

Tamar Campaign



Contextual Bible Study  
Manual on

# Gender-Based Violence



Edited by  
Fred Nyabera and Taryn Montgomery

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Manual on Gender-Based  
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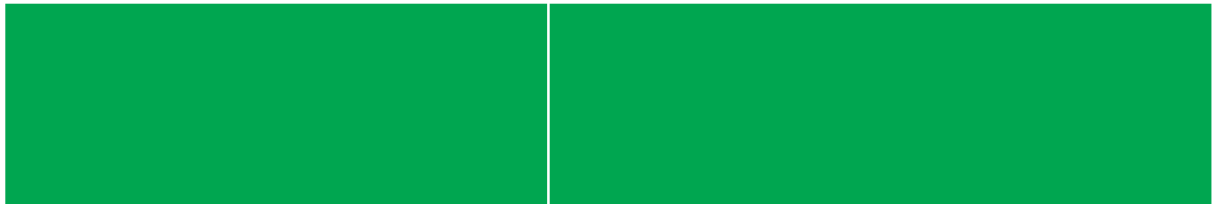
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# Foreword

Tamar Campaign

This book invites you to consider Gender-Based Violence from a biblical perspective as it relates to your life and context. It has been prepared under the guidance of the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) on behalf of the Tamar Campaign Working Group. Twelve women and men living in very specific and diverse countries and contexts have been asked to provide a personal perspective on the given Biblical passages.

The Bible studies are designed within the framework of Contextual Bible Study as developed by Dr. Gerald West of the Ujamaa Centre in South Africa. In studying the Bible in this way, the emphasis is on reading 'with' rather than reading 'for' or 'to'. The emphasis is on allowing the readers (literate and illiterate) to read and interpret the text within their own context, cultural background, and life experience, all with the aim of achieving personal and societal transformation. We are grateful to West and his staff of the Ujamaa Centre for assisting us in our own journey of Contextual Bible Study and for granting us permission to use some of their work in explaining Contextual Bible Study in the opening chapter of this manual.

Knowledge without application falls short of God's desire for God's children. God desires for us to apply what we have learned through our experience and study of scripture so that we grow in the fullness of God. This Bible study guide was prepared with these goals in mind. As you go through the following pages, we hope you will be encouraged to apply what you have learned. We further hope that these Bible studies will provide a safe space for the survivors of Gender-Based Violence to share their experiences and seek healing within themselves and their community. Thank you for accompanying us on this journey.

**Fred Nyabera, Executive Director, FECCLAHA.**

Contextual  
Bible Study

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FECCLAHA

# Introduction

## Tamar Campaign

Launched in Kenya in 2005, the Tamar Campaign seeks to acknowledge the existence of Gender-Based Violence in African society with particular focus on sexual and domestic violence and to challenge churches and religious institutions to address the crisis. Sponsored by The Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) in partnership with St. Paul's University and the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Tamar Campaign stands as a proactive voice empowering the Church to break the chains of silence surrounding Gender-Based Violence.

The Church is uniquely placed in society to play a decisive role in the prevention and elimination of the different forms of violence against women and children, and possesses the moral authority, responsibility and capacity to minister to the needs of those who have been abused, as well as deal with the perpetrators. It is with this in mind that FECCLAHA has initiated the development of this manual, providing twelve Contextual Bible Studies that address Gender-Based Violence and the response of the Church.

By using the Contextual Bible Study method for the further development of the Tamar Campaign throughout the FECCLAHA region, it is our hope to filter the message of healing, restoration and hope to survivors of Gender-Based Violence at the local level of the Church. The practice of Contextual Bible Study is one of active and equal participation where all group members are engaged in bringing the scripture to life through their own story. Therefore, the leadership style of such a Bible study is facilitation.

It is important for pastors, lay leaders and Bible study group members to actively engage fellow members in dialogue on Gender-Based



Violence which is present in the Bible and active in our communities today. Through guiding Bible study group members in interpreting the text for its historical, literary and reader/reception resources, facilitators can guide the group in further understanding both the positives and the negatives of specific Bible stories and the hope and love of God shown in each. Also known as ‘behind the text’, ‘on the text’ and ‘in front of the text’, this method allows members to apply the message of each story to their own cultural, religious, economic and social context.

Doing Contextual Bible Study as a tool for discussing Gender-Based Violence has been a common practice of the Ujamaa Centre in South Africa, where the Tamar Campaign originated, for over 15 years. Therefore, much of the direction and explanation of how to undertake Contextual Bible Study that you will find in this opening chapter of the manual has come from the Ujamaa Centre.

