

---

# Study Guide for *GodViews: The Convictions That Drive Us and Divide Us*

By Jack Haberer  
Study Guide by Carol Wehrheim

## **Introduction**

**T**his study guide for *GodViews: The Convictions That Drive Us and Divide Us*, by Jack Haberer (Geneva Press, 2001. 1-800-227-2872, [www.genevapress.com](http://www.genevapress.com)) provides plans for four units with suggestions for two more units, one to extend the study to five units and one specifically for use in a meeting of the church Session. Each unit plan includes activities for an hour, which could easily be expanded to 90 minutes by allowing additional time for the discussion questions. The opening and closing moments of meditation and prayer based on selections from First Corinthians are essential; they help build the community for study as well as place the discussion within the community of faith. Please allow sufficient time for them. Otherwise, adapt these plans to your time and your group.

While the study is intended for members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who want to examine a way to be the church that embraces a diversity of convictions while seeking the unity that Christ intends, it could be used by those in other denominations as well. The participants will be encouraged to explore five views of God and God's mission in the world that call individuals to particular service. Each view is valid, but no view is sufficient for the total life of the church or the wholeness of the Body of Christ.

---

This study could be of particular help to a Session, especially as it opens up the value of a host of points of view concerning any topic for discussion and decision making. The session, “So Who Cares?”, would introduce elders to the unique role of the Reformed tradition.

The leader of the group is expected to guide the discussion without monopolizing the conversation. It will be helpful if the leader is one who is respected by all the participants and respects the viewpoints of those present. The leader will want to be familiar with the entire book, including those portions not used specifically in the session plans.

Reading assignments from the book will be given for each unit. Have the participants read Chapters 1, 2, and 3 before Unit 1. If that is not possible, the unit plan provides ways to introduce the material to the group.

## Setting the Stage

**Purpose:** to examine the history of conflict in the church and to acknowledge the importance of maintaining the unity of the Body of Christ.

**Materials:**

- newsprint
- markers
- wooden blocks

**Open with a meditation.** Invite the group to relax and open their hearts and minds to hear the words of Paul to the church in Corinth, a church beset by controversy. Read 1 Corinthians 1:4–9. Then ask the group to listen to these words again and, this time, to concentrate on any word or phrase that stands out for them. Read the passage again, pausing briefly after each phrase.

Invite any participants who wish to name the word or phrase that grabbed their attention and comment on it, if they choose. From their comments, bring out the following ideas from the Bible passage:

- Everyone has received the grace of God through Jesus Christ.
- Each one has been given spiritual gifts.
- Everyone will be strengthened through Christ.

Also note that this letter is to the church in Corinth, a congregation in conflict. Paul wrote this affirmation, reminding the hearers that each member of the group was of value and had been gifted by Christ.

**Present the background for this study.** If the group read chapters one through three of *GodViews* before this unit, ask them to name times of conflict in the church (see Chapter 2 for examples). List them on newsprint. The group may name conflicts in other denominations or individual congregations as well. Be sure to keep the

descriptions from being disrespectful. If the group has not read the book, present this information to them, using the history of the Presbyterian Church as the major example (pages 11–13).

**Explore the reasons for struggling to stay together.** A premise central to *GodViews* is the importance of the unity of the church. Author Jack Haberer questions the call to division, whether it is withdrawing from the body or cutting others off from it.

Point out that when Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, his message focused on maintaining the unity of the congregation. Invite discussion of this concept and its importance with these questions, encouraging the group to draw from the material in Chapter 3:

- Haberer notes this about reducing any topic to two opposing points of view: “binary thinking provides a great way to win a war” (p. 23), but it is “a godawful way to run a church” (p. 24). Why is that so? What results from binary thinking? What promotes it in today’s culture?
- He then provides several reasons why he believes that the church, specifically the Presbyterian Church (USA), ought not to be talking about, much less considering, a split or division. Read aloud “Impasse?” in Chapter 3 or provide time for the participants to review this section silently. Then ask, “What about Haberer’s arguments for staying together do you find compelling?” “If you disagree with him, what points would you want to emphasize?” “What circumstances would make it necessary for a group of Christians—congregation or denomination—to go their separate way?”
- Read 1 Corinthians 1:10–17 aloud to the group. Ask, *How would you interpret Paul’s call to unity to a contemporary church body?*

**Make the assignment for the next session.** Assign Chapter 4 for the next unit. Also assign the first three chapters if participants have not already read them.

**Close with prayer.** Give each person a wooden block; a child's building set works well. Ask them to take turns placing their blocks on a flat surface, adding each one so it touches at least one other block. The task is to build a stable structure, not to make it a test for the last group members to add their blocks.

Gather around the block structure. Pray the following prayer:

*Holy God, giver of peace, author of truth,  
we confess that we are divided and at odds with one another,  
that a bad spirit has risen among us  
and set us against your Holy Spirit of peace and love.  
Take from us the mistrust, party spirit, contention  
and all evil that now divides us.  
Work in us a desire for reconciliation,  
so that, putting aside personal grievances,  
we may go about your business with a single mind,  
devoted to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

(From *Book of Common Worship*, #49, p. 812. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993. Used by permission. Taken from *The Worshipbook: Services*, copyright MCMLXX The Westminster Press.)

# 2

## Unit 2

---

### A Host of Influences

**Purpose:** to identify the variety of influences that contribute to our understanding of God.

**Materials:**

- construction paper (at least 18 x 36 in.)
- markers in a variety of colors
- masking tape
- newsprint or overhead transparencies and projector
- a copy of the book *Old Turtle* by Douglas Wood

**Open with a meditation.** Print “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16b) on newsprint or an overhead transparency and display it where everyone can see it. When everyone has gathered, ask the participants to sit comfortably. Read the verse aloud together two or three times. Then invite them to whisper it to themselves over and over until you begin this prayer: *As your children, Loving God, we seek the mind of Jesus Christ. Send your Spirit to guide us on this journey. Amen.*

**Sample the group’s interests and values.** Prepare a continuum by determining a straight line from one side of the room to the other, a line unencumbered and long enough that the group members can stand along it. Give these instructions to the group: *The ends of the line indicate the two choices in the statements I will read. I will announce what each end represents. Choose anywhere along the line to place yourself, depending upon the strength of your opinion about the choice.*

- You would rather have a vacation at the seashore or the mountains.
- You would prefer to gather with just one or two friends or with at least a dozen for an evening.
- You would rather go to a sports event or to a symphony concert.
- You feel that a service of worship is not complete unless you hear the anthem or the sermon.

- You usually think of God as a judging parent or a nurturing parent.
- You think of the church as a family or an outreach group.
- You prefer a small congregation or a large congregation.

From time to time, have the participants talk with one or two persons near them to compare their reasons for standing where they are or talk with someone at the other end of the line to compare reasons.

Conclude this activity by pointing out the breadth of opinion in even a fairly homogeneous group and that the reasons for similar choices are often not the same.

**Review the previous unit.** Ask those present for Unit 1 to recall the topics discussed and to describe thoughts they have had about those topics since that unit. See that the following points are covered in the review:

- Conflicts have been present in the church from the beginning.
- Even with our differences, we strive to attain a unity in the Body of Christ.

**Introduce “GodViews” as used by Jack Haberer.** Define the term as it is used in the text (p. 34). Then review what goes into personal GodViews as described on pages 35–38: psychological temperament, life experiences, status and needs, personal identity, spiritual formation, spiritual gifts and the influence of God.

**Ponder personal influences on GodViews.** Give each participant a large sheet of construction paper or newsprint (at least 18 x 36 inches) and markers or crayons. Provide a variety of colors for those who want to use more than one color. Have the participants spend a few moments thinking about the influences on their own GodView, maybe jotting notes on the back of the paper. It is not yet necessary to identify their own view of God. Then have them create a chart or image of the influences on their view of God. They might print “GodView” in the middle of the page and write the various influences, being fairly specific, around it in any fashion desired. They might create a time line of the ways and times their GodView has been influenced. Encourage them to put their GodView influences on the paper in the way that seems most helpful to them. So they will think deeply into their lives, explain that they will have the

opportunity to post their work for others to see; however, they may pass and simply fold their paper so it is for their eyes only. While looking at the work of others can be instructive and interesting, this activity is to help each person see the multiplicity of influences in their own lives.

