



Doing and Understanding Contextual Bible Study

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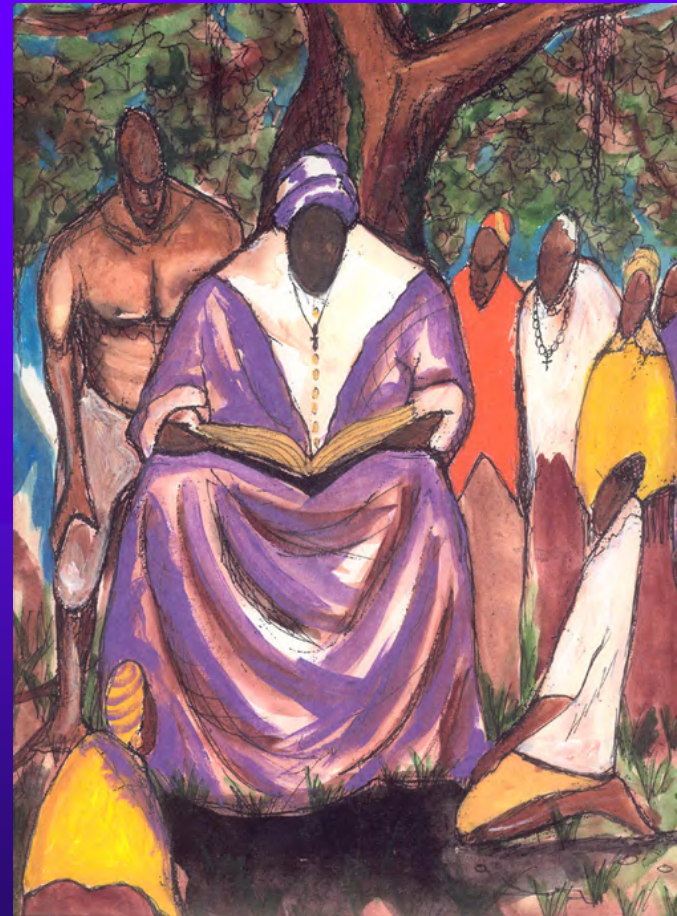
1. What is Contextual Bible Study?

- An *interactive* study of bible texts
- The *context of the reader* and the *context of the bible* into dialogue
- To *raise awareness* and *transformation*



Five keywords and Five C's of CBS

1. Interactive -
Community
2. Context of the reader –
Context (Social Location)
3. Context of the bible –
Criticality
4. Raising Awareness-
Conscientisation
5. Transformation -
Change





Key word 1. Interactive

- ◆ CBS is not taught – it requires the voices and opinions of all who participate in the study.
- ◆ Questions answered not by the facilitator, but by the participants themselves.
- ◆ Discussion, debate and analysis among the participants and that is the point.
- ◆ Interaction needs to be recorded for all the participants to see. (newsprint or blackboard)





So the 1st C is for COMMUNITY



- ◆ The bible is read in community rather than individually.
- ◆ All voices are listened to and critically engaged with.
- ◆ Engagement rather than “teaching.”
- ◆ Sharing knowledge and resources – both from the facilitator and the participants.

Keyword 2: Context of the Reader

- ◆ Contexts vary across the globe
- ◆ Context also varies within particular countries, tribes and locations.
- ◆ It is important to choose a theme for a bible study which most participants from a particular context can agree upon.



So the 2nd C is for Context



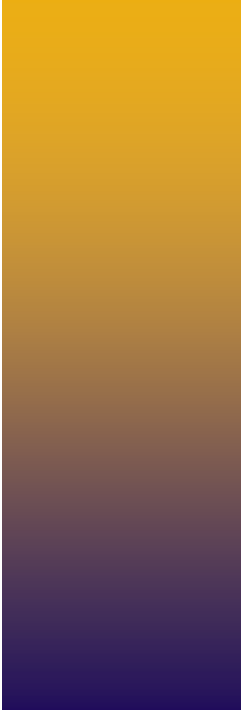
- CBS begins with the reality or the context of the people who want to study the bible
- The theme of a bible study is chosen from this reality
- For example if a community is being affected by HIV&AIDS, they come to the bible wanting to know what does the bible say to them in this context of suffering?



Keyword 3: Context of the Bible

- ◆ We respect the text in its own context.
- ◆ “Reading the bible is like reading someone else’s mail” – it was not written to us, but we nevertheless are trying to derive meaning from it.
- ◆ Biblical studies tools are employed here to attempt to understand the text in its own context.
- ◆ The easiest way - a literary methodology – asking questions regarding character, story, plot, etc.
- ◆ Sometimes the facilitator may want to introduce some socio-historical information regarding the text.





