

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 process¹, 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.

¹John 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.