When everyone is ready, ask the group to post their work and have everyone spend a few minutes looking at them. Conclude this activity by inviting people to respond to these questions: *What did you discover about the influences on your view of God from this exercise? What surprised you?* Spend enough time on this discussion for the group to see the host of influences on how we perceive God, from family grouping to crises.

**Present Haberer's five GodViews.** In advance, print each GodView with a sentence description from pages 30–40 and the vision for it from page 41 on newsprint or an overhead transparency.

Introduce each GodView to the group, showing the newsprint sheets or transparencies one at a time. A fuller discussion of them will be the focus of Unit 3.

**Make the assignment for the next unit.** Assign Chapters 5 through 9 and ask the participants to recall times when each GodView was dominant in their life.

**Close with prayer.** Read the opening pages of *Old Turtle* by Douglas Wood (Pfeifer-Hamilton Publishers, 1997), up to the last “louder” and entrance of Old Turtle. This picture story book for all ages provides a heart-warming way to think about GodViews.

Conclude the session with this prayer:

*How great is your love, Lord God,  
how wide is your mercy!  
Never let us board up the narrow gate that leads to life  
with rules or doctrines that you dismiss;  
but give us a Spirit to welcome all people with affection,  
so that your church may never exclude secret friends of yours,  
who are included in the love of Jesus Christ,  
who came to save us all. Amen.*

(From *Book of Common Worship*, #27, p. 804. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993. Used by permission. Taken from *The Worshipbook: Services*, copyright MCMLXX The Westminster Press.)

## Five GodViews

**Purpose:** to examine the five GodViews identified by author Jack Haberer.

**Materials:**

- name tags (optional)
- copies of “Unit 3 Worksheet” (Appendix A)
- pencils
- newsprint
- markers
- *Old Turtle*

**Open with a meditation.** As preparation for meditating on the Bible passage, have the group sit or stand in a circle and look around at the group members, naming silently the gifts each one brings to the group. Then ask them to pray for individuals as they come to mind as you read 1 Corinthians 12:4–11. Pause often as you read to allow for their silent prayers.

**Review the previous units.** Invite the group to name the key points from the text and the discussion from Units 1 and 2. Include in the conversation a brief definition of GodView. This is also an opportunity for the participants to note insights that came to them since the previous session and to raise questions for clarification.

Explore the five GodViews. Form five groups, with at least two people in each group. The simplest way is to number off by five, but you may prepare name tags with preassigned groups to distribute as people arrive. Assign one GodView to each group. They are to answer the questions on “Unit 3 Worksheet,” drawing from information in the chapter describing their GodView as well as the appropriate information in Chapter 11. Distribute the copies of the worksheet, newsprint, and markers. Each group should appoint a reporter who will present their description in the plenary session. Be sure each newsprint identifies the GodView and numbers the

answers to the questions. Allow the groups at least twenty minutes to complete this assignment.

**Present reports.** Have each group report, not necessarily in the order in the book. Save the newsprint sheets to use in Unit 4.

**Make the assignment for the next session.** Assign Chapters 11 through 15. Encourage the participants to pray daily for the unity of the church.

**Close with prayer.** Read the rest of *Old Turtle* or you may choose to read the entire book.

Conclude the session with this charge:

*Go out into the world in peace;  
have courage;  
hold on to what is good;  
return no one evil for evil;  
strengthen the fainthearted;  
support the weak, and help the suffering;  
honor all people;  
love and serve the Lord,  
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

(From *Book of Common Worship*, p. 82. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993. Used by permission.)

## A Way of Unity

**Purpose:** to explore how the inclusion of all the GodViews might enhance the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the church at large.

**Materials:**

- multiple copies of 1 Corinthians 12:12 and 12:13
- newsprint sheets with GodViews from Unit 4
- copies of “In Essentials
- Unity” (Appendix B) and “Dialogue Instead of Debate” (Appendix C)
- index cards
- pencils

**Open with a meditation.** Print multiple copies of 1 Corinthians 12:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, enough so half the group will have verse 12 and the rest, verse 13. Distribute the papers to group members as they arrive. If the space permits, have all those with verse 12 gather in one corner of the room and those with verse 13 in the opposite corner. Beginning with verse 12, that group reads their verse and takes one step toward the middle of the room. Then, the other group reads verse 13 and takes a step. They continue this pattern until they meet in the middle. There, they share their papers and read both verses in unison.

If there is not space for the entire group to move, have two or three people do the readings as described above.

**Review the previous units.** Post the newsprint sheets with the GodViews from Unit 3. If the group is not too large, gather in front of each one as you read the definition of that view. Invite comments from the group regarding insights about GodViews or other concepts in the study since the previous unit.

**Consider reasons for the church to stay together.** In Chapter 11, Jack Haberer discusses the ways we have tried and continue to try to bring together the Body of Christ as well as what holds us together. Review the group's discussion of the importance of working for unity from Unit 1. Ask the participants to add other reasons or further thinking they have done on this topic since then, noting those in Chapter 11.

**Explore the essentials for Christian unity.** This saying is often quoted in discussions about unity in the church: *In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, charity*. Distribute "In Essentials, Unity" (Appendix B) to the participants. After they have read it, discuss what each quote has identified as essentials to the Christian faith. Encourage the group to discuss their own understanding of the essentials. For this discussion, remind them of the principles for "ecclesiastical détente" (pages 129–130). Encourage them to include in their discussion the voices of advocates for each GodView. Also look at pages 122–126, where the Formula of Agreement is described.

**Consider a new modus operandi.** Many church members are tired of the "argument culture" (page 146) of society and particularly the church, as Haberer notes, where every issue becomes polarized between two extremes. He suggests that the church, in its many settings, provides a place for dialogue. Distribute copies of "Dialogue Instead of Debate" (Appendix C), which is based on Chapter 13 of *GodViews*. Go over it together, encouraging the participants to express their ideas about the feasibility of dialogue in today's society, particularly in the church.

Allow time for the group to try dialogue. Select one of these topics or devise one of your own:

- the choice of a book of the Bible for a new study group
- the five most important criteria for selecting elders
- what the church should expect of each member

The topic ought not be one that requires an immediate decision by the group or one that is pending from the congregation. Decision-making often leads to immediate debate rather than allowing a time for listening and learning.

Following the dialogue, invite the group to ponder how it went and what it takes to keep the discussion a dialogue rather than turning into a debate.

**Conclude the study.** Four units to cover an entire book are probably not adequate to make life-changing commitments, but such change begins with new insights. Ask the group to comment on what they discovered during this study, whether it was new learning or insights into older ideas.

Distribute index cards and ask them to write a sentence or two, for their own use, about a way that they hope to use what they have discovered or rediscovered during these units.

**Close with prayer.** Invite the group into a period of silent prayer as they seek God's help in completing the commitment they have written on their cards. Conclude their silent prayers with: *Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of Lord Jesus* (Colossians 3:17). *Go now in peace, knowing that God is with you. Amen.*

# 5

## Optional Unit

---

### Optional Unit to Insert between Unit 3 and 4

#### *Studying the Bible Together*

**Purpose:** to experience the Bible study method proposed in *GodViews*.

**Assignment:** Read Chapter 12.

**Materials:**

- copies of “Studying the Bible Together” (Appendix D)
- Bibles
- concordances

**Open with a prayer.** Pray the following prayer for illumination or a similar prayer of your own:

*O Lord our God,  
your Word is a lamp to our feet  
and a light to our path.  
Give us the grace to receive your truth in faith and love,  
that we may be obedient to your will  
and live always for your glory;  
through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.*

(From *Book of Common Worship*, #4, p. 60. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993. Used by permission. Taken from *Service for the Lord's Day*, Supplemental Liturgical Resource 1, copyright 1984 The Westminster Press.)

**Introduce the Bible study method.** The method described in Chapter 12 of *GodViews* can be conveyed in two groups of questions as found in “Studying the Bible Together.” Give a copy to each participant. Explain the process that you will use.