In further explaining Contextual Bible Study as a way of studying the Bible through one’s own context, the Ujamaa centre says:

The Contextual Bible Study method is similar to many other forms of Bible study that have their origins in the interface between socially engaged biblical scholars and ordinary Christian ‘readers’ of the Bible (whether literate or not). Many will be familiar with the **See-Judge-Act** method, where the Bible study process begins with analysis of the local context (See), and then moves to the Bible to allow it to speak to the context (Judge), and then moves to the participants planning a course of action arising from the Bible study (Act). Contextual Bible Study is similar.

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 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 Tamar Campaign stands 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 twelve studies in the manual.

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 organised 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 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 biblical scholarship can be characterised 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<sup>1</sup>, 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.

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<sup>1</sup>John Riches from the Contextual Bible Study group in Glasgow, Scotland, talks of the need to slow down the reading process, allowing readers more time with the text. Critical consciousness questions do this.

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 individual's embodied theologies that the group is empowered to 'own' the theology being expressed as their own. In most cases, participants from marginalised 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 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. As mentioned in the foreword, 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 organisations 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 organise 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 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 systematise 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 counselling 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 1.22);
  - 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 organise 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 marginalised 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 recognises that we are all to some extent shaped by our contexts and that our contexts are influenced by our readings from the Bible. Recognising 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 marginalised 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 a 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 recognises 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 recognise their own identity and the value and importance of their contributions.

Tamar Campaign

## Contextual Bible Studies

## 2.1 The Rape of Tamar, the Crime of Amnon

*Pamela Cooper-White*

2 Samuel 13:1-22

### Introduction

In Tamar's story we find a *rape* which combines elements of *incest* and *domestic violence*. There is a *conspiracy* of men aiding and abetting the perpetrator of the crime and a male conspiracy of silence after the act. Finally, there is a raw form of *retribution* in the end but this brutal act of revenge is done quite apart from the victim. All power to act or even to speak is taken away from Tamar. In the end, the father to all three of the principle characters in this drama as well as all his servants are seen to mourn by wailing and weeping 'very bitterly' day after day, not for the victim, but for the rapist and the rapist's brother.



Tamar is someone whose story is still very modern:

- Tamar was sexually assaulted, not by a stranger, but by someone she knew;
- The violation took place not in a desolate remote place at the hands of a stranger, but by a member of her own family in his home;
- Tamar was exploited through one of her most vulnerable traits-her kindness, her culturally instilled obedience and her upbringing to take care of the other;
- Tamar said 'No' and her 'No' was not respected;
- When Tamar sought help she was told to hush it up;
- The process for achieving justice and restitution was taken out of her hands entirely and carried forward by her brother. No other women are even recorded in this story as having a voice or a role in coming to Tamar's aid. It became men's business; and
- In the end, it was Tamar's perpetrator for whom her father mourned not for her. In fact, the end of Tamar's story happens without her.

### Read 2 Samuel 13:1-22

#### Discussion:

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. What are the various crimes committed in this story?
4. What are the political implications of Tamar's rape?
5. What does she say and do?

Perhaps the most important theme of the story of the rape of Tamar is that it is not primarily a story about sexual lust or-at least from the point of view of the story's narrator-about the violation of a person. It is first and foremost a tale of the exercise of power and domination. From the narrator's point of view, this is a 'true crime' story-but the crime is actually portrayed in the context of the books of Samuel, not as a crime against a person, but rather a property crime.

6. What are some of the motives that lead a man to rape a woman? What led Amnon to rape Tamar?

Whether the act is rape, sexual harassment, battery or the sexual abuse of a child all our approaches toward prevention as well as intervention and healing will fail until we recognize these not as acts of passion, lust or temper but as acts of power and aggression often using or targeting sexual body parts or sexist language-simply because this is the area of greatest vulnerability and greatest violation.

7. Do you know women like Tamar in your community? How are they viewed?
8. What can the Church do to break the silence against gender-based violence?

## 2.2 A Selfish Levite

Judges 19

*Mark Shaw*

### Introduction

Is there a moral ecology to life and society? Do small crimes create a ripple effect in society, family and church? Do large consequences flow from small sins? This seems to be a biblical way of thinking and certainly in our passage of Judges 19. One of the primary points of the book of Judges is that without proper structures of justice; moral, sexual, spiritual and political anarchy will abound. This chapter gives an extreme example of that tragic truth. Commentators on Judges 19 note the series of shock waves: from small to great, from personal to public and from selfishness to tragedy that make up this story of the violated concubine. (cf. Adeyemo in *Africa Bible Commentary*).



