

Nine things pastors can do besides pray for Gaza

By [Ruth Everhart](#)

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The conflict in Gaza occupies hearts and minds right now. I know you're praying for peace. But how else can a faith leader respond? So often we feel forced to choose a side. *Are you pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian?* The topic always seems to boil down to this question which (reasonably enough) results in paralysis.

When I pitched my book ([Chasing the Divine in the Holy Land](#)) to Bill Eerdmans Jr., he quipped: "Remember that Christians don't like to read about the Holy Land. They only like to argue about it." Zing!

Yet, there is so much more for faith communities to do than argue. I continue to believe that one of the most valuable aspects of life together is the opportunity for vigorous study and discussion—whether in Sunday morning adult classes, evening forums, midweek supper & study events, or some other venue.

Please don't be afraid of a spirited discussion on a touchy topic. Most folks desire a safe place to explore things that matter. Where else can we wrestle with current issues and relate them to our faith? If we begin the discussion with prayer and open hearts—and ground rules about listening carefully and speaking in love—the Spirit will bring us along. Here are some discussion and study suggestions, each of which takes a tiny bite from an enormously complex topic. You know which ones will best appeal to your folks:

STUDY THE BIBLE

1. Tackle the Hebrew Scriptures: Study Abraham and Sarah and the promise of land (Deuteronomy 1). Or revisit the story of Isaac and Ishmael (Genesis 16 and following). What did the text mean then? What does it mean now? Does it have anything to do with the current conflict? If so, exactly what?

2. Tackle the Christian Scriptures: Study what Paul says about faith as a devout Jew turned Jesus-follower. Or revisit a passage from Romans or Galatians. What did the text mean then? What does it mean now? How are Christians and Jews and

Muslims related today?

3. Use a Resource: I trust the [Thoughtful Christian resources](#), some of which are available as downloadable single-session studies. (Feel free to suggest others in a comment.)

EXPLORE THE HISTORIC CONTEXT

4. Create a Timeline: Have folks create a timeline of significant events leading up to the current confrontation in Gaza. Create a safe space for people to add to their knowledge without feeling embarrassed by any areas of ignorance. Read [9 questions about the Israel-Palestine Conflict you were too embarrassed to ask](#).

5. Investigate the Crusades: Use [Wikipedia](#) to review the facts of the crusades, then watch [Kingdom of Heaven](#) together. Ask what, if anything, connects the Crusades with current events in Gaza? Or are the only significant conflicts the ones between Jews and Muslims? Or don't any of these religious conflicts have a thing to do with Gaza?

6. Learn about Zionism: How many hymns can you list that include the word *Zion*? Define Zionism from the point of view of Jews, Muslims, and Christians. How does Zionism affect what goes on in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories? Is there such a thing as secular Zionism? Make a timeline of Zionism, it may be different than what you imagine it to be.

SEEK OUT OTHER PERSPECTIVES

7. Invite a Speaker: Is there a rabbi or imam or [Palestinian Christian](#) you could invite to your church? Is there someone who has traveled extensively in the Middle East? Is a policy expert available? Is there a pilgrim among you? Each of these persons will have a unique lens.

8. Investigate what your Denomination is Doing: As a Presbyterian, we have a great deal of energy (i.e. controversy) about the Middle East currently. Our General Assembly voted to divest funds from three American corporations providing material support for Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestine. [Here are FAQs](#).

9. Cultivate a Pilgrim Heart. While Israel is the scene of much violence, it's also the Holy Land, a land pivotal to our faith. It helps to approach that land with a pilgrim heart, open to the sacred presence in all of its manifestations. I'm excited

about a new video resource that can help us become pilgrims vicariously. It's being launched via a free webinar today (August 7), at 7 p.m. EST (4 p.m. PST). Come explore many holy sites at [JerusalemExperience](#). The creator of the videos, Eran Frenkel, has approached me as a colleague in this venture, which I find enormously heartening in this time of conflict.

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