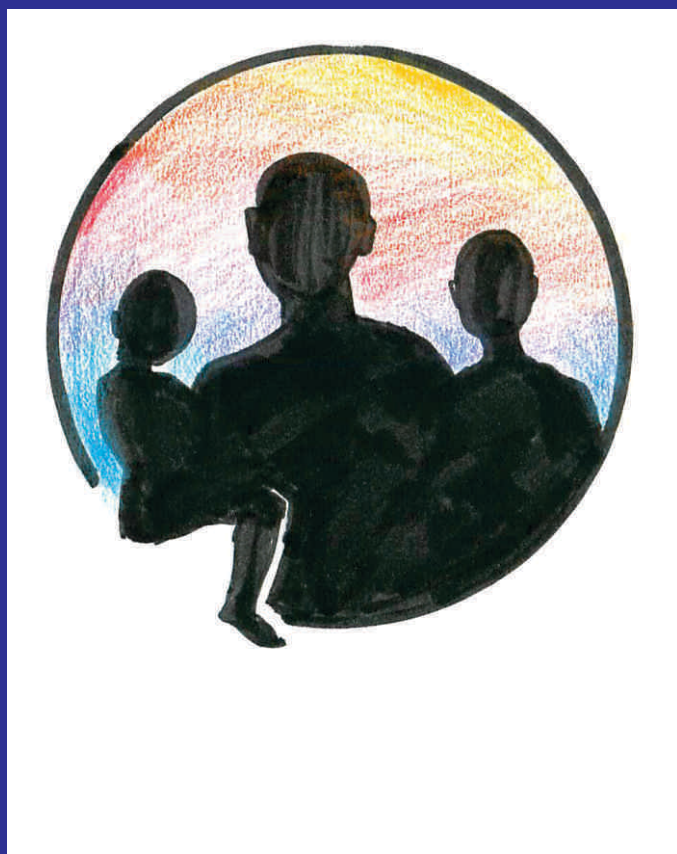


Contextual Bible Study Manual on

Transformative Masculinity



Edited by Ezra Chitando
and Nyambura J. Njoroge

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors.

Art by Maggie Machledt Girard

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Foreword

“Never doubt that a few individuals can change the world” is a powerful statement that we need to remember whenever we face critical challenges during our contemporary struggles. It is on the basis of this firm belief that a few individuals can and have changed the world that the enterprise of Transformative Masculinity has been built. Empowered, gender-sensitive and passionate men can and have contributed to the struggle for a just world for all.

Looking back to the World Council of Churches (WCC) story, we cannot forget that work on the relationship of women and men started off as a department of “the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society” as early as 1953 — an indication that just relationships in the church and society can only be reached if both men and women work together towards the building of a just community of women and men. It had to change to the sub-unit of Women in Church and Society because of clear disparities that disadvantaged women. In 1974 when the Women in Church and Society courageously organized a consultation on “Sexism in the 1970s”, one of the issues raised was the need for men to work with women against sexism. From it was born the Community of Women and Men study which clearly affirmed that unjust relationships between women and men actually undermined the nature and mission of the church that is called to be one.

Jumping the years to 2001-2010, during the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), WCC Women in Church and Society acknowledging that more than 60% of sexual and gender based violence is directly caused by men, developed a process of reclaiming positive femininity through the exploration of women's spirituality of resilience, healing and wholeness. This would be done alongside reclaiming and developing positive masculinity for mutual partnership by exploring with men what it would take to be nurturing and gender just men through deconstruction of hegemonic masculinities to reconstruct positive ones through socialization. One of the methodologies used was the Contextual Bible Studies.

The Bible studies you have in this publication have been developed to assist in the journey towards Transformative Masculinity. They have been pilot-tested in diverse settings and have initiated profound changes in the understanding of masculinity within communities of faith in different parts of the continent and beyond.

I commend these Contextual Bible Studies on Transformative Masculinity to you the reader. They remind us of the urgency of the need for collaboration between women and men in the quest for gender justice.



Foreword

When read in creative ways, the Bible is a powerful resource for liberation. Transformed men will in turn contribute towards the transformation of families, churches, institutions, nations and the world. Together, we shall overcome sexual and gender-based violence, stigma and discrimination, sexism, homophobia and other forms of marginalization.

Fulata Moyo,
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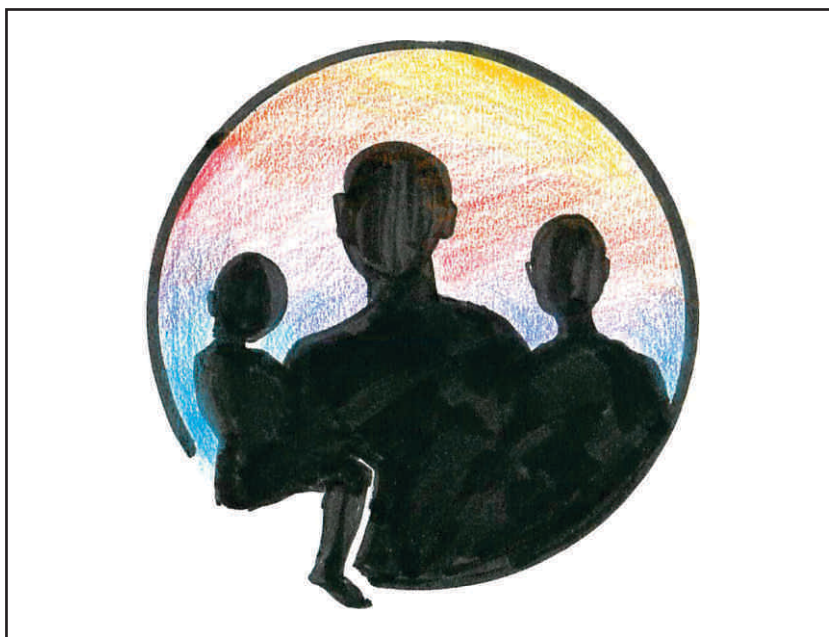
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Transformative Masculinity: Bringing Men into the Struggle against Sexual and Gender-based Violence and HIV¹

Ezra Chitando



Introduction

In the biblical account of the fall of humanity in the garden of Eden, God calls out to the man, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3: 9). We argue that the same question can be repeated in the context of the struggle against sexual and gender-based violence and HIV. One could ask the men, “Where are you?” Most of the caring and activism has been done by women. Men have not been very visible. This is because of a wrong interpretation of sexual and gender-based violence as, “women's issues.” In this publication, we are urging religious leaders and men to make sexual and gender-based violence and HIV “human issues.” This means that male religious leaders must accept that all of us must be involved in addressing sexual and gender-based violence and HIV.



¹From Hazel Gutu and Ezra Chitando, *Transformative Masculinity* (Harare: EHAIA, 2012)

This Contextual Bible Study manual carries Bible studies that seek to challenge men to have a fresh look at their responsibilities. We are convinced that these responsibilities have become even more urgent in the struggle against sexual and gender-based violence and HIV. We contend that by mobilising boys, young men and men, religious communities will increase their effectiveness in addressing pressing social, political and economic issues. We believe that men are not the problem: they are well placed to contribute towards social transformation. Boys and men are critical players in contributing towards “a new heaven and a new earth.” This is a world characterised by gender justice. Gender justice is achieved when women and men interact as equals created in the image of God.

“Transformative Masculinity”: Summarising the Concept

In different parts of the world, men have emerged as the gender that is mostly responsible for perpetrating sexual and gender-based violence. In addition, men are more likely to have multiple concurrent partners, thereby increasing their partners' (and their own) vulnerability to HIV. It is therefore critical to work with boys and men to change harmful perceptions of what it means to be men. This has seen an increase in the use of the idea of “Transformative Masculinity,” especially in the World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA).

“Transformative Masculinity” seeks to challenge boys and men to contribute towards more helpful and life giving ideas about what it means to be men. The idea is to challenge negative and harmful ideas of what a “real man” is. In many cultures, ideas relating to a “real man” suggest that a “real man” is one who is:

- Uses force and violence in relationships
- Rough, tough and insensitive
- Does not recognise the human rights of women
- Does not show any feelings/emotions (especially in public)
- Does not accept the leadership of women
- Accepts the use of language that denigrates/reduces the stature of women
- Has sex with as many women as possible
- Must always be in control; is possessive and dominating
- Exceedingly competitive and does not fail
- Addicted to work.

These (the list could be extended) assumptions and practices have led men to carry many heavy burdens. They have also caused a lot of harm to women. It is therefore vital for men to be empowered and liberated from oppressive notions of what it means to be a man. “Transformative



Ezra Chitando

masculinity” seeks to encourage boys and men to embrace more harmonious and tolerant ways of being men. The concept has been adopted to motivate boys and men to be “born again” in relation to their interpretation of who they are and how they relate to women, children and other men.

The overall aim is to contribute towards the multiplication of “gender equitable men” in our communities. These are boys and men who:

- Are caring and sensitive
- Respect women, children and other men
- Are faithful in relationships
- Grant their partners space to be independent and to grow
- Use dialogue, not violence, to resolve conflict
- Use respectful language towards women, children and other men
- Avail their time to children
- Avail equal opportunities to women and men
- Are willing to share responsibilities and chores in the home
- Accept the leadership of women and young people
- Actively promote the leadership of women and young people
- Challenge sexual and gender-based violence whenever they encounter it.

The Role of Religious Leaders in Promoting Transformative Masculinity

Religious leaders play an important role in promoting transformative masculinity. To begin with, religions have tended to support or to justify the abuse of power by men. Many men, including those who are not actively religious, appeal to sacred texts to justify why they should dominate women. Some perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence maintain that religion has accorded them the right to do as they please with women. Religious leaders can help to challenge such abuses of religion by challenging men to be more sensitive and caring.

Religious leaders can promote transformative masculinity in the following ways:

- Leading lives that demonstrate the values of transformative masculinity (as summarised above)
- Using the pulpit to challenge men within the faith community to uphold the values of transformative masculinity



- Utilising existing structures and institutions (Sunday school, Youth/Men's/Women's groups) to inculcate/instill ideals of transformative masculinity
- Harnessing examples of transformative masculinity from sacred texts
- Inviting non-governmental organisations that work with boys and men to promote transformative masculinities within their communities
- Utilising material (books, pamphlets, short movies, music, etc) on transformative masculinity to increase awareness
- Reaching out to boys and men that are not members of their communities with messages of transformative masculinities, ie, engage in outreach activities
- Maximising on special days such as Fathers' Day to promote transformative masculinity.

Conclusion

This Manual has been designed to remind religious leaders and general readers of the need to promote transformative masculinity. It utilizes biblical passages to challenge men to aspire towards higher ideals. We anticipate that this Manual will inspire readers to work tirelessly towards contributing to a world where women and men interact as equal beings created in the image of God.



Contextual Bible Study²

Gerald West



As you move through this manual, it is our hope that you make the Bible studies your own, adapting them to fit your own context and in time developing similar studies for use in your local churches and communities. Addressing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in a responsible and respectful manner, that both affirms the survivors and condemns the actions of the perpetrators, is the call of the Church. We cannot remain silent; indeed we are called to act. The Transformative Masculinity Campaign seeks to do this. With you, the silence can and will be broken, healing and justice will prevail.

1.1 Understanding the Construction of a Contextual Bible Study

Much of what is discussed in this chapter will make more sense once you have actually participated in a Contextual Bible Study, or facilitated one. Nevertheless, some orientation to the Contextual Bible Study process is useful. In fact, it is strongly encouraged that you read through this section before using any of the studies in the manual.



² From Fred Nyabera and Taryn Montgomery, eds., *Contextual Bible Study on Gender-Based Violence* (Nairobi: FECCLAHA, 2007). Used with permission.

There are five identifiable steps in the construction of a Contextual Bible Study. These are: choosing a theme; finding a Biblical text; questioning and reading; articulating and owning; and developing a plan of action.

Step 1: Choosing a Theme

Contextual Bible Study always begins with the reality of the local community. It is always guided by the issues or themes that a particular local community is dealing with. Bible study groups which are already organized usually have a very good idea of the issues confronting them in their community.

However, newly formed groups may need some assistance in coming together to do social analysis of their context. This is an important first step! Contextual Bible Study always begins with the contextual concerns of the community.

Step 2: Finding a Biblical Text

Once the theme is determined, the actual planning of the Bible study can start. Now that there is a theme, a Biblical Text that also refers to this theme, or 'speaks into' it is needed. Two approaches are often used here. It is important to read the texts that the group chooses, however, it is also important to bring texts and resources which are less familiar to the group. In other words, the group reads familiar texts in unfamiliar ways (by approaching them differently) and they also read unfamiliar texts (those texts that are neglected or forgotten).

Reading familiar texts in unfamiliar ways and reading unfamiliar texts allows the group participants to engage with aspects and parts of the Bible to which they have not previously had access. In this way, the Contextual Bible Study process enables the group to establish lines of connection between their own context and community and new discoveries within the Bible.

A Note to the User on Finding a Text

For the Bible studies in this manual, certain scriptural texts have been chosen and worked with during the construction of the studies. You and the Bible study group participants should feel free to make the study your own by adding and exploring other texts pertinent to the chosen theme.

Step 3: Questioning and Reading

Once the biblical text has been chosen, the task of constructing the Bible study itself begins. To do this, two kinds of questions are typically used. The Bible study begins and ends with contextual questions that provide the



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framework for the study. These contextual questions are also called 'community consciousness questions', because they draw on the resources of the community. They draw on the lived experience and the embodied theologies of the participants themselves.

Within this framework of contextual questions, we construct carefully formulated textual questions, which force the group to constantly engage with the biblical text. These textual questions are also called 'critical consciousness questions', because they draw on the systematic and structured resources of biblical scholarship. The challenge for the socially engaged biblical scholar is to construct questions that open up the biblical text in such a way that it has the potential to address the context of the participants.

The resources of the biblical scholarship can be characterized as consisting of three dimensions of the text (in other words, three ways of reading the text):

- Behind the text (focusing on the socio-historical world that produced the text);
- On the text (focusing on the text itself as a literary composition); and
- In front of the text (focusing on the possible worlds the text projects beyond itself towards the active reader).

When the text is examined for the construction of a Bible study, generally these three dimensions are used in a specific way:

1. Begin with an in front of the text mode of reading asking participants what they think the text is about. Here they are asked to draw on their own understanding of what the text projects towards them, or is telling them directly;
2. Then the focus moves on to the text itself, allowing it to "have its own voice' among the voices of the participants. Questions that draw the readers in to a close, careful and slow reading of the text are used here;
3. Next, allowing for questions from the participants probes the world behind the text. They draw on the resources of biblical scholarship to look at the detail of the socio-historical context of and background to the text; and
4. Finally, we again examine what the text now projects to us as participants, only to discover that this is deeper, fuller, more meaningful or even quite different to our first reading of it!



Literary questions (point 2 above) slow down the reading process, enabling the participants to read the text more carefully and closely than they usually do. Literary questions also open up the narrative world to the reader, inviting the readers to enter and locate themselves within this world. The socio-historical questions of the participants (point 3 above) often arise from their desire to know more about the socio-historical detail of this narrative world they have entered.

In summary, having heard the voice of the text in its own world (the world of the text and the world behind the text that produced it) we now allow the text to speak afresh to us. We move from our initial engagement with the text to the text in detail — granting it a voice — and then back to our engagement with the text, but this time having heard its voice. It is this combination of contextual and textual questions that constitutes the Contextual Bible Study method. By fusing community consciousness with critical consciousness, the text speaks anew to our realities.

Step 4: Articulating and Owning

Once the questions have been designed, the Contextual Bible Study now has a life of its own! What emerges now belongs to the group. The power of the Contextual Bible Study process is that it allows participants to articulate and own theological understandings of their context. The combination of contextual and textual questions has the potential to establish lines of connection between the biblical text and the embodied local / contextual theologies of the participants. This connection often gives the participants an increased capacity to articulate these incipient (partially formed) and inchoate (not yet clear) embodied local theologies.

If the Bible study is a safe place for participants- a place of trust and affirmation-then they may begin to articulate their lived theologies. When they do so, others in the group may be encouraged to do similarly. It is when there is an overlap between individuals' embodied theologies that the group is empowered to 'own' the theology being expressed as their own. In most cases, participants from marginalized contexts have very little opportunity to test out whether their own embodied theology is shared by anyone else.

Contextual Bible Study provides this opportunity to try out and then own local contextual theologies.