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### Ice Breaker: From Whisper to Shout

Start with an interesting sentence like ‘The yellow crow flies by night’. Do not announce this sentence to the group. Begin the game by whispering the sentence as low as you can into the ear of person number one. That person is told to whisper it louder into the ears of the next person. This is key: each person must be instructed to increase the volume each time the sentence is repeated. The third person does the same and so on until the sentence has made it around the circle. Though the sentence might be different by the time you are finished the real point of the exercise is to show how small actions, like a whisper, can result in larger issues like a shout. Talk about this before introducing Judges 19.

### Read Judges 19

This chapter will help us answer the questions about the ‘butterfly effect’ of sexual selfishness and sexual violence.

#### Discussion

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. What are some of the selfish acts that you see in this story?

The Levite in verses 1 to 10 starts a sexual union with another woman who becomes a common law wife (concubine). While this practice was common among the nations of the ancient world and was allowed in Israel, it was rarely found among Levites. Concubinage violated the spirit of Leviticus 21:7 and 13:15 where

it is clear that levitical marriage was to be different from that of either the average Israelite or person of the surrounding cultures. The second selfish act is the unfaithfulness of the concubine in Judges 19:2. A third selfish act is the Levite not following the law of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1). Note that the actions of the husband in Judges 19:24-28 make it clear his decision to not divorce was not out of love or concern for the second wife or the honour of God.

4. What are the various levels and expressions of sexual violence stated or implied in this story?

(For example, verse 24 offering two innocent women to militant homosexuals to protect themselves; verse 25 unrestrained gang rape; verses 26-27 allowed to die on the doorstep after being violated sexually; and verse 28 the shocking indifference of the husband).

5. Look carefully at Judges 19:29-30. If you were an Israelite leader at that time and received this bloody message what would you conclude about the culture as a whole? What possible courses of action would you consider taking?
6. How does this story of selfishness, violence and tragedy speak to our respective contexts?

(You may want to bring several copies of daily newspapers and ask members of the Bible study group to look through them for examples of the ripple effect of sexual sin and sexual violence).

7. What can a local church do within its own congregation? What can it do in the community at large?
8. What actions will you plan in light of this Bible study? What resources for action can you recommend to the group?

## 2.3 The Bleeding Woman and a Dying Girl

Mark 5:21-43

*Musa Dube*

### Introduction

Journeying into this story with eyes of a Motswana woman and within the current context of HIV/AIDS, I find that this story of the bleeding woman and the dying girl in Mark bristles with familiar issues. I also find that we cannot journey into this story without recognizing the HIV/AIDS pandemic in our own countries and communities. In this journey, the story opens many useful windows for our context.

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## Read Mark 5:21-43

### Discussion

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. In relating the current backdrop of HIV/AIDS in much of Africa, what similarities do we find in this story? How can we relate the suffering of the bleeding woman and the dying girl to the suffering of those infected?

As we enter through the doors of Mark 5:21-43 we find desperate parents whose children are under the shadow of death. We find desperate patients who have spent all they have in hopes of healing only to grow more frail. We find doctors who give medicine and take money for their services but cannot fully heal patients. We find mothers who have stayed at home to nurse their sick children. We find parents and relatives waiting desperately for healing from healers until it is too late-when their sick ones give in before healers arrive. We find people mourning, crying loudly for their lost children. We find bodies of dead youth.

As a woman, I also note that like in the HIV/AIDS context, illness is embodied by women's bodies and in this case that of the bleeding woman and the dying girl. I find that home based-care is also in the hands of women. Yes, it is the story of Mark 5, but it is also the story of our context, the story of our HIV/AIDS infected bodies and communities.

4. What does this story tell us about healing and hope?
5. What do we learn from the examples of Jairus and Jesus in dealing with the suffering of women? How should men respond to such situations as these?

As we open another window of this story, we find life-affirming models of manhood and fatherhood that affirms a girl-child's life. In relating through our African context, she might be a young girl but she deserves life, not suffering. Jairus and Jesus embody these positive male models. For example, Jairus runs to find Jesus, and once he finds him he falls down and begging Jesus repeatedly he says, 'My daughter is at the point of death. Come lay hands on her so that she may be made whole and live'. Even if she is a girl-child, Jesus agrees to go, and when she has died before they arrive Jesus insists, 'The child is not dead but sleeping'. Jesus walks to her still body, takes her hand and calls, '*talitha cum!*' She is restored to life.

6. What lessons do we draw from the suffering and the healing of the bleeding woman? How can we affirm her bold character in our own lives today?

