is not holy ground, for in the cool of the evening thou hast walked upon it and in the heat of the day thou hast died upon it, and at the coming down thou hast returned and art always and everywhere returning to it and to us who would upon it too, this holy ground, though heedless of its holiness. O make us whole. Set us free.*

*Thou did shape us each in the darkness of the womb to give us life and thou knowest us each by name, and not one is forgotten by thee, not one but is precious in thy sight—the ugly with the beautiful, the criminal with the child, the enemy with the friend. Lord, give us eyes to see each other and ourselves more nearly as thou seest us, to see beneath each face we meet, and beneath even our own faces, thy face.*

*Help us to know that for each thou hast died as though he were the only one. Amen.”*

Frederich Buechner (1926–), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) minister,  
Pulitzer Prize-nominated author of fiction and non-fiction

**Hymn:** “Come, Great God of All the Ages” (1987), Mary Jackson Cathy (1927–), Presbyterian hymn writer.

### Offer a brief review of the chapter

1. Discuss with the class the place and condition of religion in contemporary society, especially among America’s youth, many of whom may not care much about religion—or denominational affiliation.
2. Remind the class of some basic developments among Presbyterians in the past and how they may have shaped our present situation with regard to theological ideas, education, pastoral care, and societal responsibility touched on in this chapter.

3. Urge members of the class to share what they have gotten out of this study of the history of the denomination and how they have shared this study with others not in the class, or perhaps in no church at all. They might share what more the author of *A Brief History of Presbyterians* might have explored.
4. Urge members of the class to discuss how they see their responsibilities for Christian life in our times, and how they would like to see the Presbyterian Church move in the future.
5. Explore with the class how members may keep up with what is going on not only in the congregation but in the presbytery, synodical, and General Assembly levels, and how they may participate in and make a little history themselves.
6. Conclude this last discussion by confessing with the class A Brief Statement of Faith to remind members of what we believe as Presbyterians about God and the world in which we live.

**Hymn:** “Now Praise the Lord, All Living Saints” (1986), Fred R. Anderson (1941–), Presbyterian minister and hymn writer.

### **Prayer**

*“O God, Creator of all things, you are perpetually renewing the face of the world and have created us new in Jesus Christ; grant that in our worship of you and in communion with you, your created energy may more and more flood our lives, so that we may play our part in the fulfillment of your purposes, which transcend all that we can think or understand. Amen.”*

Willem Visser’t Hooft (1900–1985), Dutch Reformed minister,  
first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches