

PRESBYTERIAN PANEL REPORT

Listening to Presbyterians



THE BIBLE

THE FEBRUARY 1995 PRESBYTERIAN PANEL

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RESEARCH SERVICES
Congregational Ministries Division
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202

THE PRESBYTERIAN PANEL: AN OVERVIEW

The Presbyterian Panel (1994-1996) consists of several thousand Presbyterians in the United States and Puerto Rico who agreed to respond to a quarterly mail survey beginning February 1994. The Panel contains independent, representative samples of four groups affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): members, elders, pastors, and clergy in specialized ministries. (The exact number of cases in each sample may be found at the beginning of the appendix.)

Participants in each of these samples were selected according to scientific sampling procedures, a detailed description of which can be found in Appendix B of the *Background Report for the 1994-1996 Panel* (Louisville: Research Services, Division of Congregational Ministries, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1994). The member sample was drawn in two stages. First, 425 congregations were sampled, with the probability of selection proportional to membership size. Each of the 425 congregations was, in turn, requested to supply the names of eight members, based on applying a set of random numbers to its current list of active members. The elder sample was drawn from a denominationally-maintained list of all elders currently serving on sessions of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations. To ensure geographical representation, elders were sampled proportionately according to their overall distribution across the church's 16 synods. The pastor sample is a random sample of all ordained ministers of the Word and Sacrament who, at the time of sampling, occupied a staff position in a congregation or other parish. The specialized clergy sample is a random sample of all ordained ministers in the denomination who, at the time of sampling, worked outside a parish (e.g., chaplains, counselors, teachers, church officials). Retired clergy were excluded from the Panel. Pastors and specialized clergy were both slightly oversampled to permit individuals who had served in the 1991-1993 cycle of the Panel to be excluded from the new samples.

The Office of Research Services, lodged in the Congregational Ministries Division of the national offices of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), maintains the Panel as a service to the General Assembly, its agencies, councils, committees, and other entities. The primary purpose of the Panel is to aid these national bodies within the church by gathering information on Presbyterian opinions and behavior for use in planning and evaluation. Secondly, the Panel exists to provide the church as a whole and the larger society with information of general interest on Presbyterians.

All Panel data are publicly available, with the exception that no data will be released that might compromise the confidentiality of respondents. Requests for Panel data in computer-readable format for research purposes will be considered on an individual basis. Responsibility for the maintenance and disposition of Panel files ultimately rests with the Office of Research Services.

SAMPLING ERROR

Time and costs preclude inclusive surveys of all but the smallest populations. With larger populations, representative samples are drawn and the responses of smaller subsets are used to extrapolate to the total population—much as medicine draws a sample of blood to profile the entire blood supply within the human body. The values obtained from a scientifically-selected sample will not necessarily be the same ones that would have been obtained if the entire population had been surveyed, but we can know, within a certain degree of probability, the range above and below the sample value within which the actual population value is likely to fall. By convention, surveys usually report 95% “confidence intervals,” that is, the range above and below a sample value that, in 19 out of 20 samples (in other words, 95% of the time), will contain the true population value. This range is also known as sampling error.

Sampling error is dependent largely on the number of cases in the sample and, with percentages, how large or how small the particular values are. In general, the larger the sample, the smaller the sampling error, and the closer a percentage is to 50% (as opposed to 0% or 100%), the larger the sampling error. Approximate sampling errors for Panel samples are:

| REPORTED PERCENTAGE | MEMBERS | ELDERS | PASTORS | SPECIALIZED CLERGY |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| | 95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL | | | |
| 50% | ±4% | ±4% | ±4% | ±5% |
| 30% or 70% | ±4% | ±4% | ±4% | ±5% |
| 20% or 80% | ±4% | ±4% | ±4% | ±4% |
| 10% or 90% | ±3% | ±3% | ±3% | ±3% |
| 5% or 95% | ±2% | ±2% | ±2% | ±2% |

HIGHLIGHTS

- A majority of panelists in every sample reported reading the Bible individually at least once in the week prior to the survey, ranging from 58% of members to 98% of pastors. Panelists who reported that they had read the Bible either “often” or “daily” in the prior week comprised 27% of members, 30% of elders, and 72% of pastors. [pp. 2-3]
- For the prior year, almost all panelists reported at least some individual Bible reading, ranging from 88% of members to just under 100% of pastors. Panelists who reported that their individual Bible reading had occurred “daily” or “almost daily” accounted for only 21% of members and 23% of elders, but 65% of pastors and 46% of specialized clergy. [pp. 3-4]
- In all samples, panelists reported a lower frequency of group than individual Bible reading, both in the prior week and in the prior year. Around one-third of members, 40% of elders, and 79% of pastors reported participation in a Bible study group in the previous year that met at least monthly. Bible study in family or friend groups was reported with less frequency; only 14% of members and 34% of pastors reported “almost weekly” (or more frequent) Bible reading in family or friend groups in the prior year. [p. 4]
- Two-thirds of pastors and specialized clergy reported a preference for either the Revised Standard Version or the New Revised Standard Version when reading the Bible in English translation. Members and elders are more divided; among members, 28% favored the King James Version, 24% the (New) Revised Standard Version, and 19%, the New International Version. [p. 5]
- Around two-thirds of all panelists report that their individual Bible reading is taken about equally from the Old and New Testaments. [p. 6]
- Presbyterians reported using a variety of approaches to choosing the passages for their individual Bible reading in the prior year. The most widespread approaches were “reading passages at random” (used at least once by about two-thirds or more in each sample) and “reading a particular book of the Bible from beginning to end” (used at least once by about one-half of each sample). [pp. 6-7]
- Just over one-half of members spend between 15 and 44 minutes on a typical Bible-reading session, while just under one-half of pastors spend an hour or more. [p. 8]
- Among members and elders, the frequency of individual Bible reading is directly related to age, and in all samples, individual Bible-reading frequency is directly related to belief in an infallible Bible. [pp. 8-9]
- In Bible study groups, the most common approach to choosing Bible passages is to “read a particular book of the Bible from beginning to end.” [p. 10]
- Of listed possibilities, only one resource was reported as used regularly by a majority of Bible-reading members and elders: a study Bible. Among pastors and specialized clergy, large majorities reported using a study Bible, as well as a Bible commentary. [p. 11]
- Bible readings during Presbyterian worship services are generally introduced by an announcement of book, chapter, and verses—around nine in ten in every sample so report. Less than one-half, however, reported that any historical or contextual introduction prior to the Bible reading is regularly provided. [pp. 12-13]
- Bible reading is essentially universal in Presbyterian worship services, and almost all of the services (90% based on pastors’ reports) include both an Old Testament and a New Testament reading. [p. 13]
- Just over one-half of pastors and just under one-half of panelists in the other samples indicated that during worship they “always” or “often” read along silently in their own or a pew Bible when the worship leader reads Bible passages to the congregation. [p. 14]
- Few panelists in any sample reported that they had often read to a child or children from the Bible or a Bible story book in the past year. [p. 15]

INTRODUCTION

The February 1995 Panel questionnaire asked respondents about their reading and study of the Bible in private devotions, small groups, and congregational worship. The Theology and Worship office of the Christian Faith and Life Program Area of the Congregational Ministries Division requested this topic. Panel staff developed the questionnaire in cooperation with Theology and Worship staff. Initial discussions began in late 1994, with the final form of the questionnaire produced in late February 1995.¹

Questionnaires were mailed to panelists during the week of February 27, 1995. A reminder postcard (sent to non-respondents only) followed, mailed the week of March 20. The Panel office accepted returned questionnaires through April 25, 1995. The response rates, by sample, are: members, 59%; elders, 62%; pastors, 75%; and specialized clergy, 72%.

The appendix reports the percentage distribution of responses to each question for each of the four samples. This narrative report highlights findings from the appendix, and presents the results of further analyses.

We advise readers to keep in mind that the Panel contains samples of *individuals*, not congregations. Members, elders, pastors, *and* specialized clergy are disproportionately located in larger-membership congregations, so the responses of each of the four samples should be interpreted as more typical of larger than smaller congregations. The distribution of elders is the least sensitive of the four to church size, but since larger congregations still tend to have larger sessions than smaller congregations, even this sample is skewed significantly in the direction of larger congregations.²

BIBLE READING AND STUDY IN THE LAST WEEK AND THE LAST YEAR

To measure the frequency and regularity of Bible reading and study, we asked two questions. The first (Q-1) was designed to get an approximation of Bible reading in a "real" week, while the second (Q-2) was designed to ascertain a more usual or "typical" reading pattern. These two questions also looked at the context of the reading, in terms of private, personal study (Q-1a and Q-2a); reading with family members (Q-1b and Q-2b); reading with a group devoted to Bible study (Q-1c and Q-2c); and reading with another church-related group, such as church school (Q-1d and Q-2d).³ To simplify the narrative presentation, we will typically use either the word "reading" or "study," not both, and we will use these two words interchangeably. Most questions contained both of these terms to try to make clear our interest in the broadest possible range of ways that people use and approach the Bible. Nevertheless, at least one panelist felt that these two terms together did not adequately address all serious uses of the Bible, mentioning specifically meditation on a Bible passage during times of prayer.

¹Theology and Worship staff members involved in the project included John Burgess and Joe Small.

