Contextual Bible Study Manual on Young People

“Let the Children Come to Me”

Edited by Ezra Chitando and Nyambura J. Njoroge
Acknowledgements

The editors are grateful to the contributors, Gerald West for the permission to use the material on conducting Contextual Bible Studies and Maggie Machledt Girard for the accompanying art. They are also grateful to Felix Mafa for the art on the cover.

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“LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME”: CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY MANUAL ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Foreword

The World Council of Churches (WCC) seeks to act in solidarity with young people in a rapidly changing world. The WCC firmly believes that young people are God’s gift to the churches. They are endowed with various skills, resources, knowledge and talents that are critical to the development of families, communities, countries and the global community. Young people have consistently demonstrated that they are leaders of today. Having led successfully today, they can continue leading effectively tomorrow.

This Contextual Bible Study Manual on Young People reflects the WCC’s commitment towards prioritising issues relating to young people. In its Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace, the WCC is committed towards ensuring that the needs of young people are addressed as a matter of urgency. This Manual seeks to mobilise parents, guardians, religious and community leaders and others to recognise that youth matters do matter. Churches must not only seek to be youth friendly: they must place youth at the heart of their activities. The WCC is aware of the numerous challenges that young people in diverse contexts face. These include child marriage, poverty, hunger, lack of access to education and others. As a fellowship of churches, the WCC is encouraging member churches to be actively involved in addressing these challenges in consultation with the young people themselves.

I warmly commend this Contextual Bible Study on Young People to church leaders, parents, youth trainers, young people and other activists for social justice. The Contextual Bible Studies in this Manual address diverse themes in a participatory and transformative way. By recognising that youth are not on the agenda but that they are the agenda, communities will “win the future.” The attitude of the churches must follow that of Jesus, namely, welcoming children and young people.

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“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14).

Introduction

Africa is a “young continent.” The majority of the continent's citizens are young people. According to the UNICEF report, Generation 2030 (2014: 7), “More than any other region, Africa's children lie at the heart of its demographic and social transition. At the time of the development of this Manual, almost 47 per cent of Africans are children under 18. In 15 African countries, more than half of the total population are children under 18.” Africa's present and future, therefore, is tied to how it treats its young people.

Churches in Africa must reflect this reality in their planning, activities and programmes. Unfortunately, however, young people tend to be marginalised in most African families, churches, communities, institutions and countries. This minimisation of young people can be seen in how African theology has neglected
issues of concern to young people. For example, there are very few reflections on theology/the Bible and children in Africa (see for example, Togarasei and Kügler 2014).

While there is debate over whether Africa’s young population is an opportunity or a risk, what is clear is that churches (and other faith-based institutions) need to step in and play a definite role in shaping African young people. Dedicated church leaders need to invest in working with young people. They must trust young people, accord them respect, mentor them and accept their leadership. The proximity of church leaders makes them the ideal point of contact for the community, inclusive of young people. In this context, church leaders are:

- Found in many communities, including the remote ones
- Respected members of the community
- Strategic and knowledgeable in interpreting sacred texts
- Presiding over institutions such as churches, schools and hospitals, that interface with young people,
- Well placed to strategically and programmatically influence government policies which have a bearing on the welfare of children and youth.

Churches in Africa must seek to address positive sexual health, provide effective Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) to children and young people, address sexual and gender-based violence and inculcate the values of TransformativeMasculinities and Femininities to promote gender justice. All of these efforts contribute towards elimination of the challenge of HIV and AIDS.

**Young People as Resources**

There are (among others) cultural, economic and political factors that have led to the marginalisation of young people in church and society. Such factors have contributed to negative views of young people. In African culture the dominant belief is that of young people as perpetual minors who must not be seen or heard. They are sometimes not counted as complete human beings or integral members of families, churches or communities.

Economically, most young people are disadvantaged because they are deprived of accessible resources that can empower and give them a voice. Most young people tend to be economically and socially dependent on their parents, guardians, benefactors or the State.
Politically, young people are often presented as “misguided” and unable to make informed, sound decisions.

These factors have contributed to the clouded view which places young people at the margins in families, churches, communities, nations and the continent.

However, when given the platforms, opportunities and respect they deserve, young people can demonstrate their value as they possess the following qualities (among others):

- Energy, zeal and motivation
- Creativity and innovation
- Technological competence
- Effective organization
- Strong critical skills
- Keen sense of justice
- Resilience

**Major Challenges that Young People are facing in Contemporary Africa**

While seeking to harness the potential of young people to contribute towards addressing major challenges, it is vital to acknowledge that young people themselves are facing some key challenges.

The Contextual Bible Studies in this volume will seek to highlight the pressing issues for young people in particular contexts. Critically, the views of the young people themselves are vital for this process to be meaningful and effective.