So the 3rd C is for CRITICALITY

- Interpretation is always “located,” “motivated” and “ideological”
- Notwithstanding the sacred nature of the bible, that the bible was written, read, translated and interpreted in a time different from our own
- We also note the importance of not just knowing the answers, but asking the right questions



Keyword 4: Raising Awareness

- ◆ People in faith communities often approach the biblical text and other sources of knowledge with a hermeneutic of trust.



- ◆ One of the aims of CBS is also to highlight how the bible and other sources of knowledge can be used as both a tool of liberation and a tool of oppression

So the 4th C is for Conscientisation



- ◆ The point of the bible study method is to bring to consciousness those things which people often take for granted as “natural” or the “the way things are.”
- ◆ It is to bring into sharp focus the way in which our faith, our cultures and sacred texts promote injustice
- ◆ BUT it is also to point to the liberating elements of the gospel

Keyword 5: Transformation



- ◆ The goal of any CBS is always transformation.
- ◆ Once people are made aware of oppression transformation has to happen. Transformation happens on various levels.
- ◆ The ways in which we read the bible is transformed – in other words we learn how to read the bible in a way that is liberating and inclusive.
- ◆ It is hoped that the bible study can transform us to such an extent that it spurs us into action for change and justice, in a world that is often unjust and not willing to change.



So the 5th C is for Change

- Lilian Robinson: “So what?”
- What difference does it make that we now have done this bible study? What will we do differently? What will we change? What resources do we have for change?



- CBS has to challenge people enough to want to make a difference in their churches and communities.
- This is grounded in the Action Plan which ends every CBS

How do we design a CBS?

- CBS is designed along traditional hermeneutical principles
- Hermeneutics is made up of 2 parts:

1. **Exegesis**: Understanding the text in its own context
2. **Interpretation**: Understanding the text in our own context



Two types of questions



1. **Exegetical >> Literary or critical consciousness**
questions – Draws on tools from biblical studies
2. **Interpretive >> Community consciousness**
questions – draws on feelings, experiences and resources from the community

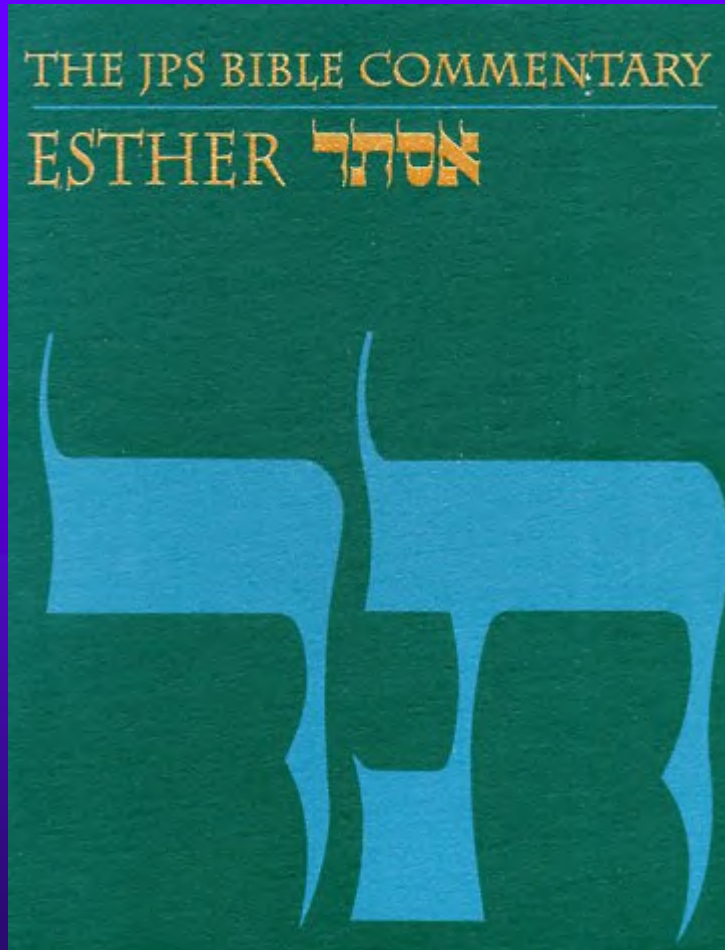
The Design of the CBS:

Eg. Esther 2:1-18

- 1. Tell the story in your own words. Begin with “Once upon a time...”
- 2. What is the theme of this text?
- These two questions are actually community consciousness questions, because in the re-telling of the story it will become clear where the community’s interests lie. This is also true of the 2nd question because of the themes which the group will choose.