When we open this final window, the role of a bleeding woman, we are given another ray of healing and hope. Unlike the dying girl, who is supported by two positive male figures, the woman herself exemplified a proactive and bold character in the struggle for acceptance. She is a woman who has suffered from the structural violence of patriarchy which stigmatized and impoverished her due to the status of her health and body. She was very poor, in ill health,

stigmatized by society and with very little chance of economic recovery and social re-establishment. She decided that enough was enough, that her suffering at the hands of others could be justified no more. Therefore, she dares court danger-she touches the cloak of Jesus. The woman believed that if she touched the garment of Jesus she would be healed from her continual bleeding. So she reaches out and touching his garment she is restored to health. Jesus, a man, realizes that power has gone out of him and asks, 'Who touched me?' She then comes forward confessing that she wanted his healing power and in desperation pursued it without asking for permission. And Jesus, being the man that he was, accepts her proactive spirit.

7. How does this story speak to our context(s) today? What lessons have we learned?
8. How can the Church be involved in speaking out against stigmatization of women and those infected with HIV?

## 2.4 War, Women and Children in the Bible

*Nyambura Njoroge*

1 Samuel 4:1-22

### Introduction

The following are suggested questions on 1 Samuel 4:1-22 for an intergenerational group of women, men and youth for a two-day seminar. All responses should be recorded on newsprint so that the group can come up with a written text. Since the text might provoke deep-seated painful emotions, it is important to have people who can provide pastoral counselling and care. My experience with this text is that it is very useful to read the first six chapters of the book of 1 Samuel several times before the bible study.

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## Read 1 Samuel 4:1-22

### Discussion

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters in the narrative?
3. What is the role of women and children in the text?
4. Can God be defeated or captured? How does this make you feel?
5. How does this text relate to our reality in Africa today particularly in light of HIV/AIDS and protracted armed conflicts?

The reality in Africa is such that we are dealing with multiple pandemics and crises as HIV and AIDS studies have clearly revealed. In our endeavour to look for solutions, one way of doing so is to study the Bible taking seriously our context. Given the horrible stories we read about the torture and suffering that women, children and the elderly encounter during and after war, I have found this text helpful. It vividly reveals how God uses the most unexpected persons (including children) to pronounce God's message.

(Provide a fact sheet on wars and genocides that have taken place in Africa since 1980. Other cases of extreme violence and criminality in the society could also be highlighted especially gender-based violence. It is helpful to have a big map of Africa in the room as well as copies in the study kit).



## Tamar Campaign

6. What resources are there in the church and community for dealing with the aftermath of war and genocide?
7. What will you do now in response to this Bible study?

## 2.5 The Invisible Crime

*Esther Mombo*

Genesis 34:1-31

### Introduction

At the beginning of Genesis 34 we read about Jacob's family settling in the Promised Land. Jacob had been reunited with his brother Esau and his new name was now Israel. Jacob had actually bought a piece of land in Shechem, and built an altar for the Lord. We read that in the midst of his settling down a plague of violence strikes his family first in the rape of his only daughter, Dinah. Dinah was the daughter of Leah, Jacob's first and less loved wife. Among her brothers were Simeon and Levi.

We learn in this story that Dinah travelled to visit the Canaanite women and while she was there the local prince seized her and raped her. The prince soon fell in love with Dinah and decided to take her hand in marriage. He informed his father Hamor to arrange the marriage and so the King went and approached Dinah's father, Jacob, on the same. Jacob requested that the father of the prince wait until his sons and the brothers of Dinah returned from the fields for he suspected there was more to the King's proposal. Indeed, the act of rape did not please the family of Dinah.



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### Read Genesis 34:1-31

#### Discussion

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters in the story and what do we know about them?
3. How do Dinah's brothers respond to her rape?
4. What points of contrast can you see between Shechem and the sons of Jacob? Is there any sense that either of the two is right in their actions?

When Dinah's brothers heard what had happened 'they were filled with fury', but they pretended that all was well. They accepted that Dinah should marry the prince on one condition: that all the men in the city get circumcised. Abiding by his request, Hamor ordered the men of the city to be circumcised but while they were still in pain, Dinah's brothers attacked the town killing every male and taking their sister from Shechem's house. Learning of their acts, Jacob admonished them but they still felt justified. They responded, 'Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?'