It is no longer convincing for churches to claim to be the “voice of the voiceless.” It is now mandatory for churches to allow people (particularly children, adolescents and youth) to “speak for themselves.”

The activist slogan, “who feels it knows it” challenges older members of families, churches, communities and nations to privilege the voices of young people when seeking to understand the situation of youth.

Below are some of the key challenges that young people are facing in different African contexts:
Ezra Chitando and Nyambura J. Njoroge

- Poverty
- Inaccessible education
- High primary school dropout rates
- Unemployment
- Abuse (physical, sexual, economic, emotional, etc)
- Girl child “marriage”
- Girl children undervalued
- Limited and conflicting information on sex and sexuality
- Persecution for sexual diversity
- Early sexual debut and teenage pregnancy
- High adolescent deaths due to AIDS
- Being orphaned due to AIDS
- Living with HIV and treatment adherence
- Bullying in schools
- Marginalisation at home and church
- Rights not upheld
- Manipulation by politicians
- Out of school youth needs not met

While the list above could be extended, it serves to show that there is an urgent need for churches to invest heavily and to prioritize addressing issues that young people face. As they have sharpened their focus on working with young people, faith-based organisations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIDA) and the International Network of Religious Leaders living with or personally affected by HIV and AIDS (INERELA+) have recognised the need and space for religious leaders to collaborate with national and international organisations that promote the welfare of young people. It is strategic for religious leaders to invite representatives of such organisations to address specific issues when holding consultations with young people.

Some Key Themes to consider in order to have thriving Young People today

Parents, religious leaders, faith-based organisations and other activists need to pay particular attention to the following themes when they conduct dialogues:

**Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)**

Whereas previously it was feared that young people would become more curious and seek to experiment when they are
provided with accurate information relating to sex and sexuality, there is a growing consensus that in fact young people with more knowledge on sex and sexuality are better equipped to make sound decisions about their lives. It is vital to ensure that young people access Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE).

**Addressing Child Marriages**

Across most parts of the global South, the challenge of child marriages remains an urgent one. In discussions, religious leaders and parents must reflect on strategies to address this burning issue. It is also emerging that in some contexts boy children are sometimes forced into early marriages.

**Expanded Definitions of Family/Parenting**

The term 'parent' has often been understood as referring to the biological mother and father of a person. However, there is need to acknowledge the many dynamic changes that are taking place in contemporary society. For example, there are families headed by young persons or by single parents. Often, church leaders have overlooked such families and have developed activities that leave children and parents who come from these families marginalised.

**Young People with Disabilities**

Globally, the struggle for the full integration of people with disabilities is an ongoing one. It remains a big challenge in churches, families and communities. In many cases, the specific needs and challenges of young people with disabilities are overlooked. It is critical that when dialogues are conducted, issues relating to young people with disabilities are put on the agenda.

**Corporal Punishment**

The deployment of corporal punishment to discipline young people elicits deep emotions and reactions. Some parents and religious leaders cite some biblical passages as justifying the use of corporal punishment. However, there is need to be creative and come up with more humane ways of guiding young people. The “texts of terror” that appear to support the use of corporal punishment for young people must be read in new and liberating ways.
Conclusion

The Contextual Bible Studies in this Manual seek to encourage family and community dialogues, reflections and actions in order to ensure that churches uphold the invitation by Jesus, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14).

Reference

Togarasei, Lovemore and Joachim Küegler. 2014. Eds., The Bible and Children in Africa. Bamberg: BUP.
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 Youth issues in a responsible and respectful manner, that affirms the integrity of young people, is the call of the Church, for instance. We cannot remain silent; indeed we are called to act. This Manual 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

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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 eighteen 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 organized usually have a very good idea of the issues confronting them in their community.

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

**Step 2: Finding a Biblical Text**

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

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

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

Step 3: Questioning and Reading

Once the biblical text has been chosen, the task of constructing the Bible study itself begins. To do this, two kinds of questions are typically used. The Bible study begins and ends with contextual questions that provide the framework for the study. These contextual questions are also called 'community consciousness questions', because they draw on the resources of the community. They draw on the lived experience and the embodied theologies of the participants themselves.

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

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

- **Behind** the text (focusing on the socio-historical world that produced the text);
- **On** the text (focusing on the text itself as a literary composition); and
- **In front of** the text (focusing on the possible worlds the text projects beyond itself towards the active reader).
When the text is examined for the construction of a Bible study, generally these three dimensions are used in a specific way:

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

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

In summary, having heard the voice of the text in its own world (the world of the text and the world behind the text that produced it) we now allow the text to speak afresh to us. We move from our initial engagement with the text to the text in detail-granting it a voice— and then back to our engagement with the text, but this time having heard its voice. It is this combination of contextual and textual questions that constitutes the Contextual Bible Study method. By fusing community consciousness with critical consciousness, the text speaks anew to our realities.
Step 4: Articulating and Owning

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

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

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

In the normal life of most church-goers their **embodied theologies** are only partially engaged, affirmed, articulated and enacted within their own local church. Because of this, many Christians go to one church 'by day' and another church 'by night'! Because they are made in the image and 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 organizations to take their plan of action forward.
1.2 The Role of the Contextual Bible Study Facilitator

Key to all forms of Contextual Bible Study (in the broadest sense) is the role of the facilitator. Bible study that strives to be collaborative depends on a leadership style that facilitates. We are all too familiar with dominating forms of leadership. These styles of leadership are inappropriate for Contextual Bible Study. The leader must be a facilitator and this section of the manual looks at this role in greater depth.