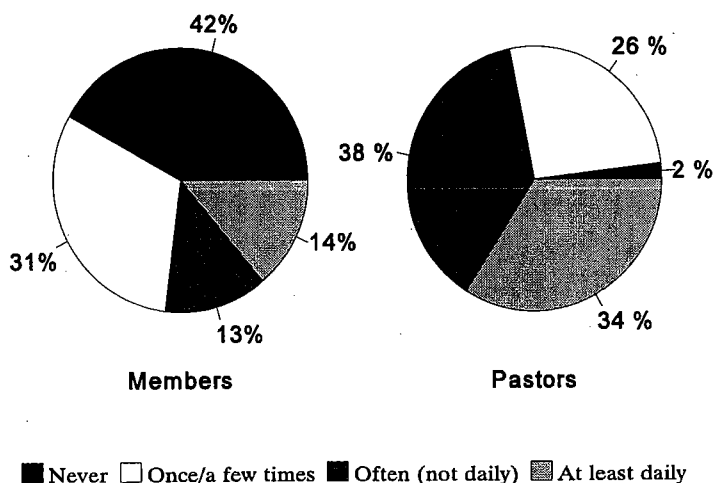
²More details on sampling and other technical aspects of the Panel may be found in the one-page overview found at the beginning of this *Report*.

³For reasons that are not clear at this writing, Q-1b asked about "family" while Q-2b asked about "family or friends"; otherwise, the subparts of Q-1 and Q-2 are identical.

PRIOR WEEK

In the week prior to completing the survey,⁴ a majority of members (58%) and elders (71%) reported reading the Bible “on their own” at least once. (Q-1a read: “. . . think back over *the last week*. In that period of seven days—and *that period only*—how often did you read the Bible or hear the Bible read . . . on your own?”). Many of these individuals, however, reported that they had read the Bible only once (about one-fourth of both samples). Furthermore, a large minority of members (42%) and just under a third of elders (29%) reported that they had *not* read the Bible privately in the week prior to completing the February questionnaire. In contrast, only 2% of pastors and 8% of specialized clergy reported no Bible reading over the previous seven days. At the other end of the continuum, 14% of members, 16% of elders, 34% of pastors, and 25% of specialized clergy reported private Bible reading “at least daily.” (See Figure 1 and Table 1.)

FIGURE 1
How Often Did You Read the Bible on Your Own Last Week?



While almost three-fourths of pastors reported reading the Bible on their own “at least daily” in the week prior to the survey, their frequency of reading it in group settings was somewhat lower than that, on average. In fact, in the prior week, fewer Presbyterians in every sample—whether clergy or laity—reported having read the Bible “often” or “daily/almost daily” in any of the three group settings than reported doing so on their own. This finding is hardly surprising: the logistics of individual Bible reading, by definition, involve only one person, and a group requires that two or more people match schedules to meet together. Even among members who share the same household with at least one other family member, 76% reported that they had *not* read the Bible with family members in the last week. Nevertheless, it is important to note that three-fourths of both clergy samples reported reading the Bible at least once in a group setting in the prior week.

⁴Since panelists responded over a period of several weeks, all panelists did not have in mind the *same* week. Still, it is worth noting that almost all panelists completed the questionnaire during Lent.

TABLE 1

| Bible Reading in the Prior Week by Setting, Frequency, and Sample (Q-1) | | | |
|---|---------|--------|---------|
| Setting and Frequency | Members | Elders | Pastors |
| on one's own | | | |
| never | 42% | 29% | 2% |
| once/twice/a few times | 31% | 41% | 26% |
| often/daily | 27% | 30% | 72% |
| total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| with family | | | |
| never | 77% | 73% | 50% |
| once/twice/a few times | 18% | 22% | 38% |
| often/daily | 5% | 5% | 12% |
| total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| in Bible study group(s) | | | |
| never | 72% | 63% | 27% |
| once/twice/a few times | 25% | 33% | 65% |
| often/daily | 3% | 4% | 8% |
| total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| in other church group(s) | | | |
| never | 61% | 46% | 21% |
| once/twice/a few times | 35% | 48% | 71% |
| often/daily | 4% | 6% | 8% |
| total | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Very few member panelists—7%—reported reading the Bible in the prior week in *all* four contexts listed in Q-1. Overall, 40% of members reported reading the Bible in at least two of the four listed contexts. At the other extreme, three in ten members (31%) reported that they had *not* read the Bible in any of the four contexts in the prior week.

These findings contrast with those for pastors—90% reported having read the Bible in the prior week in at least two of the contexts listed (including 32% who reported Bible reading in all four), while only 1% reported no Bible reading in the prior week.

PRIOR YEAR

When approached more generally, Presbyterian members and elders continue to reveal wide variation in their Bible reading practices (Q-2: "Please think back over *the past twelve months*. In general, about how often over this year did you read the Bible or hear the Bible read (*excluding* during worship services) . . . ?"). While few members (12%) or elders (5%) reported no individual Bible reading or study at all in the previous year, many of the rest reported only very infrequent or sporadic reading. Overall, 45% of both members and elders chose one of the following three options as their response regarding individual, private Bible reading: "rarely, but no regular pattern"; "at times, but no regular pattern"; or "once a month or less." If we add to these totals the proportions of members (4%) and elders (6%) who responded "once every 2-3 weeks," we have a majority of both members (62%) and elders (56%) who reported either no or infrequent Bible reading in the year before the Panel survey.

The responses of members and elders stand in clear contrast to those of pastors and specialized clergy. Almost two-thirds (65%) of pastors reported in response to Q-2a that they read the Bible on their own "daily/almost

daily,” and most of the rest—27% overall—reported that they read it “weekly/almost weekly.” Combined, 92% of pastors read the Bible on their own with relative frequency and regularity. Specialized clergy are a bit less compulsive: 46% reported individual Bible study “daily/almost daily,” and another 33%, “weekly/almost weekly” (total: 79%).

As with Q-1, in all samples, Bible reading and study in conjunction with some sort of *group* was reported less frequently than individual Bible study. Members were the least likely Presbyterians to read the Bible in (or for) a group context:⁵ indeed, a slim majority of members (52%) reported never reading the Bible in a “group devoted specifically to Bible study” in the prior year (Q-2c), while 42% reported never reading the Bible “with family or friends” (Q-2b), and 39% reported never reading the Bible “in connection with another church-based class or group” (Q-2d). (The corresponding proportions for elders are 39%, 32%, and 19%.) By contrast, a majority of pastors (59%) reported Bible reading in conjunction with a group devoted solely to Bible study “almost weekly” or more often, and 52% reported such frequency of Bible reading in connection with one or more other church groups. Interestingly, pastors and specialized clergy are both more likely to report frequent Bible study with church groups than with family members: only 34% of pastors reported family-based Bible study either “weekly/almost weekly” or “daily/almost daily” (among specialized clergy, the corresponding proportion is 29%). Nevertheless, the highest reported rate of “daily/almost daily” *group*-linked Bible reading is found among pastors (9%) and specialized clergy (8%) for the “family or friends” (Q-2b) category.

A CLOSER LOOK AT FAMILY BIBLE READING

We used Q-21 (“Do you share a household with one or more family members?”) to split each sample into two broad groupings, those who live in some sort of family arrangement and those who don't. The former comprise large majorities of all samples, ranging from 79% of elders to 88% of pastors. We asked this subset a series of five questions (Q-22a to Q-22e) concerning the circumstances of family Bible reading. As the appendix shows, non-response rates were relatively high to Q-22, probably because—as we know from Q-1b and Q-2b—noticeable proportions in all samples previously reported that they never read the Bible with family members. To focus more exclusively on the panelists who earlier in the questionnaire acknowledged at least some Bible study with family, we recalculated the percentages for each part of Q-22 after excluding panelists who responded “never” to Q-2b (“In general, about how often over this [past] year did you read the Bible or hear the Bible read . . . with family or friends?”) (see Table 2). Except for the holidays of Christmas and Easter, few panelists in any sample reported family Bible reading on the occasions listed.

TABLE 2

| Percentage of Panelists Reporting Bible Reading with Family, by Sample and Occasion (Q-22) | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| Do you and other family members <i>typically</i> read the Bible together . . . | PERCENT RESPONDING "YES" | | | |
| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
| at meals daily? | 6% | 5% | 8% | 7% |
| at meals occasionally? | 21% | 23% | 35% | 33% |
| at Christian holidays? | 54% | 51% | 66% | 66% |
| at birthdays/anniversaries? | 7% | 6% | 5% | 7% |
| at a regular study time? | 17% | 18% | 21% | 24% |

Note: Includes only panelists who indicated some Bible reading with family in the last year (Q-2b) and who reported at least one family member sharing their households (Q-21).

⁵With hindsight, these questions are ambiguous as to whether we were asking about Bible reading (a) in the group setting itself; (b) away from the group meeting, but as an assignment or follow-up to the group meeting; or (c) both.

BIBLE TRANSLATION PREFERRED

Bible readers have a large number of English-language translations available. To find out their particular preferences, we asked Q-3: "Which English translation of the Bible do you *personally* most prefer?" Among ministers, only two versions are widely preferred: the (New) Revised Standard Version (NRSV/RSV).⁶ Two-thirds of both pastors (67%) and specialized clergy (69%) prefer the NRSV/RSV, and 18% and 12%, respectively, prefer the New International Version (NIV). No other translation is preferred by more than 4% in either clergy group.

The Bible choices of members reveal greater diversity. While a fourth of them (24%) reported preferring the NRSV/RSV, even more—28%—favored the King James Version (this total includes responses of the "New King James Version"). Just under a fifth, 19%, reported their preference as the NIV. And, while relatively small proportions of members chose some of the other widely available translations, they were still more likely to choose these other versions than were either sample of clergy (e.g., 8% of members chose Today's English Version, compared to 4% of pastors and 3% of specialized clergy).

Age is associated with preferences for Bible translations (Q-3). In particular, the New International Version is preferred by larger proportions of younger rather than older panelists, whatever the sample. The preferences of members and pastors of different ages are shown in Table 3, below.

TABLE 3

| Members' and Pastors' Preferred Bible Translations (Q-3): by Age | | | | | |
|---|----------------|-------|-------|------|-----|
| | Members | | | | |
| | < 40 | 40-54 | 55-69 | 70+ | n |
| NIV | 34% | 23% | 16% | 11% | 130 |
| Living Bible | 2% | 4% | 10% | 12% | 47 |
| King James | 22% | 28% | 37% | 36% | 198 |
| RSV/NRSV | 30% | 27% | 22% | 24% | 164 |
| TEV/Good News | 7% | 7% | 10% | 10% | 55 |
| Other | 4% | 11% | 5% | 7% | 46 |
| total* | 99% | 100% | 100% | 100% | |
| n | 122 | 203 | 185 | 131 | 642 |
| | Pastors | | | | |
| | < 40 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ | n |
| NIV | 22% | 23% | 12% | 14% | 166 |
| RSV/NRSV | 72% | 67% | 73% | 65% | 620 |
| TEV/Good News | 1% | 4% | 6% | 9% | 40 |
| New English | 1% | 2% | 3% | 4% | 22 |
| Other | 3% | 4% | 6% | 8% | 42 |
| total* | 99% | 100% | 100% | 100% | |
| n | 229 | 282 | 232 | 147 | 890 |

* = may not total 100% due to rounding
 Note: For each sample, only versions selected by at least 20 respondents are presented. Also, because there are so few pastors over the age of 70, a somewhat different age breakdown was used for that sample.

⁶Many of the better-known English translations have undergone revisions in recent years, often with the addition of the word "New" to the name of the original translation. One such updated version, for example, is the "Jerusalem Bible." Because this question was open-ended, rather than fixed-choice, we couldn't tell whether a panelist who wrote "Jerusalem Bible" on his or her questionnaire had *deliberately* listed the earlier version or had simply left out the word "New." Thus, we combined the responses into one category in each of these cases.

INDIVIDUAL BIBLE READING AND STUDY

To focus specifically on various aspects of individual Bible reading and study, we used Q-4 to distinguish between panelists who have engaged in this sort of Bible study in the past year and those who have not. We then asked the former group a series of questions about that activity, from motivation to location to how they chose what passages to read. Thus, please note: *The percentages reported in the remainder of this section are percentages of the subset of each sample who reported at least some individual reading of the Bible in the past year.*

READING LOCATION

Few panelists (1% or 2%) in any sample reported reading the Bible primarily “in a car or public transportation” (Q-7, “During the past year, *where* did your *individual* Bible reading or study *usually* take place?”). Of the two remaining choices (besides “other”), only among pastors did a majority (57%) select their “office/place of work” as the usual location of their Bible reading. About one-third of specialized clergy (32%) also reported reading the Bible primarily at the office. However, only 2% of members and 3% of elders did so. Viewed from another perspective, Bible reading is reported as primarily a home activity by 95% of members and elders, 66% of specialized clergy, and 41% of pastors.

OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT—OR BOTH?

Around two-thirds of panelists in each sample, ranging from 63% of elders to 70% of pastors, chose “I have read about equally from both the Old and New Testaments” when asked to describe the content of their Bible reading over the past year (Q-9). The second largest proportion in each sample selected this choice: “I have read mostly from the New Testament,” ranging from 25% of specialized clergy to 31% of elders. Almost no one reported reading entirely from one testament or the other (the highest New Testament-only proportion was 2%, and the highest Old Testament-only proportion was 1%), and only a slightly larger proportion reported reading “mostly from the Old Testament,” ranging from 6% of specialized clergy to 2% of pastors.

READING GUIDES AND HELPS

The Bible is, of course, a multi-authored, collaborative work—really a *set* of books written over several centuries that have been combined into one resource. Depending on one's interests or reasons for reading, skipping between selected passages or concentrating on a particular section or book may be much more appropriate than simply starting at the beginning of the Old Testament. To gauge something of the variety of approaches Presbyterians take when they read the Bible, we asked panelists six questions about their methods of choosing what parts of the Bible to read (Q-6).

Interestingly, by far the most widespread approach was “reading passages at random” (Q-6e): 80% of members and 77% of elders reported doing this in the prior year, as did almost two-thirds of pastors (64%) and specialized clergy (63%). Unfortunately, we didn't ask how often panelists used this or any other selection method, so we can't distinguish between the person who *always* approached the Bible in this manner from one who happened to do so once during the year.

Majorities of members indicated that they had also used two other approaches to Bible reading: selecting a particular book and reading it from beginning to end (52%; Q-6a) and “reading selections from a devotional magazine like *Upper Room* or *These Days*” (55%; Q-6d). Similar proportions of elders also reported using these two approaches (48% and 59%, respectively). The responses of both clergy samples were only slightly different. While exactly one-half of specialized clergy reported using the book-selection method, 64% of pastors did so. However, both pastors and specialized clergy were slightly *less likely* than members and elders

to report having used devotional magazines to guide their Bible reading (40% of both clergy samples so reported). About four in ten pastors and specialized clergy also reported using denominational resources like *Daily Prayer* or *The Mission Yearbook of Prayer and Study*, although these resources were used much less by members and elders (28% and 34%, respectively, so reported).⁷

The biggest lay-clerical gap in the use of Bible reading guides is found for the lectionary (Q-6b). Since this resource is a set of suggested Bible readings primarily used by pastors to guide their choices of Bible readings for congregational worship and sermon preparation, it is not surprising that about three-fourths of pastors (76%) and specialized clergy (73%) reported using the lectionary to guide choices of Bible readings, while only 26% of members and 37% of elders did so.

Hearing the Bible read via television or videotapes, radio or audiotapes, was reported by over four in ten members (43%) and elders (43%) (Q-6f). Somewhat fewer, but still sizeable, proportions of pastors (35%) and specialized clergy (29%) heard the Bible read via such media. (Again, keep in mind that we can't distinguish between individuals who relied on a particular approach only once and those who used it often or routinely.)

OVERLAPPING USE OF METHODS AND FORMATS

Many panelists in every sample reported using more than one approach to selecting the Bible passages they read. Among members, 44% reported using at least two methods, including 13% who reported using four or more. Multiple methods were reported at much higher rates by pastors: 4% reported using all six selection methods, and over one third—36%—listed at least four methods.

We wondered about the panelists who listed only *one* method for choosing their individual Bible readings: which method do they use exclusively? While there are few of them in each sample, there are sufficient cases for display (see Table 4). Members and elders are very similar, with the random method used by about four in ten. Most of the remainder either use a devotional magazine to guide them or select a particular book of the Bible. Pastors differ from both lay groups, particularly in their much greater use of the lectionary and the book-selection method and their much lower use of devotional magazines and random selection. Specialized clergy resemble pastors in that relatively many use the lectionary. Curiously, though, when compared to pastors, only half as many specialized clergy use the “select-a-book” method, and more than twice as many specialized clergy are likely to use a random-choice method. In terms of these two methods, specialized clergy are much more similar to members and elders than to pastors. (In interpreting these findings, keep in mind that they refer to very small, self-selected subsets of each sample.)

TABLE 4

| Methods Used to Guide Individual Bible Reading (Q-6) by Panelists Who Reported Using Only One Method | | | | |
|---|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| | Members (n=86) | Elders (n=94) | Pastors (n=75) | Sp. Clergy (n=63) |
| read a particular book | 15% | 19% | 43% | 21% |
| read selections from the lectionary | 7% | 7% | 43% | 38% |
| read selections from PCUSA worship books | 2% | 4% | 1% | 3% |
| read selections from devotional magazines | 24% | 17% | 3% | 5% |
| read passages at random | 47% | 42% | 11% | 32% |
| listen to audio/video Bible reading | 4% | 6% | - | 2% |
| total | 100% | 99% | 101% | 101% |

Note: Totals may not add to 100% because of rounding. - = zero (0.0%); no cases in this category

⁷The relatively high proportion of missing responses among members and elders to Q-6d suggests that many of these panelists are unfamiliar with these two resources.

AVERAGE TIME SPENT PER READING PERIOD

While there is considerable personal variation, in general most individual Bible reading occurs in relatively brief time intervals. Among members, a majority (53%) spend between 15 and 44 minutes at a typical Bible reading session. While the comparable proportion for pastors is somewhat *lower*—40%—it is because more pastors reported spending an hour or more on average per reading session (48%, compared to 30% of members). Specialized clergy typically spend less time than pastors but more time than laity in their individual reading sessions, with 42% spending 15 to 44 minutes per session, and 41% spending an hour or more.

PURPOSES OF STUDY

People read the Bible on their own for many reasons, but the principal one, judging from the results for Q-5, is to meet needs (Q-5d: “Continue to recall your *individual* Bible reading or study over the past year. To what extent was that reading and study part of your own individual needs or wants?”). Majorities in every sample responded “very often” or “often” to this question, including 70% of members and 67% of elders, pastors, and specialized clergy. Almost no one—about 1% of each sample—indicated that they *never* read the Bible for this reason, and only 5% to 7% reported that they read it for this reason “rarely.”