In the normal life of most church-goers their embodied theologies are only partially engaged, affirmed, articulated and enacted within their own local church. Because of this, many Christians go to one church 'by day' and another church 'by night'! Because they are made in the image and



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likeness of God, there is a deep yearning to have their embodied theology engaged by the church, affirmed by the church, articulated by the church and enacted by the church. Alas, this seldom happens. The Contextual Bible Study process provides an opportunity for this.

A Note to the User on Articulating and Owning

The questions for each Bible study in this manual are based on those expressed by participants during workshops and studies during the construction process of each Bible study. As such, they are the embodiment of those participants' own theologies. The Bible studies in this manual are not static 'model answers'. If you use a study, you need to be flexible, making it your own and adapting it to suit your context. The Bible studies in this manual are simply a starting place (or framework) for contextual exploration of a biblical text along a certain theme.

Step 5: Developing a Plan of Action

Contextual Bible Study always ends with action. Each small group and the larger group which they make up is required to develop an action plan. Contextual Bible Study is not merely about interpreting the Bible; it is about allowing the Bible to equip us to change our world so that the kingdom of God may come on earth, as it is in heaven! Because the Bible study empowers participants to articulate and own local contextual theologies, there is now increased capacity to act. Provided the group remains in control of the process, action is a necessary outcome of Contextual Bible Study.

Groups usually know what can and cannot be done in their local communities. Certain actions may not be possible within the constraints of their context, however, this should not prevent some kind of possible action being planned. Contextual Bible Study should make a difference in the public realm! So participants are encouraged to plan an action that moves from the Bible study group into the public realm of the church and/or society.

A Note to the User on Developing a Plan of Action

Contextual Bible Study on its own cannot accomplish the move from study to action. It is a good idea therefore, to provide participants with additional resources from non governmental, governmental and community based organizations to take their plan of action forward.

1.2 The Role of the Contextual Bible Study Facilitator

Key to all forms of Contextual Bible Study (in the broadest sense) is the role of the facilitator. Bible study that strives to be collaborative depends on a



leadership style that facilitates. We are all too familiar with dominating forms of leadership. These styles of leadership are inappropriate for Contextual Bible Study. The leader must be a facilitator and this section of the manual looks at this role in greater depth.

The primary role of the facilitator is to assist the overall purpose of Contextual Bible Study, namely group collaboration. Therefore, the facilitator needs to be someone who enables the group to work together collaboratively, sharing their resources and coming to some common action.

To be the facilitator of a Contextual Bible Study, you do not have to have a qualification; facilitation is for ordinary Christians-Africans and others! Anyone is welcome to organize and facilitate the Bible studies in this manual. They are not intended for ordained clergy (or ministers) alone. The Bible studies in this manual 'talk' directly to you as a facilitator; are easy to follow and are designed to help you walk with the Bible study group through the Contextual Bible Study process.

1.2.1 Facilitating the Process of the Contextual Bible Study

The following are important 'tips' for facilitation, but remember that the more you practise facilitation in a 'real life' context, the better you will become.

1. It is important to understand the group that is doing the Bible study. The facilitator should be familiar with the demographics of the group participants: age, race, denomination, language, gender, cultures, traditions, similarities and differences, how many in the group and so on. Preferably the facilitator should come from within the group itself. There is also some value in thinking about the knowledge and experiences of the participants regarding the theme of the Bible study. This is so that you do not 'miss' the group completely when you are trying to encourage their participation;
2. The style of these studies is one of participation and discussion. This means that they are compiled with the understanding that each and every participant has wisdom- the 'answers' are not with one person. In fact the participants play a key role and have a valid contribution to make (see the following section for details). So when a study is done, it should not be undertaken as if in a school classroom (with the facilitator as the 'teacher'), but rather like a round table discussion between equals;
3. The facilitator is just one voice in the Contextual Bible Study so it is important to defer to the group even if what the group is saying does



- not appeal to the facilitator. This does not mean that the facilitator does not have a voice but it does mean that their voice is not the most important one. The overall purpose is group collaboration;
4. Including group participants in the practical aspects of the Contextual Bible Study is also crucial to the success of the Bible study. The notes in this manual indirectly make reference to tasks or roles which may be taken up very easily by group participants rather than the facilitator, adding a great sense of participation to the study. The facilitator should be aware of these roles which may be taken up very easily by group participants rather than the facilitator adding a great sense of participation to the study. The facilitator should be aware of these roles and use them to include participants. Examples of these roles are as follows: someone who reads the key text(s); someone who writes notes onto the newsprint paper; the note-taker of each small group; the spokesperson of each small group; and someone who could open and / or close in prayer;
 5. The facilitator needs to enable the 'group process' to take place. In other words, s/he should manage group dynamics, promote turn-taking, keep to time, summarise and systematize the reading results, find creative and empowering ways for participants to report back their findings to the plenary and move the group from reflection into action;
 6. It is important to be able to manage conflict when it arises between the participants. Conflict can be creative, so it is not a bad thing. However, it usually needs to be managed. Often the small group itself can manage conflict but sometimes the facilitator may need to step in;
 7. Since the Bible study is driven by questions, the facilitator needs to enable the participants to engage with the questions (and in so doing to engage with each other and the text of Scripture);
 8. The facilitator should try to provide information when requested but always in a way that draws on the resources of the group. If the facilitator does not know the information requested or an answer to a question, then s/he should say so! It is better to go and find out the information than to pretend;
 9. It is important to stimulate the use of local reading resources and to introduce critical reading resources from biblical studies into the reading process as these are requested and required;
 10. The facilitator should be sensitive to the fact that not all participants may be literate. It is the role of the facilitator to ensure that there is sufficient discussion, explanation or even repetition of any written material so that those who 'read' through hearing are also able to



- participate fully in the study and not feel left out;
11. The facilitator should make sure that the Bible study questions are allocated sufficient time for group discussion and then for participants to report back. If time is limited, the facilitator need not ask each group to report on every question. Instead report backs can be rotated allowing each group a chance to lead the report back on a question and then the other groups only need to report on what has not already been covered.
 12. The facilitator should keep the Bible study process moving forward to the conclusion;
 13. Ice-breaker' exercises before the Bible study are an excellent way to help people to get to know one another. Some examples of these are included at the end of this section;
 14. Dividing the participants into small groups is a creative process that can be done in different ways depending on the nature of the Bible study. For example, in a Bible study of a gender-sensitive issue like sexual abuse, it is usually wise to divide people into groups of older women, older men, younger women and younger men. In other Bible studies, where it is best to mix up the participants, then some simple exercises may be used and examples of these are included at the end of this section;
 15. Doing these Bible studies may evoke great emotion in participants. This is because the themes may be painful and difficult for many people. The facilitator will need to be ready for this and sensitive to the needs of the participants. It may even be necessary to take a break at some point within the study, have disposable tissues available, or allow participants a reprieve from having to face what is difficult for them. If the study opens up old wounds for an individual, it may even be necessary to offer or find future counseling or other support if s/he would find this helpful; and
 16. There is value in doing some preparation before the study begins. You will need to:
 - Read through the whole study;
 - Read through the key text and be sure you have an understanding of what it is about;
 - Gather the things you will need for the study (see 1.2.2);
 - Read through all the questions within the study and reflect on what you think the participants' responses may be;
 - Write a few notes for yourself in preparation; and
 - Write the questions for the study on a large piece of newsprint or a chalkboard.