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

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

1.2.1 Facilitating the Process of the Contextual Bible Study

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

1. It is important to understand the group that is doing the Bible study. The facilitator should be familiar with the demographics of the group participants: age, race, denomination, language, gender, cultures, traditions, similarities and differences, how many in the group and so on. Preferably the facilitator should come from within the
group itself. There is also some value in thinking about the knowledge and experiences of the participants regarding the theme of the Bible study. This is so that you do not 'miss' the group completely when you are trying to encourage their participation;

2. The style of these studies is one of participation and discussion. This means that they are compiled with the understanding that each and every participant has wisdom - the 'answers' are not with one person. In fact the participants play a key role and have a valid contribution to make (see the following section for details). So when a study is done, it should not be undertaken as if in a school classroom (with the facilitator as the 'teacher'), but rather like a round table discussion between equals;

3. The facilitator is just one voice in the Contextual Bible Study so it is important to defer to the group even if what the group is saying does not appeal to the facilitator. This does not mean that the facilitator does not have a voice but it does mean that their voice is not the most important one. The overall purpose is group collaboration;

4. Including group participants in the practical aspects of the Contextual Bible Study is also crucial to the success of the Bible study. The notes in this manual indirectly make reference to tasks or roles which may be taken up very easily by group participants rather than the facilitator adding a great sense of participation to the study. The facilitator should be aware of these roles which may be taken up very easily by group participants rather than the facilitator adding a great sense of participation to the study. The facilitator should be aware of these roles and use them to include participants. Examples of these roles are as follows: someone who reads the key text(s); someone who writes notes onto the newsprint paper; the note-taker of each small group; the spokesperson of each small group; and someone who could open and / or close in prayer;

5. The facilitator needs to enable the 'group process' to take place. In other words, s/he should manage group dynamics, promote turn-taking, keep to time, summarise and systematize the reading results, find creative and
empowering ways for participants to report back their findings to the plenary and move the group from reflection into action;

6. It is important to be able to manage conflict when it arises between the participants. Conflict can be creative, so it is not a bad thing. However, it usually needs to be managed. Often the small group itself can manage conflict but sometimes the facilitator may need to step in;

7. Since the Bible study is driven by questions, the facilitator needs to enable the participants to engage with the questions (and in so doing to engage with each other and the text of Scripture);

8. The facilitator should try to provide information when requested but always in a way that draws on the resources of the group. If the facilitator does not know the information requested or an answer to a question, then s/he should say so! It is better to go and find out the information than to pretend;

9. It is important to stimulate the use of local reading resources and to introduce critical reading resources from biblical studies into the reading process as these are requested and required;

10. The facilitator should be sensitive to the fact that not all participants may be literate. It is the role of the facilitator to ensure that there is sufficient discussion, explanation or even repetition of any written material so that those who 'read' through hearing are also able to participate fully in the study and not feel left out;

11. The facilitator should make sure that the Bible study questions are allocated sufficient time for group discussion and then for participants to report back. If time is limited, the facilitator need not ask each group to report on every question. Instead report backs can be rotated allowing each group a chance to lead the report back on a question and then the other groups only need to report on what has not already been covered.

12. The facilitator should keep the Bible study process moving forward to the conclusion;
13. **Ice-breaker’ exercises** before the Bible study are an excellent way to help people to get to know one another. Some examples of these are included at the end of this section;

14. **Dividing the participants into small groups** is a creative process that can be done in different ways depending on the nature of the Bible study. For example, in a Bible study of a gender-sensitive issue like sexual abuse, it is usually wise to divide people into groups of older women, older men, younger women and younger men. In other Bible studies, where it is best to mix up the participants, then some simple exercises may be used and examples of these are included at the end of this section;

15. Doing these Bible studies may evoke great **emotion in participants**. This is because the themes may be painful and difficult for many people. The facilitator will need to be ready for this and sensitive to the needs of the participants. It may even be necessary to take a break at some point within the study, have disposable tissues available, or allow participants a reprieve from having to face what is difficult for them. If the study opens up old wounds for an individual, it may even be necessary to offer or find future counseling or other support if s/he would find this helpful; an