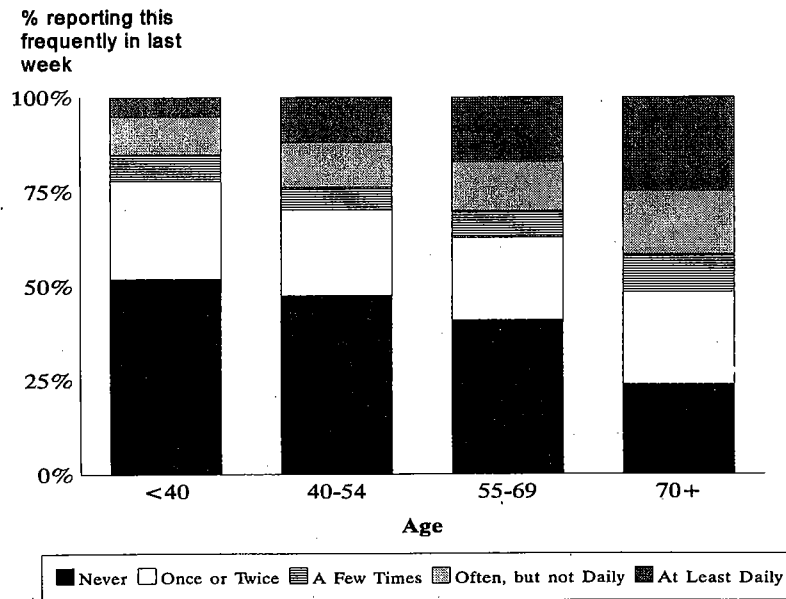
At the same time, the phrase “your individual needs or wants” is a bit vague, especially compared to the other four reasons asked about in Q-5. Furthermore, three of these possible motivations for Bible-study link Bible reading to activities more typical of clergy than laity. Hence, it is not at all surprising that only a minority of members or elders responded “very often” or “often” to any of them. Almost no members (2%) or elders (4%) reported reading the Bible “often” or “very often” as part of sermon preparation (although 92% of pastors and 76% of specialized clergy did; Q-5a), or as part of “job- or academic-related assignments or work” (5% of members and 7% of elders so reported, compared to 50% of pastors and 42% of specialized clergy; Q-5e). Members and elders were also much less likely than pastors and specialized clergy to read the Bible individually as part of preparations for a Bible study group—a result that gets more ink below.

Compared to their responses on Q-5a and Q-5e, members and elders were a bit more likely to report individual reading of the Bible “often” or “very often” as preparation for a Bible study group—either as leaders (22% of members and 28% of elders so reported) or as participants (33% and 31%, respectively, so reported). And while pastors (82%) and specialized clergy (58%) were much more likely than members and elders to have reported that they read the Bible individually either “often” or “very often” as part of leadership preparations for study groups, they were *not* more likely to have reported reading the Bible because of participation in such groups (36% of pastors and 32% of specialized clergy reported that they read the Bible “often” or “very often” as part of their preparation “for *attending* a Bible study group”).

AGE DIFFERENCES IN INDIVIDUAL BIBLE READING

When we looked at Bible reading frequency over the past year by *age*, we found significant differences. Among members and elders, the reported frequency of Bible reading in the prior year is greatest among the oldest respondents (see Figure 2). Indeed, among members aged 70 and over, more than one half (52%) reported that they had read the Bible at least weekly in the past year, compared to 29% of the youngest members (under age 40). Some of these age differences are likely linked to concurrent life cycle differences (e.g., most older panelists are retired or are homemakers and thus may have more time for Bible reading). But is part of the difference a decline in piety among younger Presbyterians relative to that of their grandparents' generation? Unfortunately, we cannot know the answer with a one-time survey. Only by conducting similar surveys in the future will we be able to determine if the now under-40 members will become more like their forebears in Bible-reading practices.

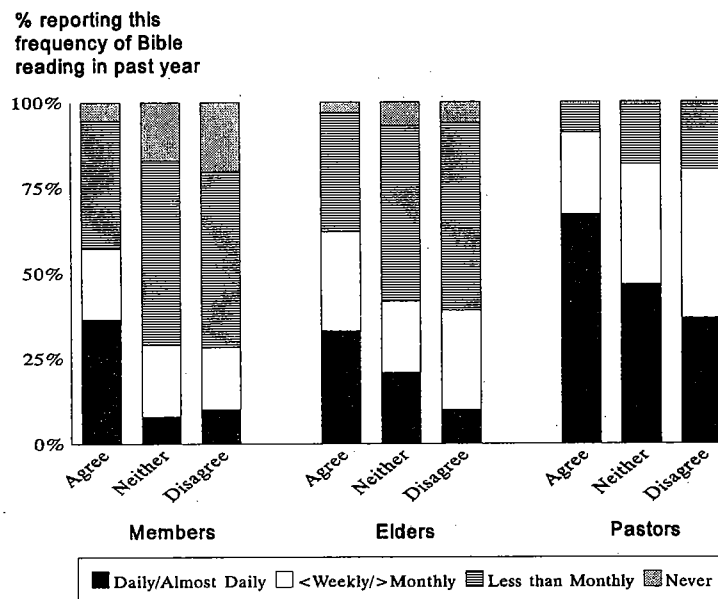
FIGURE 2
Frequency of Members' Individual Bible Reading in the Week Prior to Survey, by Age



BIBLICAL INFALLIBILITY BELIEFS AND FREQUENCY OF BIBLE READING

In all samples, there is a clear relationship between view of the Bible as a whole and the frequency of reading it on one's own, both in the prior week and in the past year. Panelists who, on an earlier Panel survey, indicated that they agreed with the statement, "As written in the original languages, the Bible is infallible," indicated greater frequency of Bible reading than panelists who disagreed with this statement or who responded "neither agree nor disagree" (see Figure 3). For example, while over a third of the members (35%) who had earlier expressed agreement with the statement on the Bible's infallibility indicated on the current survey that they read the Bible daily in the last year, only 10% of member panelists who had disagreed with the infallibility statement indicated daily or almost daily Bible reading in the year prior to the current Panel survey. At the other extreme, only 5% of members who had agreed to the question on Biblical infallibility responded "never" to the February 1995 question on Bible reading in the prior year, compared to 20% of members who had disagreed.

FIGURE 3
Bible Reading Frequency of Members, Elders, and Pastors by Categories of Opinion on Biblical Infallibility: Percentage Responses



Similar patterns are also found when beliefs on Biblical infallibility are compared with frequency of participation in group forms of Bible reading (e.g., Q-2b, Q-2c, and Q-2d).

BIBLE READING FOR BIBLE STUDY GROUPS

In the previous sections, we looked in detail at the circumstances of individual Bible study among Presbyterians. One important motivator for many panelists to read the Bible individually is their concurrent participation in a Bible study group. In this section we focus more directly on the reading and study of the Bible that takes place within such groups.

To identify participants in Bible study groups, we asked Q-10: “In the last year, have you engaged in any form of regular Bible reading or study as part of a *Bible study group*, that is, a small group devoted specifically to study of the Bible?” Responses indicate that pastors stand out among Panel samples for their level of involvement: almost three-fourths—73%—indicated that they had read the Bible regularly in the prior year as part of a Bible study group. In no other sample did a majority report reading the Bible regularly for this purpose, although sizeable minorities so reported (members, 33%; elders, 41%; specialized clergy, 45%).

The remainder of this section examines in more detail the Bible reading practices of the subset of panelists who reported any Bible reading in a Bible study group in the previous year (Q-10). That is, *the percentages for the rest of this section are percentages of the subset of panelists in each sample who reported some Bible reading in the previous year in conjunction with a group specifically devoted to Bible study.*

APPROACHES USED TO SELECT GROUP BIBLE READINGS

In all four samples, majorities of 60% or greater reported that at least some of their group-related study was guided by “reading a particular book of the Bible from beginning to end” (Q-11a). The second most frequent approach—“reading passages at random” (Q-11e)—was also the same in all samples, although it was reported by relatively fewer clergy than laity (see Table 5). Almost as frequently reported by both samples of clergy (32% for each sample) was “reading selections from the lectionary” (Q-11b). Of the other possibilities listed in Q-11, similar (and relatively small) proportions of members and elders reported using each one to guide or structure their group Bible reading—around a fourth to a fifth of each sample. Likewise, relatively few panelists in either clergy sample reported using liturgical, devotional, or audio or video resources to guide their group study. Still, it is probably worth emphasizing that 18% of pastors and 15% of specialized clergy reported that they had listened to audiotapes or watched videotapes on which the Bible was read as part of their study group preparations.

TABLE 5

| Approaches Used to Select Bible Readings for Group Study (Q-11) | | | | |
|---|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
| read a particular book | 66% | 60% | 67% | 61% |
| read passages at random | 45% | 46% | 34% | 34% |
| read selections from PCUSA worship books | 24% | 20% | 8% | 12% |
| read selections from the lectionary | 22% | 23% | 32% | 32% |
| read selections from devotional magazines | 21% | 23% | 9% | 11% |
| listen to audio/video Bible reading | 26% | 23% | 18% | 15% |

Note: Columns total more than 100% because many panelists listed more than one guide for their reading choices.