1.2.2. Facilitating the Practicalities of the Contextual Bible Study

There are some very practical aspects to facilitating a Contextual Bible Study. It is one thing to work well with a group of participants but it is quite another when very basic practical details of a group or gathering are not taken into account! The facilitator of a Contextual Bible Study does well to consider the following:

1. Check that you have all the necessary equipment on hand: that they are adequate and that they work properly. These are some of the things that you will need to gather: pens, paper, a Bible, large newsprint paper (or a chalk board and chalk), large newsprint pens, a newsprint stand and masking tape. The Bible studies in this manual in some cases will require that you photocopy a picture or arrange for each small group of participants to have a Bible to use. Furthermore, you may need to find local reading resources (other than the manual itself) which are appropriate to the participants and their context;
2. Make sure that the responses of the participants and their group reports are written onto the newsprint for all to see. The facilitator does not have to do this him/herself and could get someone else to do it. It is also a good idea to write the study questions onto the newsprint ahead of time so that these can simply and quickly be stuck up for the participants to see when the time arrives during the study. When writing on the newsprint (or chalkboard), the following is important:
 - Make sure the writing is easy to read and big enough for someone at the back of the room to see-the participants should not have to struggle to see what you have written; and
 - Make sure the writing is legible and clear. (Handwriting is not always easy to read!);
3. Think about the venue where the Bible study will be held: How big is it? Does it have electricity? Does it have chairs? What kind of equipment is available? Will it cost much (if you are paying)? and will it generally be a good venue in which to hold the Bible study? Plan appropriately for the venue. If there is no electricity, and you wish to meet at night, then you will have to think about alternative lighting. You will need some walls or other places to pin or stick up the sheets of newsprint paper. If you are meeting in the open air, then perhaps a tree would be a good place to do this;
4. When you are facilitating a Bible study, it is important to ensure that there is no obstacle between you and the participants. Do not 'hide' behind a lectern, pulpit or table. Rather have a table to the side of the room on which the equipment is available; and



5. In fact it is best to set out the seating arrangement in such a way that participants sit in a semi-circle and look at each other rather than a 'classroom' style where everyone is facing the 'front'. It is best not to have people sitting behind tables. Remember that the role of the facilitator is to help participants play an active part in the Contextual Bible Study and the way that participants are seated is crucial to this. Make sure the venue is set up before the Bible study begins so that when participants arrive the study may begin right away.

Great Ideas for Facilitators'

Icebreaker' Exercises

Taxis: For example, people can be asked to join 'taxis' with a limit being placed on how many passengers the taxi has space for. So, for example, the facilitator will say, 'Get into a taxi in groups of three!' Participants have a great time jostling and pushing and pulling each other as they try to form small groups of three. Each time this is done, those in the 'taxi' are asked to say something about themselves.

Getting to Know You: Ask the participants to get into pairs. Each person should tell their partner something small and fairly unimportant about himself or herself that no-one else knows. This can be a different thing for different people. (Examples of 'something small' are: where their mother was born or what their favourite colour is). Their partner should listen carefully and also have a chance to say something. Then get each person to report back to the whole group on what their partner said, for example, 'Wanjiku told me that her favourite food is chicken curry'. The idea here is to get participants sharing comfortably in small and large groups without feeling threatened.

Broken Telephone Line: Ask everyone to be quiet. Whisper a short message into the ear of the first person. Only whisper once. Get them to in turn whisper the message they heard from you into the ear of the next person. That person should pass on the 'telephone message' quietly to the next person. No one should be allowed to repeat his or her message. Go around the room. The last person should loudly share out the message that came through the broken telephone line!

Dividing Participants into Small Groups

Numbering: Start with one participant and give them number 1. The person next to them is number 2, and the person next to them is number 3. Then the next person is number 1 again, the next number 2 and so on. Point at each person giving them a number 1,2,3....1,2,3....1,2,3 and so on. Then get all the number 1's to join together, all the number 2's and so on.



Mini-choirs: Ask the participants to organize themselves into mini-choirs. Each choir should have a person with a bass voice, a tenor voice, an alto voice and a soprano voice. (This is a particularly good way of dividing participants into groups where it is important for there to be a mixture of genders and ages). Some small groups may need to have more than one type of voice. This is also a good way to make the point that everyone has a unique 'voice' to offer when doing a Contextual Bible Study, and that we all need to listen carefully to each other. Do not be surprised if spontaneous singing begins!

1.3 The Role of Contextual Bible Study Participants

Contextual Bible Study always begins with the reality of the local community. It is always guided by the issues or themes that a particular local community is dealing with. Because of this, the role of the participants doing the Contextual Bible Study is as important as that of the facilitator as they bring with them the themes of their local community. Since participants have a crucial contribution to make, the intention of this section is to help the facilitator understand this better.

Contextual Bible Study has important insights to offer the church and community. **Ordinary readers of the Bible** also have important insights to offer the church and community. This manual is really for those who want to use their biblical training to serve the church and community but who also want to learn from the insights and resources on offer by ordinary readers of the Bible.

Participants in a Contextual Bible Study are usually these 'ordinary readers' of the Bible referred to above. These readers of the Bible are 'ordinary' because they read the Bible in an untrained way. They are also 'ordinary' because often they are **poor, oppressed or marginalized in the society**. Thus these ordinary readers have something significant to offer when it comes to reading the Bible and hearing God from this perspective within the African context.

We all bring our contexts with us when we read the Bible. Contextual Bible Study recognizes that we are all to some extent shaped by our contexts and that our contexts are influenced by our readings from the Bible. Recognizing the role that our African context has on our reading of the Bible is important because we want to read the Bible explicitly from and for the African context. The Bible itself shows that God speaks specifically to specific people in specific life situations.



In the African context, however, we know that there are different contexts or realities and so it is important to choose to read the Bible from the perspective of Africans who are poor and oppressed. This choice is made because we believe that God is particularly concerned for the poor and the oppressed—those who are socially, politically, economically or culturally marginalized and exploited. Throughout the Bible we read that God hears the cry of widows, orphans, women, strangers, those with disabilities, the poor and the oppressed. Jesus himself was born amongst the poor and chose to live and work with the poor and then also died the death of the poor and oppressed on the cross. So when the perspectives of the poor and oppressed are heard in the Contextual Bible Study through the participants we are echoing God's concern for them.

It is important to be committed to **reading the Bible in community with others** whose contexts are different from our own. This is particularly important for facilitators who do not come from the African context. Reading the Bible 'in community with' means that the facilitator recognizes that in the Bible study group s/he may have power that comes from a privileged background/it also means that the facilitator's role is to empower the group participants during the Bible study process to discover, acknowledge and recognize their own identity and the value and importance of their contributions.



**TRANSFORMATIVE MASCULINITY
CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDIES**

2.1. When Men Drunk with Power Make Decisions

Esther 1:1-2:1

Nelly Murugi Njeru and Pauline Wanjiru Njiru



Introduction

In most societies, men occupy positions of power and authority. They enjoy the privilege of making decisions that affect women, children and other men. Unfortunately, most men are “drunk with power.” The decisions that they make have serious consequences on the health and well-being of other members of their families and communities. Men who have power in families, religious institutions and governments have generally made poor decisions. The passage under discussion raises serious questions regarding the state of mind under which most men in our contexts make decisions.

The story of Vashti is re-lived everyday by women in our time. This text depicts patriarchy in action. It shows the king feasting with the nobles, but also shows the queen with a parallel party for the women in the royal palace. Most likely these were the wives of the same men who were at the king's banquet. It is possible for one to imagine that things were balanced in terms of gender dynamics (each had their own party). However, things change when the king, who is under the influence of alcohol, wants the



Nelly Murugi Njeru and Pauline Wanjiru Njiru

queen to parade her beauty in front of his guests. To his dismay and total disbelief, the queen who appears to be sober turns this request down!

Maybe she wanted to protect her husband from the embarrassment he would have caused himself had she yielded to his request. This was a big undertaking! The decision taken by the queen was immediately viewed as 'disobedience' to the king's order and interpreted by the king's advisers not just as a disobedience to her husband but also a bruise/injury/hurt of the ego of the men of the land. She is therefore to be punished, not just to avenge the king's embarrassment, but also to protect the king's ego (1:16-18).

Vashti is punished not necessarily because she did something wrong (and maybe this explains why she is not allowed to explain herself). She could have been punished because her action was going to liberate women and the king's advisers felt threatened by the possible loss of their power and control over 'their' women. To silence the women and keep them in check, Vashti had to be sacrificed.

1:7 Greek historian Herodotus wrote that the Persians 'are very fond of wine and drink in the large quantities ... it is also their general practice to deliberate upon affairs of weight when they are drunk... sometimes, however, they are sober at their first deliberations but in this case they always reconsider the matter under the influence of wine' (comments from the Insight Bible).

Herodotus describes the king as a cruel, capricious sensual man – which fits well with his character in this book. In 483, he gives a huge feast, the climax to a six month display of his wealth and power. However, his queen refuses to play along with his wish to make her part of the exhibition. We are told that on the seventh day of the banquet, King Xerxes sent his personal servants to fetch the queen so that he could display her beauty for she was lovely to look at (1:10-11). We are told that Queen Vashti refused to be paraded in front of drunken men. This refusal on the part of Queen Vashti caused consternation! To refuse the king was interpreted as a way of humiliating him. So the king turned to his trusted advisers, who were also under the influence of alcohol. *"What do we do to this insolent woman? Can you imagine this?"* Xerxes must have inquired from his fellow men, with his eyes wide open and in total disbelief, anger, dismay and hurt.

Although some would condemn her disobedience, most can sympathise with her and admire her courage in sticking to her principles. She did not want men to lust over her, nor her husband/king to be embarrassed. The



king is quoted as “...a king who strongly preferred women who never interfered with his wishes” (1:12). Xerxes is known to have had violent temper, while Vashti was a strong character herself who did not fear the wrath of an angry king.

So what was the appropriate punishment for a queen who had refused to obey the king? It seems that the king made no attempts to ask Vashti why she had not come. This suggests certain arrogance from the king. Vashti may have had good reason not to appear, but her part of the story is not told, nor is she given a chance to explain her decision. Instead, her judgment is arbitrarily given by the king and his nobles.

Like Vashti, African women (*and indeed all women*) should have self respect and be women of principle: with their principles of self-respect, human dignity, social justice and gender equity derived from the word of God. This may be costly but it is worth the price. Men in particular need to learn not to exploit women's beauty for their own pleasure. Men must respect women and accord them a voice. They must not view women as trophies to be displayed. They must not see strong women as threats to their masculinity, but as assets to their families and communities.

Note that the other men in the story did not care about Vashti or about the king: they were taking care of their fears to ensure that their wives did not disobey their decisions. This was so even when these decisions were blatantly wrong, unfair and disrespectful for all to see. This story exposes men's cultural, patriarchal and sexist vulnerability. When a woman in this story uses her God given faculties to protect her dignity, maintain her self-respect and keep her 'God-image-in-her' intact, the men's ego is shaken, their male power challenged and their cultural supremacy interfered with. **The Men's Verdict: 'Vashti Must Be Gotten Rid Of!'**

Read Esther 1:1-2:1.

Questions

1. What are the main themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters in this story? What do we know about them?
3. What was the “crime” of Vashti and why must she be punished? What do you think about the judgment passed against her?
4. What do we think influenced the responses by a) Vashti, b) the King and c) the decision by the king's advisers? How would we interpret the response by each of these characters?



5. Looking at our communities, do men send their wives away? What are some of the motives that lead a man to expel his wife and get another? Can these be justified?
6. Do we have men who are “drunk with power” making decisions in our families, communities and nations today? Where is the evidence?
7. State three practical steps that you are going to take to promote sensitive and effective decision-making by men.



2.2. Naaman: The man who had to face his pride in order to find healing

2 Kings 5:1-27

Sue Parry



Introduction

In general, men find it difficult to be humble. Men have been socialised to regard themselves as heads of families and institutions. They tend to feel that they must always be treated as very important people. On the other hand, humility is a critical aspect of Transformative Masculinity. Men must be willing to listen to the voices of those they regard as occupying lower positions. The story under discussion provides critical insights into the need for men to be humble as therein lies their healing.

The story of Naaman is the best known of the wonders performed by the prophet Elisha.

Naaman was not a Jew but a Gentile in Syria and Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian army, enemies of Israel, answerable to and highly respected by both the King and the Syrian people for his bravery and fortitude. He was also afflicted by the worst disease of the day: leprosy. His wife's servant, a



little slave girl from Israel, spoke up that he could be healed if only he were to meet with the prophet of the Lord in Israel. Naaman relays this to the Syrian king who is very supportive and sends Naaman to the king of Israel, with a letter of introduction and lavish gifts of gold, silver and fine clothing. On receipt of the important visitor and letter, the king of Israel is seriously alarmed by the request for healing and assumes it is a letter of provocation. Elisha, the prophet of God, hears of the king's response and tells him to send Naaman to him.

Naaman arrives at the prophet's house in his magnificent chariot and with his wealthy entourage and expects Elisha to come out to him, to magically wave his hand over the disease and to confer healing on this great man. Instead, Elisha sends out a servant with a simple message, telling Naaman to go and wash seven times in the River Jordan. Naaman is furious, affronted, and speaks disparagingly about the waters of Jordan compared to the rivers of Syria and leaves in anger. His servants humbly approach him, acknowledging his track record of unquestioning bravery and suggest he consider the command. Naaman changes his mind and faithfully follows the instructions of Elisha, and is cleansed of the leprosy.

Naaman then returns to Elisha and meets him face to face, acknowledging the source of his healing and his changed attitude. He seeks guidance on the challenges he will face as a believer in a land of unbelievers and offers gifts to Elisha in gratitude. Elisha refuses the gifts and Naaman departs. Elisha's servant, Gerhazi, however, follows Naaman, lies to him about the prophet's need of some gifts, and accepts them from Naaman. He is assisted back with the gold, silver and clothing which he hides in his house. Elisha questions him and he tries to deceive Elisha who then curses Gerhazi with Naaman's leprosy for his greed and deception.

Read 2 Kings Chapter 5: 1-27.

This passage depicts a typical man who recognises his need (to be healed of a terrible disease) but he had preconceived ideas and expectations as to how this should happen. Secure in his position of power, influence and riches, he first went to the wrong place (to the king of Israel instead of to the Prophet of God). His pride stood between him and his healing, and it almost cost him the miracle. When he had the humility to let go and let God, God was able to work in Naaman's life, freely restoring him to full health, physically, and more importantly, spiritually.



Discussion:

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. What was the reaction of Naaman to:
 - the slave girl?
 - the King of Israel where he first sought healing?
 - the Prophet Elisha's messenger?
 - the instructions for his cleansing?
 - his servants and their advice?
 - Elisha after his healing experience?
 - Gerhazi?
4. Naaman was willing to pay any price, willing to do any great deed of prowess, to make any fatiguing pilgrimage, but he was unwilling to obey a simple command 'wash and be clean.' What was the issue here?
5. Why did Elisha not accept the gifts from Naaman?
6. How difficult do you think it was for Naaman to 'climb down' from his lofty position in society (see how his pride and anger is expressed in verses 9, 11 and 12)? If he had not, would he have experienced such healing?
7. What can families, communities and the Church do to promote positive behaviour and attitudes by men?



2.3. Recognising Diverse Male Sexualities and Challenging Gender-based Violence

Judges 19: 1-30

Bongi Zengele and Ezra Chitando



Introduction

The HIV epidemic has drawn attention to one particular group of people that churches in Africa have been hesitant to acknowledge: men who have sex with men. Studies in a number of African contexts have shown that there are men who have sex with men and that in many instances, they also have sex with women. However, because of the sharp criticism against homosexuality, many men who have sex with men do not access health facilities. This puts them and their female partners at risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

The refusal to acknowledge the existence of men who have sex with men by charging that such practices are “unAfrican”, “unbiblical” and “Western” is counterproductive in the age of HIV. Masculinities in Africa are diverse and not all men are heterosexual. The deployment of the Bible to silence the reality of men who have sex with men has been a contentious issue. In particular, the passage under study, Judges 19:1-30 has been harnessed in debates on men who have sex with men to condemn them outright. It is,



therefore, important to read the text afresh and to be alive to the presence of other themes such as men's covenants in violence against women. It is important to note that homosexual violence is not representative of homosexuality.

Read Judges 19: 1-30.

Questions:

1. What is this text about?
2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. What are the different sexual orientations that can be found in the text? Do these exist in our communities? What is the attitude towards them?
4. From the passage, what is the attitude of men towards women?
5. If the scene described in the text would be enacted today, how would it expose men and women to HIV?
6. How can the church promote human dignity and challenge sexual and gender-based violence?



2.4. Joseph: A Man who Challenges Popular Interpretations of Masculinity

Genesis 39: 1-23

Ezra Chitando, Charles Klagba and
Hendrew Lusey



Introduction

In most societies across the world, men are defined as having an insatiable sexual appetite. Boys grow up being socialised to regard themselves as slaves to sex. In fact, conventional wisdom suggests that men hunt for sex and will not hesitate to indulge in sex whenever an opportunity avails itself. The dominant pattern has been to maintain that men are readily available when it comes to sex. There is a strong myth that men are helpless when they are presented with an opportunity of having sex. This myth makes men vulnerable as they seek to live up to it.

In the passage under review, the myth that every man is “ever ready and available” when it comes to sex comes under review. Joseph recognises the fact that he can control his sexuality and he refuses to give in to Potiphar’s wife. However, he is victimized for taking a principled stance. In acknowledging Joseph’s consistency, however, there is need to refrain from presenting Potiphar’s wife as a yet another temptress who should be



condemned. Her actions suggest that she was facing sexual challenges on the domestic front. The passage should facilitate open and honest dialogue on sexualities.