5. What do we know about Dinah? How does she live out the rest of her days?

The story stands on its own in Genesis with no apparent connection to what precedes it or what follows it. Dinah is not mentioned again in the Bible except as a name in the genealogy of Jacob (Genesis 46:15) which includes grandchildren as well as children. But we know that Dinah never has children perhaps because she was never married after her rape. In Old Testament society, a woman who was known not to be a virgin at marriage could not expect to find a husband (Deuteronomy 22:30) and if a woman was raped, the rapist

was forced to marry her (Deuteronomy 22:28). Dinah's rapist was willing to marry her and to pay the required price but her family refused to accept his offer in the end.

6. What do we learn from reading this story?
7. What motives guide the sons of Jacob to attack the town? How are they motivated by the desire to take revenge for Dinah's rape?

The anger of her brothers was not about the hurt done to Dinah as much as the disgrace brought to the family. This family honour was invested in the chastity of Dinah and this far outweighs the behaviour of the men in the family. The males were justified in defending their honour even by deceit and murder while Dinah's welfare was only incidental: she was a piece of family property which had been violated.

8. How can we relate Dinah's story to that of survivors of rape today particularly women who are raped as a weapon of war? What is similar and what is different?

We realise that after the rape Dinah becomes the object of actions rather than the subject. She does not do much but things are done to her. We do not know her emotions because her story is not told. Dinah has no power to make anything of herself any longer; her sexual identity has been defined by the choices of men. This is very similar to the experiences of many rape victims today. They face a dilemma on how to handle the situation because reporting the case to the police has its own set of consequences. It may result in further emotional distress or assault from the perpetrator.

9. Reading Dinah's story in this way, how can the Church today speak out against gender-based violence particularly rape?

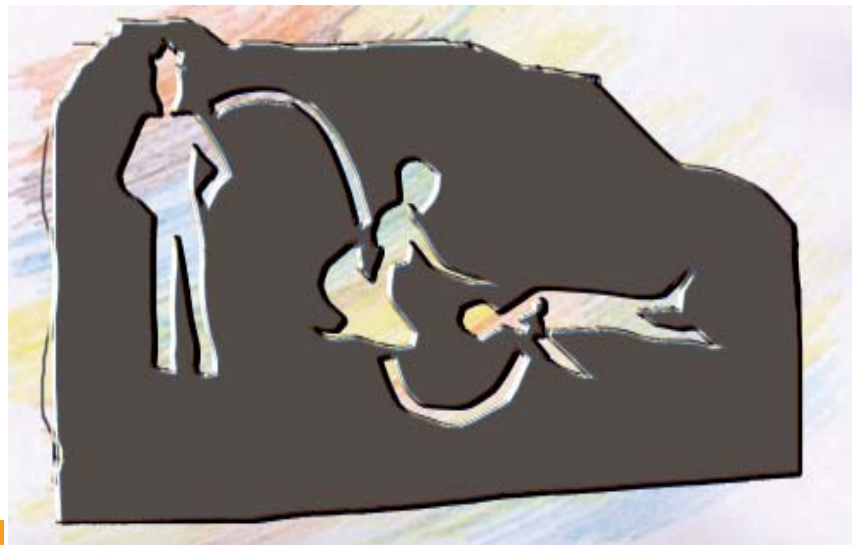
## 2.6 The Rape of Bathsheba?

2 Samuel 11:1-27

*John Gicheru*

### Introduction

This text is part of the story of David after he became king over Israel. 2 Samuel 2:1-5:10 details the final events of David's rise to kingship while 2 Samuel 5:11-8:18 narrates the story of David as King. In these chapters, David becomes King over south and north, consolidates and expands the kingdom and establishes a true royal state for the first time in Israel. The following two chapters, 9 and 10, form the immediate context of our story.



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### Read 2 Samuel 11:1-27

#### Discussion

2 Samuel Chapters 9 and 10 portray David as a King acting with kindness and faithfulness to his subjects. But the text before us begins with the resumption of the war with the Ammonites at the beginning of the New Year.

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Is there anything Bathsheba could have done to avoid David's advances?

Taking the text at face value, the King had not known Bathsheba before—he had to send someone to inquire who she was. When the summons from the King came, Bathsheba, as a subject, had to obey. We do not know whether her sexual surrender to the King took place willingly or under protest. Probably she could have protected herself more from prying eyes when bathing. It is instructive that whereas David 'sent someone (one person) to enquire about the woman's identity' he sent messengers (two or more men to fetch Bathsheba (verse 3-4). Probably this was to ensure that she came and if she resisted they would have compelled or carried her. Probably she could have screamed or resisted, scratched, bitten him or run away. Bathsheba had very little in her power as a woman to fend off the advances of the King.