HELPS AND MOTIVATIONS FOR BIBLE READING

In two further questions, we asked all panelists who reported Bible reading or study in the prior year—whether individually, as part of a group, or both—to reflect on two aspects of their reading: (1) the use of commentaries or other study aides (Q-12), and (2) the motivations for their Bible reading (Q-13).

(Remember that, as with the two previous sections of this *Report*, the percentages that we report in this section are for a *subset of panelists*, in this instance those who reported any Bible reading in the prior year, *whether group, individual, or both*.)

THE USE OF HELPS IN BIBLE READING

One type of study resource that has almost universal use among clergy is “a Bible commentary” (Q-12b). Over nine in ten pastors (93%) and almost as many specialized clergy (83%) reported regular use of this type of resource. Relatively fewer members and elders—although still sizeable proportions (38% and 47%, respectively)—reported regular use of a Bible commentary with their Bible reading and study.

One resource was reported as used regularly by a majority of *all* samples: “a study Bible” (Q-11a). Even here, however, the proportions so reporting are somewhat higher among pastors (79%) and specialized clergy (71%) than among members (51%) and elders (56%).

No other resource among those listed in Q-12 was reported as used regularly by a majority in any sample. However, around a quarter in every sample, ranging from 22% of specialized clergy to 29% of elders, reported using “a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) study curriculum” (Q-12c). Of the other two listed resources, “Kerygma” (Q-12d) has the most reported use: 5% of members and elders mentioned having used it, as did 14% of pastors and 6% of specialized clergy. Almost no one reported regular use of “Bethel Bible study” (4% or less in every sample; Q-12e).

Quite a few panelists indicated that there were other resources (Q-12f) they “used regularly” when they read or studied the Bible in the previous year. These respondents were asked to specify those resources, and while not coded, a look at several questionnaires revealed a wide variety of items, from concordances to religion textbooks to magazines that contain a Bible study (e.g., *The Christian Century*).

MOTIVATIONS FOR BIBLE READING

We asked Q-13 to gather information about possible individual motivations for Bible reading: “When you read the Bible—whether on your own or as part of a group—to what extent do you read it for . . .”: “comfort?” (Q-13a); “entertainment?” (Q-13b); “guidance?” (Q-13c); “information?” (Q-13d); and “inspiration?” (Q-13e). Response choices were “always,” “often,” “sometimes,” “rarely,” and “never.”

The least-commonly reported motivation for Bible reading among this Bible-reading subset of panelists is “entertainment.” Almost one-half of members (48%) and elders (45%) responded that they “never” read the Bible for entertainment, as did almost one-third of pastors (30%) and specialized clergy (32%). Most of the rest in each sample responded “rarely,” ranging from 30% of members to 44% of pastors.

Of the other listed motivators, large majorities in all samples indicated that they “always” or “often” read the Bible for the following reasons: “inspiration,” “guidance,” and “information.” In general, both samples of clergy are more likely than members and elders to read the Bible for these reasons, but one reason motivates more laity than clergy: “comfort” (see Table 6).

TABLE 6

| Motivations for Bible Reading (Q-13) by Sample (Percent responding "always" or "often") | | | | |
|--|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| Do you read the Bible for . . . | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
| inspiration? | 74% | 74% | 90% | 86% |
| guidance? | 66% | 65% | 76% | 68% |
| information? | 64% | 65% | 76% | 72% |
| comfort? | 52% | 48% | 43% | 38% |
| entertainment? | 7% | 6% | 7% | 6% |

In short, large majorities of panelists in all samples who read the Bible tend to do so for the traditional religious reasons of inspiration and guidance. Yet somewhat smaller proportions turn to the Bible for another seemingly traditional function of religion—comfort. In fact, higher proportions read the Bible “always” or “often” for reasons of information than for reasons of comfort.⁸

THE BIBLE AND CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP

The “Directory for Worship” in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s *Book of Order* minces no words when it comes to the core place of the Bible in Presbyterian worship: “. . . the reading, hearing, preaching, and confessing of the Word are central to Christian worship. The session shall ensure that in public worship the Scripture is read and proclaimed regularly in the common language(s) of the particular church” (W-2.2001).⁹ While further guidelines follow, they are general enough to leave some room for interpretation and individual style. Hence, we developed several questions to ascertain some of the range of variation in Bible use during Presbyterian worship services.

INTRODUCING THE TEXT

To gather information on what the minister, liturgist, or other worship leader tells the congregation before reading from the Bible during a worship service, we asked two questions. The first, Q-15, concerns information to identify the location of the passage:¹⁰ “When the Bible is read aloud during worship in your congregation (the congregation you attend most often), how is the reading usually introduced?”¹¹ Of the five alternatives, one emerged as a near-consensus choice: “the reader announces the book, chapter, and verse of each Bible passage.” This response option was selected by 88% of members, 90% of elders, 85% of pastors, and 85% of specialized clergy. Most of the remaining panelists in each sample selected the option “the reader announces the book and chapter of each Bible passage,” including 7% of members, 6% of elders, 10% of

⁸While one would be well-advised not to extrapolate too much from this juxtaposition, it does seem consistent with the stereotype of Presbyterians as unemotional, as well as with the long-term emphasis on education among Presbyterians.

⁹Instead of “the Bible,” *The Book of Order* uses the word “Scripture” almost exclusively.

¹⁰Of course, a worship service will typically include more than one passage, but we have chosen to use the singular form here for simplicity and to avoid such awkward constructions as “passage(s).”

¹¹The parenthetical phrase particularly refers to specialized ministers, many of whom by virtue of their jobs travel often or visit a variety of congregations.

pastors, and 9% of specialized clergy. The low relative level of “don't know” responses—1% or fewer in each sample—suggests that Bible reading in worship is memorable to all but a handful of Presbyterians.

Of other possible prefaces to the Bible text, we asked about the frequency in worship of two in particular: (1) “a brief *historical* introduction,” and (2) “a brief introduction to the *meaning* of each passage” (Q-16a and Q-16b). Among pastors and specialized clergy, the modal response to Q-16a is “sometimes”: 39% of pastors and 36% of specialized clergy reported that historical introductions to the Bible occur only “sometimes.” About as many chose “rarely” (23% for both) as reported it is a common occurrence (about one quarter—25% and 24%, respectively—responded that in their congregations the reader provides a historical introduction to the passage “always” or “often”). When the focus is “a brief introduction to the *meaning* of each passage” (Q-16b), the results are very similar.

Combining the responses to Q-16a and Q-16b, we find that a majority of congregations served by the pastors in that Panel sample observe a rough symmetry in these two practices.¹² That is, they tend to have reported historical and interpretive (“meaning”) introductions to Bible readings at about the same rates, although a few reported wide disparities. (See Table 7; the diagonal—highlighted in bold type—shows responses of pastors who reported the same or similar rates for both types of introductions. Their combined responses total to 76% of the pastors who answered both Q-16a and Q-16b.)

TABLE 7

| A Comparison of Pastors' Responses to Questions on How the Bible Reading is Introduced in Worship in Their Congregations (Q-16a and Q-16b) | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------|------------|-------|
| Is there an historical introduction? (Q-16a) | IS THERE A MEANING INTRODUCTION? (Q-16B) | | | |
| | Yes, always/often | Yes, sometimes/rarely | No, never | Total |
| yes, always/often | 15% | 8% | 1% | 24% |
| yes, sometimes/rarely | 4% | 51% | 8% | 63% |
| no, never | * | 3% | 10% | 13% |
| total | 19% | 62% | 19% | 100% |

* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero
 Note: Each percentage is based on the total n for all nine cells.

THE CONTENT

According to panelists, most Presbyterian worship services include, at a minimum, a reading of one Old Testament and one New Testament selection. That is one finding from responses to Q-19: “When the Bible is read aloud during a worship service at your congregation, does the reading *ordinarily include . . .*” any of the following five categories of the Bible: “a selection from the Old Testament” (Q-19a), “a selection from the New Testament” (Q-19b), “a Psalm” (Q-19c), “a reading from one of the Gospels” (Q-19d), or “a reading from one of the Epistles” (Q-19e). Not surprisingly, almost all services have either an Old Testament (90%, according to pastors) or a New Testament reading (98%). In fact, almost all congregations—90%—have a reading from *both*. The principal exceptions are congregations that have a New Testament reading, but not an Old Testament one.

Furthermore, responses suggest that in about one-half of the services a Psalm is read, either as the sole Old Testament passage, or in addition to another one. Gospel readings are a bit more common than Epistle

¹²We rely on pastors' responses because they are likely to be the most knowledgeable on this issue. Not a single pastor responded “don't know” to either Q-16a or Q-16b.

readings—87% of pastors reported the former as ordinarily included in worship, while 70% of pastors reported the latter—although, obviously, many congregations ordinarily include both.¹³ (As with Q-16, we are relying on pastors' responses here. The differences between members and elders, and between both members and elders and the two clergy samples, owe principally to a much higher proportion of members than elders, and of elders than pastors or specialized clergy, selecting “not sure” as their responses to the last three items in Q-19. If we were to eliminate the respondents who chose “not sure” and then recalculate the percentages, we would find, for example, that 84% of members and 85% of elders responded “yes” when asked about a Gospel reading, almost identical to the responses of pastors and specialized clergy to that same question.)