Read Genesis 39: 1-23.

Questions

1. What is this text about?
2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. What could be some of the possible reasons behind the actions by Potiphar's wife?
4. Are there men like Joseph in our communities today? How are they viewed by other men?
5. List three practical steps that you will take to contribute towards men who act responsibly like Joseph.



2.5. When Male Honour becomes Deadly

Genesis 34: 1-31

Bongie Moyo-Bango



Introduction

In some societies across the world, religion, culture and tradition have positioned men as the “guardians of the honour of the family.” Men have been socialised to regard themselves as having the special responsibility to uphold and protect the “family honour.” In some religions and cultures, men have taken this self-understanding to extremes and have gone ahead to kill their daughters and sisters for “defiling the family honour.” Sometimes this happens when young women fall pregnant out of wedlock or defy their families when it comes to choosing marriage partners. Patriarchy socialises boys and men to regard women who are related to them as “minors to be protected and disciplined if necessary.”

Whereas many men are protective of women who are related to them, many are not willing to extend the same level of protectiveness to women who are not related to them. For example, many men would confront their brothers-in-law if they discover that they use violence towards their married sisters. However, the same men might themselves be violent towards their own partners! The passage under review brings out some complex issues regarding masculinity and violence. It highlights the danger posed by the idea of “male honour,” a concept that remains relevant in our own time.



Summary: Dinah and her brothers' revenge (Genesis 34)

Dinah, Jacobs's daughter by Leah, went to visit with the other young ladies in Canaan where the family had settled and caught the attention of Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite. Shechem took her and lay with her and violated her- he was strongly drawn to her and loved her. He wanted her for a wife and asked his father to go and negotiate with Jacob on his behalf and said he would be willing to pay anything for her. Jacob waited for his sons to return from the fields and told them what had happened. When the sons of Jacob came in from the fields and heard what had happened they were grieved and very angry because of the disgrace and dishonour Shechem had brought on their family by sleeping with their sister outside of marriage. The Canaanites' were willing to make amends by allowing their men to marry into Jacob's family and vice versa and Jacob's sons pretended to go along with this on condition that all the Canaanites men got circumcised. This they agreed to and on an agreed upon day all the men were circumcised. Whilst they were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Levi and Simeon, took their swords and killed all the men in the city, including Shechem and his father Hamor and took their sister Dinah out of Shechem's house. They plundered the city because their sister had been defiled. Their father Jacob was not happy with their actions but they justified themselves saying "Should he have treated our sister like a harlot?"

Discussion

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the characters and what do we know about them?
3. What does Shechem say and do?
4. What do Dinah's brothers say and do?
This story is very interesting in that it brings us into contact with male pride and sense of honour with regard to their (men's) immediate family. This is an ideal that most African men can identify with: protectiveness towards one's sisters and female relatives is ingrained in most men. Shechem's situation is also not new to the African context: most of us can recall several occasions in which 'damages' have had to be paid for the 'defilement' of a female relative or sibling. However, Dinah's voice and thoughts are conspicuous in their absence.
5. What do you find striking about Dinah in this passage?
6. How can we ensure that the sense of 'honour' that men have towards their sisters and female relatives extends to other females in our communities?
7. What can families, the church and communities do to promote men who treat every woman as they would their sister/aunt/mother, as well as empowered women who have a voice?



2.6. Rebekah: A Woman who Shapes Masculinity

Genesis 27: 1-29

Bongie Moyo-Bango



Introduction

In most instances, people overlook the role that women play in the shaping of the boy child or their influence on masculinity in general. It is often assumed that men “invent” themselves. However, the basic truth that is often missed is that women, particularly mothers, play a critical role in the upbringing of their children. In most instances, boys spend most of their early formative years with their mothers/women. It is, therefore, critical to acknowledge this role and to ensure that women utilise the space that is availed to them to introduce positive values in boys.

In the story of Isaac and Rebekah and their sons, Esau and Jacob, Rebekah demonstrates the influence that a mother can have over her son. She uses her agency (that is, capacity to act in her interest) to subvert culture. Although some may want to judge her harshly, her actions confirm the need to acknowledge the role of women in shaping masculinity.

Read Genesis 27: 1-29

This chapter will assist us to answer the question about the role of women in shaping masculinity.



Summary

Isaac on his death bed called on his first born, Esau who was a hunter and asked him to go and hunt game for him, make the savoury stew that he (Isaac) liked and he would eat it and bless him.

Rebekah, Isaac's wife, was listening as Esau was receiving these instructions from his father and rushed to give her own set of instructions to their second-born son, Jacob. She instructed him to take two of the best young goats from their flock and *she* would make her husband the savoury stew he loved, then *Jacob* would take it to his father who would eat it and bless *him*. Jacob answered that he was a smooth skinned man, whereas Esau was hairy man and his father would feel this and consider him a deceiver and curse rather than bless him. Rebekah, his mother answered "let your curse be on me... just listen and do as I say." Jacob obeyed, got the two young goats and his mother made the stew his father loved. Then she found her elder son Esau's clothes and made Jacob wear them. Then she put the skins of the two young goats on the smooth parts of his hands and neck. Jacob then took the food to his father and when asked who he was, he claimed to be Esau. Isaac questioned how he had found the game so quickly and Jacob claimed God had given it to him. Isaac, still unsure, asked to feel him and felt the hairy hands and said- "the voice is Jacob's but the hands are the hands of Esau" and asked one final time- "Are you *really* my son Esau?" to which Jacob answered, "yes." Isaac then asked for the food to be brought to him and he ate then he asked Jacob to kiss him and indeed he smelled like Esau and so he blessed him.

Discussion

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. What does
 - a) Isaac say and do?
 - b) Rebekah say and do? and
 - c) Jacob say and do?

Important to note in this passage is how Rebekah influences the outcome of a situation which by right was male dominated and had nothing to do with her. She manipulated the outcome. She exercised her agency. The first born male child was always the recipient of the fathers' blessings and main portion of his inheritance. The second-born son was not as important. Rebekah loved her second son more than her first born and therefore meddled and was willing to live under a curse for his sake.



Bongie Moyo-Bango

4. What type of woman was Rebekah? List three characteristics that make up her personality.

Rebekah highlights how mothers in this world play a crucial role in the upbringing of the boy child. Their influence on the type of young man society ends up with is huge. Firstly, preferential treatment of one child over another skews treatment and makes the one grow up believing in his self-importance and with an expectation of obeisance from all the women who cross his path. Secondly, there needs to be a paradigm shift in how women treat and bring up both their boy and girl children. Are women, by the very nature of nurturing, propagating the same characteristics in men that they then bemoan?

5. Do we have men like Isaac in our communities today?
6. Do we have men like Jacob in our communities today?
7. List three practical steps you will undertake to contribute towards women and men shaping masculinity positively.



2.7. Leaders: Gate Keepers or Channels of Healing and Fullness of Life?

Matthew 8: 1-13

Nyambura J. Njoroge



Churches' Response to Violence and the HIV Pandemic

As Christians and churches one of the things that we have in common is the Bible which is a main source of enlightenment, empowerment and inspiration in our faith journeys and engagement in God's mission. Today some of the major life threatening and destructive issues that churches have been addressing in the last three decades are HIV and AIDS pandemic and endemic violence in our families, churches and society in general. In various ways we have turned to different parts of the Bible for guidance but we do not always reach the same conclusion, especially with regards to HIV transmission which is largely sexually transmitted. Some Christians use moralist approach which has promoted stigma, discrimination, blaming, condemnation, a silencing and judgmental theological messages.

On the other hand, one thing that has been crucial is to have effective and empowering leadership and people who speak with authority and clarity to promote healing and fullness of life in contexts where unspeakable suffering and needless death have become way of life. In particular we have turned to the Bible and especially the teachings of Jesus to learn how to address issues related to HIV transmission, sexual and gender based violence and how to nurture healthy relationships in various communities.



In our efforts to encourage churches to promote HIV and violence prevention education and to accompany people and families that are most affected we have encountered two types of leaders in our churches.