4. Did Uriah know about David's violation of his wife?

5. The simple message, 'I am pregnant', from Bathsheba threw David into a panic. Did she have to embarrass the King in such a manner?

Bathsheba could be viewed as having had schemed to trap the King and force him to marry her. This view is supported by the argument that she should have kept quiet and faced the consequences alone instead of bringing shame to the 'whole nation'. On the other hand, Bathsheba's bold action in forcing the King to take responsibility for his action is commendable although things developed in a manner she could not have anticipated. Had she kept quiet she would have been 'stoned to death' while David went scot-free. Unfortunately, her disclosure led to the murder of her husband. However, David was forced to take her as his wife and thus live up to his responsibility as a father.

6. 'But the thing David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord'. (verse 27b). What does this mean?

The King may have been powerful and acting with impunity but he was not above the law. God had given David victory and the throne in Israel and he had forgotten where he had come from. The messengers who all along knew what was going on and Joab who may have suspected something, were unable to call the king to see his own folly but that did not mean that he was right. The covenant of the Lord applied to everybody, including the chief executive in the land.

7. What are the main issues raised in the story?
8. What will you do now in response to this Bible Study?

## Tamar Campaign

When doing this study with a church group, members were surprised by the many issues raised by the Bible study some of which they had never thought of as related to this particular text. Particularly disturbing were the issues of pornography, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, safe sex and abortion. David also emerges as a more human figure than the idealized Messianic character Christians are used to.



## 2.7 The Woman Caught in Adultery

John 8:1-11

*Mvume Dandala*

### Introduction

Gender-based violence is a spiritual problem and human rights violation affecting millions across the world today. It affects women, children and even men, regardless of their age, race, faith, educational background or economic status. Still in Africa today, some countries have laws and policies that actively discriminate against women. In most cases, both conventional and customary laws deny women their full legal capacity to exercise and enjoy their rights. As a result women have fewer advantages culturally, socially, politically, economically and sexually than their male counterparts.

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## Read John 8:1-11

### Discussion

In this passage the community approaches the woman with harshness and prejudice but Jesus crosses the cultural boundaries and reaches out to the victim in spite of the Jews' expectations and belief to stone her.

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Why was the woman made to stand before the crowd?

Bringing this woman to Jesus was part of the strategy of the teachers of the law (scribes) and the Pharisees to discredit Jesus. She was the object of their trickery. Note that they did not bring the man who was involved in adultery to stand before Jesus when in Mosaic Law both the man and the woman involved are subject to the death penalty.

4. What did the scribes and Pharisees want to see happen to the woman? Was it just punishment?

The complainants are the teachers of the law; they thought that Jesus' only options were to either say 'leave her alone' or 'stone her'. They base their case on the Law of Moses, either as written or as they interpret it.

5. What does this story tell us about gender and the roles of women during Jesus' time?

## Tamar Campaign

6. Are there women like this woman in your community today?  
How are they treated?
7. How can the church better assist women who have been rejected by their communities?

## 2.8 Lot Offers His Daughters

*Oliver Kisaka*

Genesis 19: 1-11

### Introduction

The story of Lot in Genesis 19 provides a window for discussion and self-examination. In this story, Lot's generosity attracts the inordinate affections of a wayward community. Did Lot think about what he had tried to do? What was uppermost in his mind? What plans did Lot have for the girls? Let's turn to the scriptures for discussions.



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## Read Genesis 19: 1-11

### Discussion

1. What is this text about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Why in your view did Lot act the way he did in verses 6-8 and what did it mean to those concerned?
4. Tell your group about any situations (especially with regards to women) you think are similar to that of the Biblical passage above. What practical steps need to be taken to either end them or avoid their recurrence?
5. In today's society, who do men think women to be? How are women looked upon?

The kind of effort that men undertake to win the approval of women and the kind of disrespect and abuse with which men treat women constitute a paradox. On the one hand, men consider women to be indispensable for their livelihood. They are born of women, raised by women and find them suitable marriage partners. On the other hand, they use their muscular, economic, political and religious advantage to demean and deny women their rightful opportunities.

6. How can the church affectively involve, encourage and affirm women?
7. What will you do with what you have learned from this Bible Study?

## 2.9 Silent Protest: Rizpah's Story

2 Samuel 21:1-14

*Gerald West*

### Introduction

This Bible study introduces us to the reality that there are often contending theologies<sup>1</sup> within the biblical text and/or silenced voices particularly those of women.



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## Read 2 Samuel 21:1-14

### Discussion

The first question should be discussed by the participants as a whole group. Write the responses offered by participants on a piece of newsprint so that everyone can see these.