READING ALONG FROM THE PEW

Do worshippers follow along in their own or a pew Bible when the liturgist reads the Bible aloud from the chancel? Responses to Q-14—“When the Bible is read aloud in a worship service, do you read along in another copy of the Bible?”—indicate that most do so, at least some of the time. The proportions responding “no, never” are low in all samples, ranging from just over a quarter of members (26%) to just over a fifth of elders (21%), pastors (22%), and specialized clergy (21%). Still, many of the “yes” responses in all samples are either “yes, occasionally” or “yes, rarely,” so that, overall, only a minority of members (40%), elders (47%), and specialized clergy (47%) reported reading along most of the time (that is, they responded “yes, always” or “yes, often” to Q-14). Pastors were not much more likely to read along regularly: 53% of them responded “yes, always” or “yes, often.”

LINKING BIBLE AND SERMON IN WORSHIP

In section W-2.2007, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) “Directory for Worship” clearly states that, in Presbyterian services, “The preached Word or sermon is to be based upon the written Word.” Note what this direction does *not* state: that the sermon must be based on that day's Bible reading. Nevertheless, since our own anecdotal experience suggests that, typically, in Presbyterian services the Bible is read prior to the sermon, it is usually possible for the sermon to draw directly upon that day's Bible reading. But do they? To begin to find an answer, we asked, “In worship at your congregation, how often are sermons based directly on one or more of the Bible passages read prior to the sermon?” (Q-20). The results show a perception gap between pastors and congregants, although the differences are less striking when we combine similar adjacent categories (see Table 8).¹⁴ Nevertheless, combining categories does not eliminate all of the response differences between samples. Clerical panelists still report more connections between the Bible reading and the sermon than do lay panelists—undoubtedly because of their very different roles in worship.

¹³In hindsight, based in part on marginal comments on some questionnaires and on the high non-response rates, this question may have frustrated some respondents whose congregations vary Bible selections from week to week. They may have two or three readings per Sunday, but the readings are not always from the same three categories: one week the second or third selection may be a Psalm, the next a Gospel, the next an Epistle. Hence, how they may have responded to the parts of Q-19 depends on their interpretation of the word “ordinarily.”

¹⁴It is also worth noting that almost no one—15 people out of 3,076 who returned questionnaires—skipped over Q-20, inadvertently supporting our assumption that Bible reading precedes the sermon in Presbyterian congregations. If the order were actually reversed, one would assume that many panelists would have been unable to answer the question, and would have left it blank. That clearly did not happen.

TABLE 8

| How Often Is the Sermon Based on the Bible Reading in the Same Worship Service? (Q-20) | | | | |
|--|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
| every Sunday/nearly every Sunday | 75% | 80% | 97% | 90% |
| more often than not | 16% | 14% | 2% | 6% |
| occasionally/rarely | 6% | 5% | 1% | 3% |
| never | - | - | - | 1% |
| don't know | 3% | 1% | - | * |
| total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero
 - = 0.0%; no cases in this category

READING THE BIBLE TO CHILDREN

Majorities of both pastors (77%) and specialized clergy (59%) reported that they had “read Bible passages or stories to children during the past year” (excluding Bible reading as part of church school) (Q-17). The proportions among members (35%) and elders (35%) were much lower. In all samples, however, many of these individuals reported that such reading had been only “occasional” or “rare”; indeed, overall, only 6% of members, 5% of elders, 20% of pastors, and 14% of specialized clergy responded “yes, often.”¹⁵

Those who reported any frequency of Bible reading to children were subsequently asked to “list any particular Bible versions or books of Bible stories that you found most appropriate” (Q-18). These responses were not coded. However, an examination of a random sample of approximately 300 questionnaires each from the member and pastor samples revealed some patterns in the responses. Unfortunately, a couple of these patterns were not very helpful. First, many panelists who responded “yes” to Q-17 nevertheless left Q-18 blank. (Open-ended questions typically have high non-response rates.) Second, many panelists—especially among the members—misunderstood the question and listed the content of their reading (i.e., books or passages of the Bible, such as “Genesis,” “the parables of Jesus,” etc.), rather than the particular Bible translation or storybook they had used. (This confusion may have stemmed from panelists misinterpreting “version” as “verse,” and/or misinterpreting “books of Bible stories” as “books or Bible stories.”)

Among pastors, the most frequently mentioned Bible version is the Good News Bible (also known as Today's English Version). Why this version is popular for reading to children but not for adults—see results for Q-3—is not clear. One pastor praised its line drawings and section headings. The fact that this translation uses a basic vocabulary (in part to appeal to persons who read English as a second language) may also help to explain its popularity among pastors for their readings to children.

Another large group listed the (New) Revised Standard Version. Other versions mentioned by more than a handful included the New International Version and The Message. While a variety of other Bibles were also mentioned, including many that were designed only for young audiences, few were described in enough detail (i.e., author, publisher) to distinguish them from others with any precision. For example, many reported reading from a “Children's Bible” or a “Children's Bible Story Book.” Are these exact titles or general

¹⁵It is clear from additional analyses (not presented here) that panelists with young children are more likely than others to have read a Bible story to a child in the past year. What may not be quite so obvious is that the younger average ages in both clergy samples as compared to both lay samples mean that relatively more of the clergy are in their childbearing and child-rearing years. The higher rates of “yes” responses to Q-17 among clergy, then, may owe as much to their concentration in certain family life cycle states as to their concentration in church careers.

categories? The only version that more than a couple of pastors clearly mentioned was “The Children's Bible in 365 Stories.”

In many respects, members' responses were similar, with many general references to a “Children's Bible” or “Children's Bible stories.” As with pastors, many others listed very specific titles of children's Bibles or story books, but almost none of these were mentioned by more than one respondent. The principal difference in the response patterns between members and pastors is that relatively few of the former mentioned a regular Bible version, suggesting that members are much more likely than pastors to rely on a storybook or a special child-oriented Bible version for occasions when they read or present Bible content to children.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

As with other groups that emerged during the Protestant Reformation, Presbyterians have long emphasized the Bible as the authoritative source for knowledge of the revelation of Jesus Christ. While the church has further attempted at various points, through its confessions, to clarify current understandings of what the Bible tells us, the Bible itself remains the bedrock upon which all subsequent interpretation is based. Hence, it comes as no surprise that the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* stresses the importance of the Bible for faith and worship.¹⁶

The February 1995 Presbyterian Panel questionnaire has provided the opportunity to learn what that historical and constitutional emphasis means in terms of the current behavior of individual Presbyterians and their congregations. In general, we can conclude that the Bible remains an important part of the corporate worship of Presbyterians. The recommendations for incorporating the Bible into congregational worship that appear in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s “Directory of Worship” clearly seem to have been taken to heart by its congregations. For example, the frequent reading in almost all panelists' congregations of both Old and New Testament passages, including Psalms, Gospels, and Epistles, indicates that the directive to “exercise care so that over a period of time the people will hear the full message of Scripture” (W-2.2002) is being observed. Similarly, the stricture that the “preached Word or sermon is to be based upon the written Word” (W-2.2007) seems to be followed almost universally, especially if we rely on the pastors themselves as our source for this information. And while we didn't ask panelists whether or not the Bible is always read during public worship—another directive of the “Directory of Worship” (W-2.2001)—the fact that few panelists skipped over questions on specific aspects of congregational Bible reading (Q-14 to Q-16; Q-19 and Q-20) would seem to indicate that Bible reading is a usual practice in worship services at their congregations.

Compared to congregational worship, there is more variability in the Bible-reading practices of individual Presbyterians. Much of that variability may be found *within* each of the Panel samples (e.g., some members reported never reading the Bible, while others reported reading it often), but there is also considerable variability *across* Panel samples. At one extreme are the pastors who, on average, spend much more time than the respondents in any of the other Panel samples in various types of Bible reading. Any other outcome would, of course, be surprising. If nothing else, pastors are expected to read and study the Bible as part of their preparation for public worship in their congregations. They are expected to select Bible readings for worship, choose the appropriate version or translation, and preach sermons based on those readings. They also are more likely than other Presbyterians to lead or participate in smaller church groups—from church school to more focused Bible study groups—where the Bible is read and discussed. In fact, when we look at the pattern of Bible reading across the four samples, we find that pastors read the Bible most, followed in turn by specialized clergy, elders, and members.

In keeping with the general societal trend toward greater privacy and individualism, both in religion and in other spheres of life, Presbyterians on average spend more time in personal Bible study than in group Bible

¹⁶The *Constitution* is published by the Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Louisville: Annual editions.

study. Furthermore, when they do congregate for Bible study, it is more often among friends rather than family. The general paucity of family Bible reading is one of the more striking findings of this study, and while not all that surprising, it tells us that the church cannot rely on family-based Bible study in any significant way to reinforce the lessons it is trying to teach. If increased Bible reading is desired, congregations might be better advised to encourage small groups of members to gather on a regular basis for this purpose. A recent study by sociologist Robert Wuthnow highlights the abundance of small groups today, particularly in the church, and argues that their popularity stems in part from a need for community that does not simultaneously threaten individualism.¹⁷ Presbyterians seem clearly in the middle of this movement. As the results of this Panel questionnaire have revealed, majorities of both pastors and specialized clergy report at least monthly participation in Bible study groups, as do sizeable minorities of members and elders. Many of these same individuals—and others—are regular participants in other church-based groups that we did not address.