- (a) Those who act as gate keepers and they do everything in their power to stop people from receiving life-affirming messages and ways of stopping HIV transmission and violence, for instance those leaders and priests who focus on judging, stigmatizing and excluding people living with HIV. Others remain completely ignorant of how HIV is transmitted or refuse to accept and acknowledge that sexual and gender based violence is happening in Christian homes and in churches.
- (b) The other category are leaders who allow themselves to listen and learn from people living with HIV and survivors of sexual gender based violence and together they look for solutions. These are the hearers and doers of the word of God and who speak with authority to their congregations through prayers, liturgy, songs and who create safe spaces where people can meet to hear one another to speech and to action. These leaders have been identified as channels of healing and fullness of life.

Given the huge magnitude of multiple problems and challenges the HIV pandemic and violence continue to cause in many families, churches and communities, fundamentally we urgently need strengthened and empowered leadership at different levels in our churches and church related organizations, especially seminaries that prepare pastors, priests, theologians and scholars.

It is in light of this background that has led me to choose the text in Matthew 8: 1-13 which gives us a glimpse of the leadership that we need as churches to address the various problems and challenges people, including migrants, continue to face in the world today. The text comes soon after what is commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthews 5-7. While Jesus was busy teaching the huge crowd and his disciples there were others who could not be present but nevertheless they heard that he was not only teaching with authority but he was also healing people. The text involves people from different backgrounds, professions, leadership and people suffering from different diseases.

To engage the text I am suggesting several questions to enable contextual interactive process in small groups as well as in preparing sermons and liturgies.



Read Matthew 8:1-13

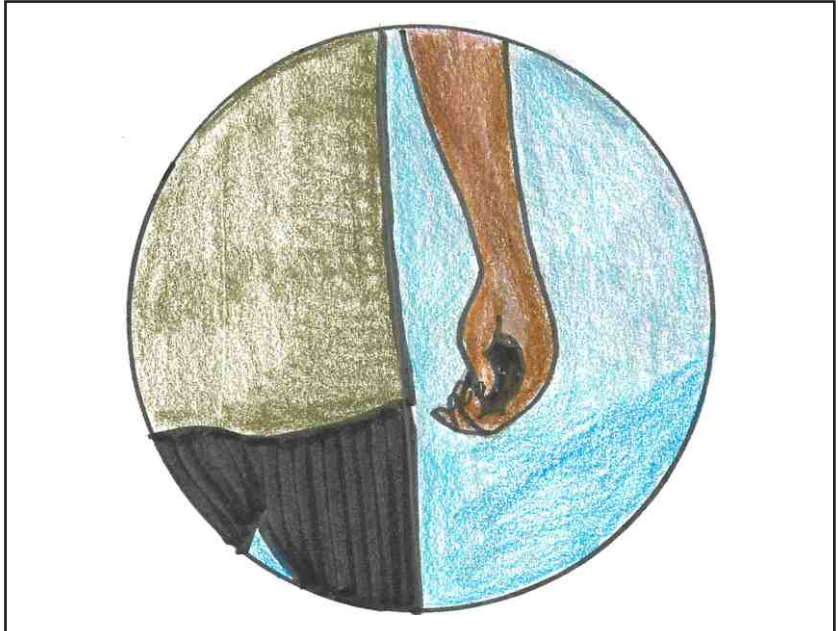
Suggested Questions

- 1) What are the themes in this text?
- 2) Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
- 3) In relating the current reality of HIV pandemic and endemic sexual and gender-based violence, how do we as leaders and as Christians receive people who disclose their HIV positive status? Or people who are sexually violated?
- 4) How does this text help us to understand the meaning of authority and/or leadership, positive masculinity and how authority should be used in religious communities in light of the HIV pandemic and sexual and gender-based violence, for instance?
- 5) What do we learn from the examples of Jesus and the Centurion and the kind of masculinity they demonstrate in dealing with illness and those who work under their authority and/or audience?
- 6) What can priests, local lay leaders and theological educators do within our congregations and theological institutions to empower Christians to become channels of healing and fullness of life?
- 7) What actions will you plan in your congregations in light of this text and how can we promote effective leadership and positive masculinities?



2.8. Jesus: A Man Who Dealt Justly With Women: **John 8: 1-11**

Bongi Zengele



Introduction

Women experience sexual and gender-based violence in most parts of the world. By far, more men are perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence, although some men also experience it. Most societies also have double-standards when it comes to handling issues to do with human sexuality. They are more willing to excuse men and punish women when dealing with what they deem as culturally unacceptable sexual behaviour. This lack of justice extends to other areas of life. Religious, cultural, economic, political and historical factors are behind the marginalisation of women. There is need for men, especially those in positions of power, authority and influence, to challenge unfair cultural practices and to defend the rights of women.

Read John 8: 1-11

Discussion

In this passage, Jesus, a man, demonstrates a lot of courage and sensitivity. He refuses to endorse the double-standards that the people were showing. Jesus acted as a defender of women's rights. Men who hold positions of



power and authority in families, institutions, churches and nations must follow the example of Jesus in defending women's rights.

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Why do you think the partner not present?
It is important to note that in most societies infidelity by a woman is deemed as more shameful than infidelity by a man. In fact, in some societies, a man who is able to seduce a woman and to have sex with her is regarded as a hero to be celebrated. On the other hand, a woman who is caught in the act is condemned. In the specific case of the woman in the story, Mosaic law required that both the man and the woman be both tried.
4. What kind of masculinities are demonstrated by the male characters in the text?
5. What does Jesus say and do?
Jesus refuses to support the oppressive practice and double-standards by the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. Instead of "remaining neutral," he engages in a strategy that saves the woman's life. He was as much on trial as the woman and he did not evade his responsibility. Like many men, he could have said, "go ahead and do what you want," but he had both courage and conviction. A woman's life could not be used as collateral damage in contests between male religious leaders. He intervened decisively but tactfully.
6. Do you know of men like Jesus in your community? How are they viewed?
7. List three practical steps that we can engage in to support life-affirming and transformative masculinities.



2.9. Men's Health seeking Behaviour: The healing of the paralytic man lowered through the roof

Mark 2: 1-12

Sue Parry



Introduction

One of the biggest challenges of masculinity is the health-seeking behaviour of men. Men tend to associate health care facilities with women. In addition, masculinity has been constructed as consisting of being robust and healthy. In many places, men are seen as strong, while visiting health facilities is regarded as falling beneath the dignity of men. Seeking medical help is seen as feminine. “Real men” are those for whom health and safety are irrelevant. Some men boast, “I have not seen a doctor in years.” They are convinced that this confirms their masculinity. They equate health seeking behaviour with “weakness” (“I am FINE”) and thus do not go for routine physical check-ups (blood pressure, diabetes, prostate enlargement, chest infections, HIV tests) and they are risk-takers: take the extra drink before driving (“I can handle my drink”); drive without wearing a seatbelt; talking on the mobile phone whilst driving; climb on the roof to repair it without someone holding the ladder; men even undertake heroic rescues that are very risky despite the risk of physical danger.



Poor health seeking behaviour by men has meant that in many instances, men access health facilities when their conditions would have deteriorated. The challenge lies in empowering men to take their health seriously and to assist them to seek medical attention early. In the story under review, the friends take extreme measures to ensure that the man received help.

The place is Capernaum, a home town for Jesus (the people heard that he had come home) and the incident takes place inside a house. A very large crowd, including preachers of the law, has gathered specifically to hear him preach. The crowd is packed inside and extended outside the door of the house. Four men come to the house, supporting a paralyzed friend on his mat. They are unable to penetrate the crowd so they resort to digging a hole through the roof of the house and lowering in the mat on which their friend lay. Jesus responds to the faith of the friends and addresses the paralytic telling him: “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Read Mark 2: 1-12

This passage depicts a man who is paralyzed and is brought to Jesus for healing by four friends. We do not hear anything from the man and can only assume he is in agreement with his kind friends' efforts. We do not know the cause of his paralysis: was he born that way, was it the result of illness or the result of some accident or some foolishness on his part? His friends obviously care a lot about him and are not dissuaded in their attempt to reach Jesus by the obstructing crowd. They are determined and creative, believing that a healing was possible if only they could get him into Jesus' presence. They were obviously prepared to take the consequences of their act of vandalism on the roof of someone else's house. The intrusion completely disrupts the proceedings in the house. The impact of this miracle is seen in three areas: the faith of the friends is rewarded and the paralytic man is dramatically and unequivocally totally healed; the crowd are in awe: “we have never seen anything like this' and they praise God; and the Pharisees and teachers of the law are incensed by Jesus' bold claims that are born out in an undeniable miracle.

Discussion:

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. What were the reactions of each to the plight of the paralyzed man?