If the group is larger than fifteen, you might form two groups so everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the conversation. See that everyone has a Bible.

**Study a Bible passage.** In keeping with the focus on First Corinthians in this study, a passage from it would be appropriate for the group to explore, using the method on “Studying the Bible Together.” Passages of interest might be 3:1–17; 14:20–33; 15:1–11. Have concordances available for the group to find related passages. This activity will take most of this session.

If the study was done in small groups, invite each group to note discussion points of particular interest or questions that were raised.

**Review the study method.** Conclude by reviewing the steps on the handout and allowing time for questions for clarification and comments on the process.

**Close with prayer.** Pray the following prayer or one of your own:

*O God, fount of all knowledge, keep us ever mindful that we know only a portion of you and your Word. We pray today and daily that more light will be shed upon your word for us. Encourage our hearts and minds to seek you without ceasing. Amen.*

---

## Discussion Guide for a Session Meeting

### So Who Cares?

**Purpose:** to examine the particular role the PC(U.S.A.) plays in the church-at-large.

**Assignment:** Read Chapter 15.

This plan is different from the others in that it is specifically designed for use by a Session as part of a Session meeting. Chapter 15 is brief and could be understood without having read the entire book. Discussing it as a Session may encourage the elders to read the rest of *GodViews*.

#### Discussion questions

- In his conversation with Professor Stackhouse, the author reflects on the motto, *Reformata, semper reformanda*. How do you understand this motto of the Reformed tradition and its application today?
- Haberer adds to *Reformata, semper reformanda* “by the word of God and the Holy Spirit.” Why do you think that is important to him? How does it change or amplify the motto for you?
- The chapter concludes with the author’s answer to the question, “How can the church be a faithful church through such times as these?” How can you (the Session) and your congregation contribute the answers that he suggests? What are other ways to answer the question he poses?

---

## Appendix A

### Unit 3 Worksheet

The GodView you have been assigned:

1. How is the Bible used in this GodView?
2. What is the mission stemming from this GodView?
3. Name a Bible character who fits this GodView.
4. What worship element would you expect to be most important to this GodView?
5. What are the strengths of this GodView? What are the weaknesses?
6. Create a symbol for this GodView.
7. Where do you see evidences of this GodView in your congregation?

---

## Appendix B In Essentials, Unity

**“T**herefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

The incarnation of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ gives to the church not only its mission but also its understanding of membership. One becomes an active member of the church through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and acceptance of his Lordship in all of life. Baptism and a public profession of faith in Jesus as Lord are visible signs of entrance into the active membership of the church.

*Book of Order, G-5.0101*

The congregation shall welcome all persons who respond in trust and obedience to God’s grace in Jesus Christ and desire to become part of the membership and ministry of his Church. No persons shall be denied membership because of race, ethnic origin, worldly condition, or any other reason not related to profession of faith. Each member must seek the grace of openness in extending the fellowship of Christ to all persons. Failure to do so constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal to the gospel.

*Book of Order, G-5.0103*

---

## Appendix C

### Dialogue Instead of Debate

#### **Dialogue**

where the goal is insight

where words inquire

where statements seek  
to humanize

where truth is engaged openly

where participants are invited  
to learn together

#### **Debate**

where the goal is victory

where words accuse

where statements seek  
to demonize

where truth is told selectively

where participants hold to their  
views until they point to foolishness

---

## Appendix D

### Studying the Bible Together

**L**ook for the plain meaning. (See *GodViews*, pages 136–139.)

1. What is the writing style?
2. What is the context of the passage (historically and within the body of writing)?
3. How does this text compare with related scriptures?

Move from discussion of the plain meaning to application of the text. (See *GodViews*, pages 140–143.)

1. How does Jesus' incarnation, teaching, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, enthronement, and sending of the Holy Spirit recast this particular scripture?
2. How does this text align with and/or reflect Christ's mission in the world?
3. How does Jesus clarify this text? Where does it stand in the priorities of Jesus' teachings?
4. How does our interpretation of it stand in light of the interpretation down through the ages?
5. Have we been open to the active role of the Holy Spirit as we have sought to interpret this text for our place and time?