As with any research, the Panel findings raise further questions. Why, for example, do clergy overwhelmingly prefer the (New) Revised Standard Version, yet laity are more divided? What is going on when panelists use a random method for selecting a Bible reading, and how often is this the method Presbyterians use? Why are family Bible readings so rare, even in married-couple and other family households? A one-time survey cannot hope to answer all such questions. Future research on Bible reading might encompass a prospective approach, for example, asking respondents to keep daily diaries in which they would record the particulars of each Bible reading as it occurs over a period of time (six months or longer). Such an approach would provide more contextual detail, as well as greater accuracy on frequency, since any retrospective survey will likely be affected by memory lapses as well as a probable tendency to overstate the occurrence of behaviors—such as Bible reading—that the church has emphasized for the journey of faith.

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¹⁷Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*. New York: The Free Press, 1994

FEBRUARY 1995 PRESBYTERIAN PANEL
Appendix

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|--------------------------------|---------|--------|---------|-----------------------|
| Questionnaires sent: | 1,412 | 1,319 | 1,253 | 681 |
| Questionnaires returned: | 835 | 815 | 935 | 491 |
| Percent returned: | 59% | 62% | 75% | 72% |

The Bible

Q-1. Please take a few moments to think back over *the last week*. In that period of seven days—and *that period only*—how often did you read the Bible or hear the Bible read (*excluding* during worship services) . . .

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|---|---------|--------|---------|-----------------------|
| a. on your own? | | | | |
| never | 42% | 29% | 2% | 8% |
| once or twice | 23% | 29% | 9% | 17% |
| a few times | 7% | 12% | 17% | 17% |
| often, but not daily | 13% | 14% | 38% | 33% |
| at least daily | 14% | 16% | 34% | 25% |
| b. with family? | + | + | | |
| never | 77% | 73% | 50% | 56% |
| once or twice | 14% | 18% | 27% | 25% |
| a few times | 4% | 4% | 11% | 6% |
| often, but not daily | 2% | 3% | 7% | 8% |
| at least daily | 3% | 2% | 5% | 4% |
| c. in connection with a group devoted specifically to Bible study? | | + | | |
| never | 72% | 63% | 27% | 56% |
| once or twice | 21% | 29% | 50% | 30% |
| a few times | 3% | 4% | 15% | 9% |
| often, but not daily | 3% | 3% | 7% | 4% |
| at least daily | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| d. in connection with another church-based class or group (e.g., prayer group, church school class, women's circle, session meeting, etc.)? | | | | |
| never | 61% | 46% | 21% | 44% |
| once or twice | 30% | 42% | 56% | 43% |
| a few times | 5% | 6% | 16% | 8% |
| often, but not daily | 3% | 5% | 7% | 5% |
| at least daily | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% |

* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero
 - = zero (0.0); no cases in this category
 + = nonresponses of 10% or more for this sample (reported percentages for all questions omit nonresponses)
 n = number of respondents asked this question

Q-2. Please think back over *the past twelve months*. In general, about how often over this year did you read the Bible or hear the Bible read (*excluding* during worship services) . . .

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|--|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| a. on your own? | | | | |
| never | 12% | 5% | * | 1% |
| rarely, but no regular pattern | 19% | 16% | 1% | 3% |
| at times, but no regular pattern | 23% | 26% | 5% | 11% |
| once a month or less | 3% | 3% | 1% | 1% |
| once every 2-3 weeks | 5% | 6% | 2% | 5% |
| weekly/almost weekly | 17% | 21% | 27% | 33% |
| daily/almost daily | 21% | 23% | 65% | 46% |
| b. with family or friends? | + | + | | |
| never | 43% | 32% | 12% | 18% |
| rarely, but no regular pattern | 23% | 24% | 19% | 21% |
| at times, but no regular pattern | 11% | 16% | 17% | 15% |
| once a month or less | 4% | 6% | 8% | 6% |
| once every 2-3 weeks | 6% | 5% | 11% | 11% |
| weekly/almost weekly | 11% | 13% | 25% | 21% |
| daily/almost daily | 3% | 4% | 9% | 8% |
| c. in connection with a group devoted specifically to Bible study? | | | | |
| never | 52% | 39% | 7% | 26% |
| rarely, but no regular pattern | 9% | 11% | 5% | 12% |
| at times, but no regular pattern | 7% | 10% | 9% | 11% |
| once a month or less | 8% | 10% | 9% | 10% |
| once every 2-3 weeks | 6% | 6% | 11% | 7% |
| weekly/almost weekly | 18% | 23% | 57% | 34% |
| daily/almost daily | * | 1% | 2% | 1% |
| d. in connection with another church-based class or group (e.g., prayer group, church school class, women's circle, session meeting, etc.)? | | | | |
| never | 39% | 19% | 4% | 19% |
| rarely, but no regular pattern | 9% | 10% | 5% | 10% |
| at times, but no regular pattern | 10% | 11% | 8% | 15% |
| once a month or less | 15% | 23% | 14% | 11% |
| once every 2-3 weeks | 8% | 10% | 18% | 11% |
| weekly/almost weekly | 20% | 26% | 50% | 33% |
| daily/almost daily | * | 1% | 2% | 1% |

Q-3. Which English translation of the Bible do you *personally* most prefer?

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|---|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| | + | + | | |
| American Standard/New American Standard | 3% | 4% | 2% | 1% |
| New English | 4% | 3% | 2% | 3% |
| Jerusalem/New Jerusalem | * | 1% | 2% | 3% |
| King James/New King James | 28% | 23% | 1% | 3% |
| Living Bible | 7% | 6% | * | 1% |
| New International | 19% | 19% | 18% | 12% |
| Revised Standard/New Revised Standard | 23% | 27% | 67% | 69% |
| Today's English | 8% | 12% | 4% | 3% |
| other | 8% | 6% | 2% | 5% |

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- = zero (0.0); no cases in this category

+ = nonresponses of 10% or more for this sample (reported percentages for all questions omit nonresponses)

n = number of respondents asked this question

Q-4. At any time *over the past year* have you engaged in *individual reading or study of the Bible*, that is, have you undertaken Bible study or reading on your own?

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|-------------------------|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| yes | 53% | 62% | 96% | 93% |
| no (Skip to Q-10) | 47% | 38% | 4% | 7% |

Q-5. Continue to recall your *individual* Bible reading or study over the past year. To what extent was that reading and study part of ...

| | Members (n=432) | Elders (n=496) | Pastors (n=891) | Specialized Clergy (n=453) |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. your preparation for a sermon? | + | + | | |
| very often | 1% | 2% | 76% | 54% |
| often | * | 1% | 16% | 22% |
| sometimes | 5% | 6% | 6% | 16% |
| rarely | 4% | 7% | 1% | 5% |
| never | 90% | 84% | * | 3% |
| b. your preparation for <i>teaching or leading</i> a Bible study group? | + | + | | |
| very often | 12% | 12% | 55% | 36% |
| often | 10% | 16% | 27% | 22% |
| sometimes | 15% | 19% | 13% | 23% |
| rarely | 10% | 12% | 4% | 9% |
| never | 53% | 41% | 1% | 10% |
| c. your preparation for <i>attending</i> a Bible study group? | + | + | | |
| very often | 15% | 10% | 20% | 14% |
| often | 19% | 21% | 17% | 17% |
| sometimes | 20% | 28% | 26% | 17% |
| rarely | 10% | 13% | 23% | 24% |
| never | 35% | 27% | 14% | 28% |
| d. your own individual needs or wants? | | | | |
| very often | 41% | 38% | 35% | 35% |
| often | 29% | 29% | 32% | 32% |
| sometimes | 23% | 24% | 26% | 26% |
| rarely | 7% | 8% | 6% | 5% |
| never | 1% | 1% | 1% | 2% |
| e. job- or academic-related assignments or work? | + | + | | |
| very often | 3% | 4% | 27% | 22% |
| often | 2% | 3% | 23% | 20% |
| sometimes | 5% | 6% | 21% | 22% |
| rarely | 7% | 11% | 16% | 17% |
| never | 83% | 76% | 13% | 20% |

Q-6. When you engaged in *individual* Bible reading or study *over the past year*, did you use any of the following methods or formats to guide your reading? (Please circle *one* response for *every* item.)

| | Members (n=432) | Elders (n=496) | Pastors (n=891) | Specialized Clergy (n=453) |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. reading a particular book of the Bible from beginning to end | | | | |
| yes | 52% | 48% | 64% | 50% |
| no | 48% | 52% | 36% | 50% |
| b. reading selections from the lectionary | + | + | | |
| yes | 26% | 37% | 76% | 73% |
| no | 74% | 63% | 24% | 27% |

* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero

- = zero (0.0); no cases in this category

+ = nonresponses of 10% or more for this sample (reported percentages for all questions omit nonresponses)

n = number of respondents asked this question

Q-10. In the last year, have you engaged in any form of regular Bible reading or study as part of a *Bible study group*, that is, a small group devoted specifically to study of the Bible?