4. What was the reaction of Jesus to:
 - The crowd – who was in the crowd and what was happening when this intrusion took place? How did the crowd facilitate or obstruct the man and friends from reaching Jesus?
 - The friends of the paralyzed man? What does this teach us about the value of our intervention/intercession on behalf of others?
 - The paralyzed man?
 - The teachers of the law?
 - The crowd?
 - The paralyzed man after his healing experience?
5. Are there instances today where *we can* be responsible for our illnesses / disabilities through our own fault or negligence?
6. What does illness/disability do to one's self-understanding as a man/masculinity?
7. What can we learn from the behaviour of the friends who went *more* than the extra mile to help their paralyzed friend access the best possible care and source of healing? How far are we prepared to go to stand by our friends and those in need?
8. How can we encourage men in our families, churches and communities to be more health-responsible?



2.10. Bartimaeus: A Man who saw His Need

Mark 10: 46-52

Ezra Chitando and Phumzile Mabizela



Introduction

“Please help me” are very difficult words for a man to say. Men have been brought up to believe that a “real man” is complete and self-sufficient. In fact, a “real man” is supposed to be the ultimate provider. In turn, he lacks nothing. A man who seeks help is regarded as feminine. A man must do what a man needs to do, says conventional wisdom. In such a scheme, a man must not request assistance from friends, family members or work mates. As a man must not cry, so must he not cry out.

The idea of a man as one who never seeks help places a great burden on men. In most instances, men carry their burdens quietly. This has serious implications on men's health and well-being. The passage under discussion challenges the refusal by men to seek help. Bartimaeus, regarded as “unmanly” by most people due to his physical condition, emerges as a powerful model of what men need to do when facing serious challenges. Because he cries out, Bartimaeus gets help and emerges out of his predicament. Although he was “blind,” he actually “saw” in a very profound way.

Read Mark 10: 46-52



Questions

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. What did Bartimaeus say and do?
4. What did Jesus say and do?
It is vital to note that Jesus did not prescribe a solution. He actually sought to establish what it is that Bartimaeus wanted. He empowered Bartimaeus to make his choice and to state what he needed.
5. Why is it difficult for men to seek help (in time)?
6. What can we do as families, churches and communities to empower men to seek help when they face challenges?



2.11. Joseph: A Different Man

Matthew 1: 18-25

Bongie Moyo-Bango



The idea of fatherhood is quite central to constructions of masculinity in most cultures. In fact, in some cultures, fatherhood is a defining feature of what it means to be a man. A male who is not associated with biological fathering is looked down upon. This has caused tremendous stress to couples that do not have biological children. In the context of HIV, it is important to acknowledge the role of social fathering: one may not be a biological father, but one may accomplish the role of a social father.

The story of the birth of Jesus is possibly the best known and told tale in the Bible and has been subject to a lot of romanticism, especially during Christmas time. A major player in the unfolding story of God's salvation plan is Joseph but oft times he is the one player that no one pays any attention to. Mary, a virgin girl affianced to Joseph, falls pregnant by the Holy Spirit and has to break the news of her pregnancy to her fiancé Joseph. Joseph, a righteous man wants to break his engagement to Mary quietly so as not to cause her any shame in their community. As it did to Mary, an angel appears to him also and tells Joseph to go ahead and marry Mary as she has been made pregnant by the Holy Spirit. He marries her as instructed and does not consummate their marriage until after the baby is born.



Bongie Moyo-Bango

Read Matthew 1: 18-25.

This passage reveals to us that there *are* good men out there: principled, selfless men ready to fight and protect those they love.

Discussion

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what we do we know about them?
3. What do you think Joseph says to Mary?
It isn't given in the passage of scripture what Joseph says to Mary, but we can fill in the gaps- quick dramatisation is possible here. A young man who has kept himself pure for his wedding night and believes that his betrothed is doing the same- then bang!- she tells him she is pregnant.
4. What does Joseph do?
Joseph is a red blooded male who did not allow his base instinct to govern his reactions. One can only imagine the disappointment, hurt and anger he must have felt on hearing that his beloved had fallen pregnant. Being human, he must have initially jumped to the conclusion that she was having an affair with another man. How many men would still be considerate and calm under such great provocation? And yet Joseph wants to break the engagement quietly so as not to cause Mary any shame. Secondly, he believes the angel and marries his pregnant fiancé. Thirdly, although young and with the urges and needs of a young man, he does not have sexual intercourse with her until after the baby is born. Joseph does not behave like your average (Joe) man. He is different.
5. Do you know any men in your community who, like Joseph, seek to love, honour and protect women? How are they treated in the community?
6. If the Joseph story were re-enacted in our world today, how would it be different? What, in our societies, has brought about these actions and attitudes?
7. How can the family, churches and communities work together to produce more men like Joseph, who act responsibly and sensitively?



2.12. Jesus: A Man who Challenged Stigma and Discrimination

Matthew 15:21-28

Ayoko Bahun-Wilson



Introduction

Due to historical, religious, cultural, political, economic and other factors, most positions of power are occupied by men. In the field of religion, men tend to dominate the top positions. However, instead of utilizing these positions to create an environment where everyone can thrive, some religious leaders have fuelled stigma and discrimination. Women, people living with HIV, homosexuals and others have been marginalized due to negative attitudes that have been cultivated by some male religious leaders. In the specific case of homosexuals, some religious leaders have openly called for violence to “eliminate these people from the face of the earth.”

The passage under discussion highlights the positive attitude adopted by Jesus towards those who were ostracised by other religious leaders during his time. Whereas most of his contemporaries drew a very narrow division between “us” and “them,” Jesus adopted a much wider and inclusive approach. Jesus acknowledged the possibility of “outsiders” enjoying the



benefits associated with the “insiders.” The passage challenges male religious leaders to remember that churches are supposed to be welcoming and hospitable. They must be safe spaces to people of different sexual orientation and other marginalized social groups.

Read Matthew 15: 21-28.

Questions

1. What is this text about?
2. Who are the characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. What does the Canaanite woman say and do?
4. What does Jesus say and do?
5. Name some of the most marginalized groups in your community today. What are the labels that are ascribed to them?
6. How can we as families, churches and communities embrace the attitude shown by Jesus and become more welcoming towards marginalized individuals and groups around and among us?



2.13. Zacchaeus: A Short but not Short-Sighted Man

Luke 19: 1-10

Ezra Chitando



Introduction

The story of Zacchaeus has been retold many times. The image of the short man who was so keen to see Jesus that he climbed a sycamore tree to see him has captured the imagination of many. Others make fun of Zacchaeus, caricaturing him because of his stature. The story is well known: Zacchaeus is a wealthy chief tax-collector. He gets to know that Jesus would be passing in his direction and decides to climb a sycamore so as to be able to see Jesus. When Jesus reaches the spot, he asks Zacchaeus to come down and indicates that he wants to stay at his house that day. Immediately, Zacchaeus comes down and they go to his house. The people who saw this complained that Jesus had gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.' At his house, Zacchaeus addressed Jesus and undertook to give half of his possessions to the poor and to compensate whoever he might have cheated by paying back four times the amount. Jesus then declared that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house.

Read Luke 19: 1-10



This passage will assist us in understanding the need and possibility for men to change and to adopt new values and qualities.

Discussion:

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what we do we know about them?
3. What does Zacchaeus say and do?
4. What does Jesus say and do?
What is critical to note in this story is that Zacchaeus defies the dominant ideas regarding a man in his society. He is acutely aware of his limitations and takes steps to overcome his situation. More critically, Zacchaeus negotiates the crowd that is preventing him from achieving his goal of seeing Jesus. In the end, he more than just sees Jesus: he meets him and they have a conversation.
5. What does Zacchaeus promise to do?
Upon meeting Jesus and reflecting on his life up to that point, Zacchaeus realised that he could not continue on the same path. It is vital for men in our families, churches, institutions, communities, nations and the world to realise that they should change radically. They must be willing to give up all the unfair benefits that they enjoy and to deal justly with women, children and other men who hold lower positions. Zacchaeus promised to give half of his possessions to the poor and to compensate those he might have cheated by paying back four times the amount. Thus, men need to “give up” many things if women and children are to experience justice.
6. Do you know men who are like Zacchaeus in your community, that is, those who seek to uphold the rights and dignity of women and children? How are they viewed?
7. What three practical steps can families, churches and communities do to promote positive behaviour and attitudes by men?