Designing a CBS 2



3. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
 4. Who has power in this text, and how is it used?
Questions 3 and 4 are literary or text consciousness questions.
- The idea is to make sure that the participants stick to the details of the text – a close reading of the text is what is required here.

Designing a CBS 3

5. Are there people like the king and Esther in your churches/community today? How do they behave? Are there people who collude with them like the advisors in the story? What are the effects of their actions?
6. Are there practices which seem “natural” or are institutionalized which are harmful to some people. Name these.



Designing a CBS 4



7. What resources are there in your church to help women and men like Esther and the king? How can you use these resources? What can YOU do?
8. What will you do now in response to this bible study?

Designing a CBS 5



- This last set of questions return us to the context – to community consciousness questions
- The very last questions are meant to force the participants to think about change and transformation
- This has to be practical and measurable.

Checkpoints of a successful CBS 1

- ✓ **Safe space** –to talk openly and confidentially – establish relationship of trust.
- ✓ **Interactive** – A CBS can never be “taught” – only facilitated. Knowledge sharing is key.



Checkpoints of a successful CBS 2



- ✓ **Creative** –Interesting activities :
storytelling, drama,
poetry, singing, case
studies etc.
- ✓ **Challenging** –to think
about faith and society
in new and different
ways. Read unfamiliar
texts, or read familiar
texts in new ways.

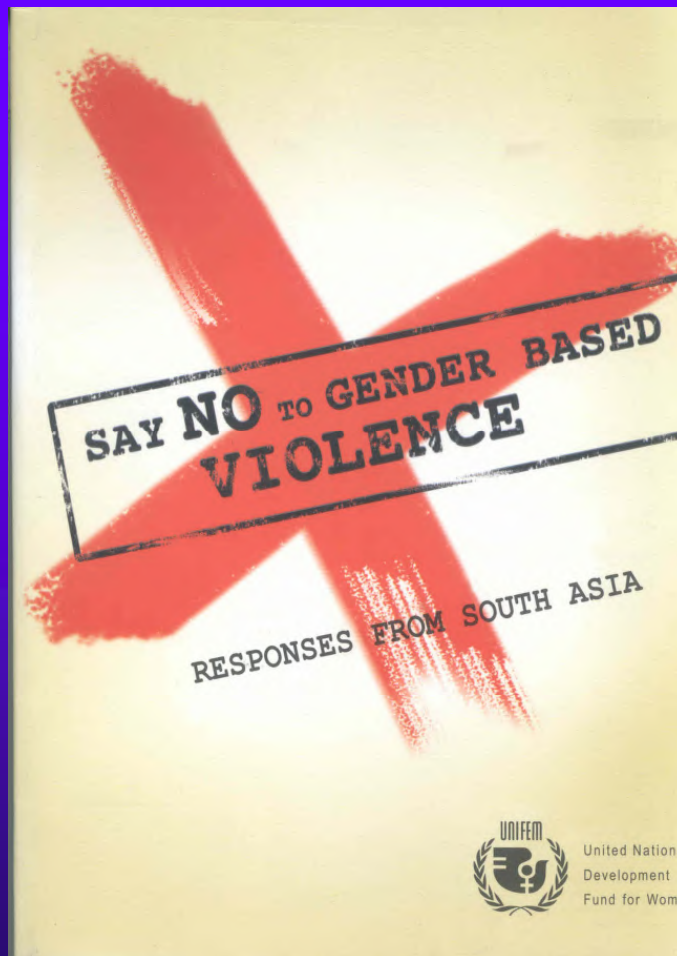


Checkpoints of a successful CBS 3

- ✓ **Sensitive** –to culture, context, church theology etc. though not in a patronising way. Critical-solidarity is important. The identity of the facilitator is very important
- ✓ **Empowering** – writing up all participants' responses on the board. Giving space to voices that are not normally heard.



Checkpoints of a successful CBS 4



- ✓ **Measured transformation** –when an action plan is implemented it is a sign that the CBS has been successful –
- ✓ e.g. when a community in response to the bible study decides to adopt the 16 days of activism against gender violence campaign – 25 November to December 10

Summary: Understanding Contextual Bible Study



- Assumption that the bible plays a very central role in communities of faith
- The bible can and must be used to discuss issues which are not just spiritual but which affects our societies.
- CBS is only a tool –it helps open up the process to discuss issues which are important in church and society



CONCLUSION

THANK

YOU