1. What is this text about?

Next, divide the participants into small groups. Ideally, there should be about four to six people in each group. Each group should have a piece of paper, a Bible and a pen or pencil. Put up questions 2 to 4 on the newsprint. Each group should be able to see the questions clearly. Each group should discuss amongst themselves while noting the answers down.

2. Who are the characters and what do we know about each of them?
3. What is the 'theology' of each of the main characters? Using the text as a basis, try and reconstruct elements of each characters' way of looking at God and life.
4. What is the theology of the narrator? A careful reading of the text gives us some clues to the narrator's point of view. For example, what does the phrase 'after that' in the last verse refer to?

At the end of discussion time each small group should report back to the whole group having summarised their responses to the questions on a piece of newsprint so that everyone can see. Ensure that participants understand the questions and answers and hold some discussion on them.

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After this, the participants should return to their small groups. Put up questions 5, 6 and 7 on the newsprint. Each group should be able to see it clearly. Ask the groups the following questions:

5. Which character and theology do you identify with and why?
6. Who in your context is like David, the Gibeonites and Rizpah?
7. How does this text speak to you and your life and what will you do in response?

The small groups should then discuss each question separately and write down some of their responses in summary form. They should then share a report of their discussions and answers with the whole group. The facilitator should summarise the responses to the questions on a piece of newsprint so that everyone can see. The results of this step are a useful reminder and resource for Christian action. Encourage the groups to each write up their own copy to take away with them. Finally, bring the Bible study to a close. You may wish to do this by leading all in a prayer.



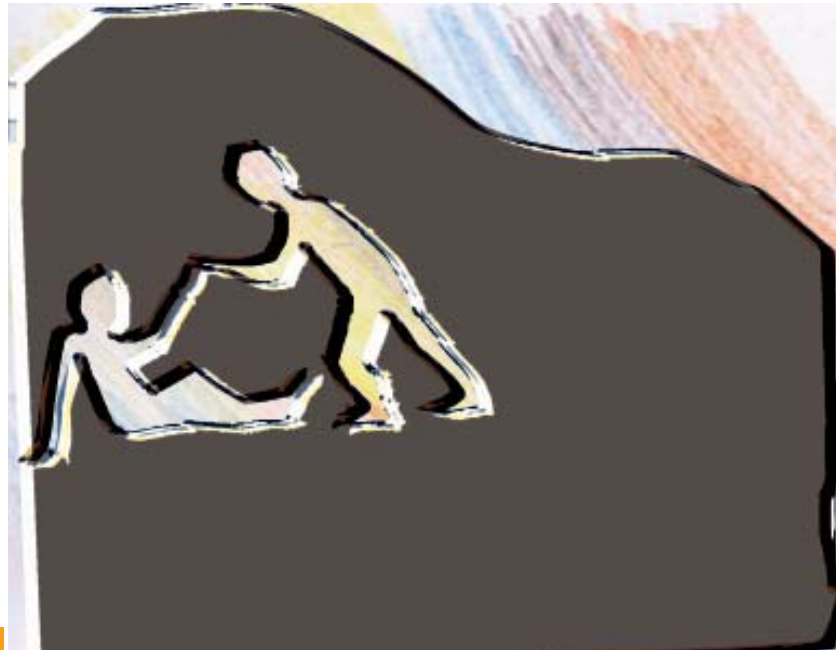
## 2.10 The Story of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10: 25-37

*Mgr. Prof. Diendonne Mbaya*  
TSHIAKANY

### Introduction

Violence has taken various names and faces in our midst: political, military, social, economic, sexual, gender based and racial. It can be loud or quiet and brutal or silent. The focus of the Tamar Campaign is one form of violence that our society is experiencing in deep and various ways. This is sexual violence which includes rape, abuse, trauma, harassment, social complications and psychological implications. Sexual violence happens both in contexts of war and in regular or normal life. In all these circumstances, the main issue is the social attitude in response to the situations once they have happened in the society. In Luke 10, we read about different attitudes.



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## Read Luke 10: 25-37

### Discussion

1. What is this text telling us?

After the text is read aloud by one of the participants, the facilitator should ask each of the participants to say what they know or think of the text and episode. The facilitator may give them some minutes of silent meditation before the sharing. What is very important at this point is the participation of each and everyone in the group in the sharing.

2. Who are the main characters in this text of the parable?
3. What do we know about the main characters? (From tradition and from the text).
4. What is the role of each character in the incident that unfolds in the text? (Both positive and negative and active and passive).
5. What is the meaning of the situation faced by the half dead man in the context? (Equivalence and relevance-refer to verse 30).