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|-------------------------|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| yes | 33% | 41% | 73% | 45% |
| no (Skip to Q-12) | 67% | 59% | 27% | 55% |

Q-11. If "yes," did your *Bible study group* use any of the following methods or formats as a guide to its reading?

| | Members (n=270) | Elders (n=331) | Pastors (n=682) | Specialized Clergy (n=222) |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. reading a particular book of the Bible from beginning to end | + | + | | |
| yes | 66% | 60% | 67% | 61% |
| no | 34% | 40% | 33% | 39% |
| b. reading selections from the lectionary | + | + | | + |
| yes | 22% | 23% | 32% | 32% |
| no | 78% | 77% | 68% | 68% |
| c. reading selections from <i>Daily Prayer</i> or <i>The Mission Yearbook of Prayer and Study</i> | + | + | + | + |
| yes | 23% | 20% | 8% | 12% |
| no | 74% | 80% | 92% | 88% |
| d. reading selections from a devotional magazine like <i>Upper Room</i> or <i>These Days</i> | + | + | + | + |
| yes | 21% | 23% | 9% | 11% |
| no | 79% | 77% | 91% | 89% |
| e. reading passages at random | + | + | + | + |
| yes | 45% | 46% | 34% | 34% |
| no | 55% | 54% | 66% | 66% |
| f. listening to radio programs, audio tapes, television programs, or video tapes on which the Bible is read | + | + | + | + |
| yes | 26% | 23% | 18% | 15% |
| no | 74% | 77% | 82% | 85% |

Q-12. When you have read your Bible over the past year—whether on your own or as part of a study group—which of these resources did you *use regularly* as part of your Bible reading and study? (If you have *not* read the Bible in the last year, skip to Q-14.)

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|--|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| a. a study Bible | + | + | | |
| yes | 51% | 56% | 79% | 71% |
| no | 49% | 44% | 21% | 29% |
| b. a Bible commentary | + | + | | |
| yes | 38% | 47% | 93% | 84% |
| no | 62% | 53% | 7% | 16% |
| c. a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) study curriculum | + | + | + | + |
| yes | 26% | 23% | 24% | 22% |
| no | 74% | 71% | 76% | 78% |
| d. Kerygma | + | + | + | + |
| yes | 5% | 5% | 14% | 6% |
| no | 95% | 95% | 86% | 94% |
| e. Bethel Bible study | + | + | + | + |
| yes | 3% | 4% | 4% | 2% |
| no | 97% | 96% | 96% | 98% |
| f. other | | | | |
| yes | 13% | 15% | 25% | 21% |
| no | 87% | 85% | 75% | 79% |

* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero

- = zero (0.0); no cases in this category

+ = nonresponses of 10% or more for this sample (reported percentages for all questions omit nonresponses)

n = number of respondents asked this question

Q-13. When you read the Bible—whether on your own or as part of a group—to what extent do you read it for . . .

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|-------------------|---------|--------|---------|-----------------------|
| a. comfort? | | | | |
| always | 20% | 18% | 9% | 10% |
| often | 32% | 30% | 35% | 28% |
| sometimes | 34% | 38% | 44% | 47% |
| rarely | 9% | 10% | 12% | 14% |
| never | 5% | 4% | 1% | 2% |
| b. entertainment? | + | + | | + |
| always | 3% | 1% | 2% | 1% |
| often | 4% | 5% | 5% | 4% |
| sometimes | 15% | 19% | 19% | 19% |
| rarely | 30% | 31% | 44% | 43% |
| never | 48% | 45% | 30% | 32% |
| c. guidance? | | | | |
| always | 26% | 25% | 28% | 25% |
| often | 38% | 39% | 48% | 47% |
| sometimes | 24% | 28% | 21% | 26% |
| rarely | 6% | 5% | 3% | 5% |
| never | 4% | 2% | 1% | 1% |
| d. information? | | | | |
| always | 26% | 25% | 28% | 25% |
| often | 38% | 39% | 48% | 47% |
| sometimes | 25% | 28% | 21% | 21% |
| rarely | 7% | 5% | 2% | 6% |
| never | 5% | 3% | 1% | 1% |
| e. inspiration? | | | | |
| always | 38% | 39% | 46% | 40% |
| often | 36% | 35% | 45% | 46% |
| sometimes | 18% | 22% | 9% | 12% |
| rarely | 5% | 3% | 1% | 1% |
| never | 3% | 1% | * | * |

Q-14. When the Bible is read aloud in a worship service, do you read along in another copy of the Bible?

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|-------------------|---------|--------|---------|-----------------------|
| yes, always | 16% | 21% | 25% | 20% |
| yes, often | 24% | 26% | 28% | 27% |
| yes, occasionally | 21% | 19% | 13% | 18% |
| yes, rarely | 14% | 13% | 11% | 14% |
| no, never | 26% | 21% | 22% | 21% |

Q-15. When the Bible is read aloud during worship in your congregation (the congregation you attend most often), how is the reading usually introduced?

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|---|---------|--------|---------|-----------------------|
| the reader simply begins reading from each chosen passage | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| the reader announces the book of the Bible of each passage | 3% | 2% | 4% | 4% |
| the reader announces the book and chapter of each Bible passage | 7% | 6% | 10% | 9% |
| the reader announces the book, chapter, and verse of each Bible passage | 88% | 90% | 85% | 85% |
| don't know/don't remember | 1% | * | * | 1% |

* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero

- = zero (0.0); no cases in this category

+ = nonresponses of 10% or more for this sample (reported percentages for all questions omit nonresponses)

n = number of respondents asked this question

Q-16. Prior to reading a Bible passage aloud during worship at your congregation, does the reader:

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|--|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| a. provide a brief <i>historical</i> introduction? | | | | |
| yes, always | 10% | 9% | 6% | 5% |
| yes, often | 22% | 24% | 19% | 19% |
| yes, sometimes | 31% | 33% | 39% | 36% |
| yes, rarely | 16% | 16% | 23% | 23% |
| no, never | 18% | 17% | 12% | 17% |
| don't know | 3% | 1% | — | * |
| b. provide a brief introduction to the <i>meaning</i> of each passage? | | | | |
| yes, always | 11% | 9% | 5% | 4% |
| yes, often | 22% | 23% | 15% | 17% |
| yes, sometimes | 31% | 31% | 34% | 26% |
| yes, rarely | 15% | 19% | 28% | 25% |
| no, never | 19% | 17% | 18% | 27% |
| don't know | 3% | 2% | — | * |

Q-17. Have you read Bible passages or stories to children during the past year (other than as part of a church school class)?

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|-------------------|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| yes, often | 6% | 5% | 20% | 14% |
| yes, occasionally | 15% | 15% | 37% | 25% |
| yes, rarely | 14% | 16% | 21% | 20% |
| no, never | 66% | 65% | 23% | 42% |

Q-18. If "yes," please list any particular Bible versions or books of Bible stories that you found most appropriate:

[see text]

Q-19. When the Bible is read aloud during a worship service at your congregation, does the reading *ordinarily include*:

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|--|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| a. a selection from the Old Testament? | | | | |
| yes | 90% | 95% | 90% | 94% |
| no | 3% | 3% | 9% | 4% |
| not sure | 7% | 2% | 1% | 2% |
| b. a selection from the New Testament? | | | | |
| yes | 94% | 97% | 98% | 97% |
| no | 1% | 1% | 2% | 1% |
| not sure | 5% | 2% | * | 2% |
| c. a Psalm? | + | + | + | + |
| yes | 45% | 49% | 61% | 59% |
| no | 34% | 38% | 37% | 35% |
| not sure | 21% | 14% | 2% | 6% |
| d. a reading from one of the Gospels? | + | + | + | + |
| yes | 66% | 74% | 87% | 85% |
| no | 13% | 13% | 11% | 11% |
| not sure | 21% | 13% | 2% | 4% |
| e. a reading from one of the Epistles? | + | + | + | + |
| yes | 52% | 58% | 70% | 68% |
| no | 17% | 21% | 26% | 24% |
| not sure | 31% | 21% | 4% | 8% |

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- = zero (0.0); no cases in this category

+ = nonresponses of 10% or more for this sample (reported percentages for all questions omit nonresponses)

n = number of respondents asked this question

Q-20. In worship at your congregation, how often are sermons based directly on one or more of the Bible passages read prior to the sermon?

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|---------------------------|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| every Sunday | 43% | 47% | 82% | 63% |
| nearly every Sunday | 32% | 33% | 15% | 27% |
| more often than not | 16% | 14% | 2% | 6% |
| occasionally | 5% | 5% | * | 2% |
| rarely | 1% | * | * | 1% |
| never | — | — | — | * |
| don't know | 3% | 1% | — | * |

Q-21. Do you share a household with one or more family members?

| | Members | Elders | Pastors | Specialized Clergy |
|-----------|---------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| yes | 82% | 79% | 88% | 86% |
| no | 18% | 21% | 12% | 14% |

Q-22. If "yes," do you and other family members *typically* read the Bible together . . .

| | Members (n=682) | Elders (n=644) | Pastors (n=819) | Specialized Clergy (n=417) |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. at meals on a <i>daily</i> basis? | | + | + | + |
| yes | 4% | 3% | 7% | 6% |
| no | 96% | 97% | 93% | 94% |
| b. at meals on an <i>occasional</i> basis? | | + | + | + |
| yes | 14% | 16% | 31% | 28% |
| no | 86% | 84% | 69% | 72% |
| c. at Christmas, Easter, or other major Christian celebrations? | | + | + | |
| yes | 38% | 39% | 61% | 60% |
| no | 62% | 61% | 39% | 40% |
| d. at birthdays or anniversaries? | | + | + | + |
| yes | 4% | 4% | 4% | 6% |
| no | 96% | 96% | 96% | 94% |
| e. at a regular time set aside for Bible reading or study? | | + | + | + |
| yes | 11% | 13% | 18% | 19% |
| no | 89% | 87% | 82% | 81% |

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