

Talking points: Reading scripture together across the boundaries of faith

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [September 5, 2006](#) issue

During the first Iraq war, after the United States started dropping bombs as a prelude to Desert Storm, homiletics professor David Buttrick surveyed mainline churches around the country to see if the war had been mentioned on the previous Sunday, whether in the sermon or in the voicing of prayers and concerns. In the vast majority of cases the answer was no.

Granted, some social and geopolitical issues are so large and so complicated that the preacher is not sure what to say.

When I find myself in this situation, knowing that people are coming to worship with such serious matters on their hearts and minds, but knowing too that I don't have a clear word from the Lord on the matter, I say something like this: "Bombs are falling, our nation is at war, precious lives are being lost, and the situation is so complicated that people of good will come to different conclusions about it. Let's hold all of that up to God—the violence, the killing and dying, and our own fears, hopes and confusion."

So it was as Christians pondered the war in Lebanon. A fragile cease-fire seems to be holding, but it may have been broken down by the time you read this. While Israel had every right to respond to Hezbollah's incursion on its border, the Israeli response in bombing civilian areas believed to harbor Hezbollah operatives and rocket launching sites caused many civilian deaths. It also created greater support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East and deepened hostility toward Israel and the United States. The war promises to create more violence in the future.

I have good and respected friends who differ vehemently about this issue. Some—and I'm inclined to agree—point to Israel's occupation of Palestine as

fundamentally wrong and ultimately counterproductive, and see Israel's strong military response to Hezbollah as disproportionate and counterproductive. Other friends, particularly Jewish friends, see Israel's existence at stake and believe that a strong military response is necessary for Israel to survive. I can understand that view too.

One of the things we all can do is keep talking to one another: Christians, Jews and Muslims. That's why [Jeffrey Bailey's article](#) on scriptural reasoning—the practice of reading scripture together across the boundaries of religion—gives me hope. The other thing we can do is hold all of our hopes and fears up to the God of Abraham and Sarah, whose will is shalom, for and among all God's children.