Participants should identify the main and secondary characters and discern the key themes and around or on which characters the drama is focused. The facilitator should focus attention on the link between character and the category of person bearing it because, later on, this will help to disclose the role of each character.

6. Are there men and women in similar situations in your church or community? (Tell their story).

7. What message do we get or hear from the voiceless victims of violence: silenced by their contextual conditions and incapable of crying their pain and sufferings in our midst? (These include girls and women who are victims of rape in families and boys or men abused by various forms of violence).
8. What is the general attitude of the church or community in such situations where people fear to get involved due to the consequences of repressive use of power to violate and silence others? (For example, compare the two attitudes in the text: that of the Priest and the Levite versus that of the Good Samaritan).
9. What resources are there in your Church or community to deal with similar hopeless situations? (Share stories on how the church or community succeeded or failed in such cases).
10. What will you now do in response to this Bible Study? (This includes the choice of attitude you make, the decision on the side to take and decisions on action to take).

## 2.11 The Rape of Hagar

Genesis 16: 1-16

*Taryn Montgomery*

### Introduction

There are numerous themes abounding in this text: that of a subordinate woman, slavery and non-consensual sex. Along with these, is the relationship between Hagar and Sarah, two women struggling for position in a patriarchal household.



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### Read Genesis 16: 1-16

#### Discussion

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Describe the power struggle between Hagar and Sarah? How do they treat each other?

The relationship between Hagar and Sarah is indeed a tense one. From the text, we learn that it was initially Sarah who suggested to Abraham to 'go in to' Hagar and conceive her a child. However, when Hagar conceived, she 'looked with contempt on her mistress'. This severely angered Sarah who insisted that Abraham deal with her directly. When Abraham refused, we learn that Sarah took it upon herself to deal with Hagar 'harshly'.

4. What do we learn of slavery and the use of concubines from this text? Can we relate this story to that of sex trade and sex slavery today?

Hagar was a slave girl to Sarah and in their cultural context Sarah could legally force her servant to bear a child if she herself could not do so therefore making the child legally Sarah's. With this in mind, we can see that Hagar had no choice in the decision and was merely a vehicle through which to bring an heir to Abraham and Sarah on top of the day-to-day duties she probably performed as their slave.

5. Do you know women like Hagar in your own community?
6. How can the church better reach out to women like Hagar and Sarah and to men like Abraham?

## 2.12 Crying for Justice

Luke 18:1-8

*Fred Nyabera*

### Introduction

Jesus tells a story which is all too true in Africa and many parts of the world today. A defenceless widow is taken advantage of and refused her rights. Through sheer persistence she wears down an unscrupulous judge until he gives her justice. On the other hand, Jesus illustrates how God as our judge is quicker in bringing us justice, blessings and help when we need it. This parable gives fresh hope and confidence to those who have been denied justice. Though they face adversity and trials, they are not without hope in God's provident care and justice. In the same breath it is also a call to the Church, the followers of Jesus Christ, to emulate God through advocating, exercising and demanding justice for the vulnerable, exploited and oppressed.



Contextual  
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### Read Luke 18:1-8

#### Discussion

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. How do the characters in this passage use power for their positions?

First, we are confronted by a model of abuse of power embodied by the judge. In that culture, a judge had absolute power in his jurisdiction. He would determine what would or would not happen and when. He called the shots. This particular judge has the worst possible combination of qualities: he is callous and uncaring about people and he has absolute power. That is the kind of power we often see in many parts of the world. We find governments, institutions, leaders and cultures that are utterly oppressive. They have power over the people under them and they selfishly use it to oppress them.

Second, we encounter a model of using one's power to empower others. This is the use of power for service and advocacy. This model is embodied by God in verse 6, 'And will not God bring about injustice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?' God is not like the unjust judge, he will respond to his children who cry out to him day and night for justice.

The third model offered by the story is that of the oppressed becoming agents of their own empowerment. The widow best captures this approach. The text does not say what constituted her grievance. But it underscores her insistence on justice: she kept coming and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent’. With her stubborn determination, she prevails upon him into doing the right thing. This judge who neither respects people nor fears God finally grants her justice but for the wrong reasons. As he says, ‘This widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming’ (verse 5).

4. What do we learn from reading this story about God, justice, the widow and the judge?
5. How do we relate the widow’s story to that of survivors of gender-based violence today?
6. Who do you identify with in this story and how have you been using your power, position, or situation to empower others?
7. How do you plan to apply the lessons learned from this Bible study in your own church?