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

1.3 **The Role of Contextual Bible Study Participants**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contextual Bible Study Manual
on Young People
1. When We Sacrifice Our Children

Genesis 22: 1-14

Ezra Chitando

Notes to the Facilitator

Purpose of the study: This Bible study seeks to examine the extent to which contemporary parents/guardians/governments sacrifice young people. Some of this sacrificing is by commission and the other is by omission. Whereas Abraham did not go all the way in sacrificing Isaac, in many instances contemporary parents/guardians/governments have actually sacrificed young people. For example, they have killed their dreams, visions and hopes for the future. They have forced them to take up careers they are not interested in. They have sacrificed young people by failing to be present in their lives and by not listening to their insights. In pursuit of religious, cultural, ideological, economic and other agendas, they have put young people on the altar.

However, like Isaac's penetrating insight when asking, “where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” young people have the power of acute observation that must be taken seriously. The conversation between father and son in the story provides promise for contemporary parents/guardians and politicians, provided the
Ezra Chitando

contributions of young people are taken seriously and followed through.

The Story: The story of the near sacrifice of Isaac evokes a lot of emotions. There have been many songs, poems and paintings of this story. Most of the time, however, the narrative is fixed as focusing on Abraham's incredible faith, namely, his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God. Rarely is the story read from the point of view of Isaac. What must have gone through his mind when his father was tying him up and raising his knife to kill him? When conducting this Bible study, it is important to ask participants to pause and hear the story afresh.

NB*There is need to postpone the popular interpretation of the narrative as being the outstanding story of faith and to focus on how parents/guardians, church, community and government leaders sacrifice children today. In order to create a conducive atmosphere, a popular hymn/chorus capturing the drama in this passage can be performed.

Read Genesis 22: 1-14

Questions

1. Suppose you were asked to give a new heading to this story, how would you express it?
2. Who are the characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. Isaac's mother does not feature in this story. Reflect on the implications of her absence. Would Abraham perhaps have followed a different path of action if he had discussed his religious experience with her?
4. What do we learn about young people's insights from Isaac's question regarding the absence of the lamb for the sacrifice?
5. Abraham engages in conversation with Isaac, although he side-steps the key issue. Discuss the role of dialogue in engaging with young people today.
6. How do we as contemporary parents/guardians, church and community/government leaders sometimes sacrifice our young people and what can we do to support them more effectively?
Notes to the Facilitator

Purpose of the study: This Bible study aims at bringing out the challenges of parenting, the intricacies relating to parenting and family dynamics. It aims at challenging negative practices which can be disastrous to the future of the children and the parents.

The Bible study aims at challenging parents to listen more to children and to be alert to children’s needs. It challenges them to be present with their children and with each other (in those cases where the father and the mother are present). The Bible study challenges parents to bond with their children and as a family. It draws attention to the need to create safe spaces for the nurturing and growth of children.

The Story:

Isaac, who is old, favours Esau, his older son. On the other hand, Rebekah, his wife, favours Jacob, her younger son. Rebekah schemes with Jacob to ensure that he would get the blessings meant for Esau.
Read Genesis 27:1-27

Questions for Discussion
1. What is this text about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. How does the choice of occupation for Jacob and Esau work out in the end of the narrative?
4. Why is it important to Rebekah that Jacob is blessed (and not Esau) and why is it important to Isaac that Esau is blessed and not Jacob?
5. In what ways was Isaac not alert in relation to the realities of his family's dynamics and why?
6. In which way might the parents of young people today fail to be alert to the needs and contributions of young people?
7. What can parents and the churches do to create safe spaces where information is shared freely and there is equity and fairness in the treatment of children?
3. When the Children are sold
*Genesis 37: 18-36*

*Ezra Chitando*

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**Notes for the Facilitator**

**Purpose of the study:** The study seeks to draw attention to the danger/reality of child trafficking and children in difficult circumstances. It encourages participants to be on the lookout for such children and to be actively involved in addressing the challenge. Further, it provides an opportunity for participants to have open and honest conversations about children in exploitative situations.

**The Story:** Joseph is sold by his brothers to the Ishmaelites who take him to Egypt. His brothers are motivated by financial interests and personal hatred to sell Joseph. The issue of human trafficking, the movement of people against their will for purposes of exploitation (often sexual), is an age-old problem. However, it is often under-reported and does not receive due attention. In particular, young girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation, domestic labour, criminal activities and organ transplants. Trafficking is often enabled by desperate economic situations and
promises of economic prosperity and educational advancement. In reality, however, these promises turn into nightmares for the trafficked young people. Both external forms of trafficking, where people are taken across borders, and internal trafficking, where people are moved within their national contexts, continue to occur at worrying rates. For example, in the case of external trafficking, one is struck by the sheer number of young girls at some airports in East Africa who are being trafficked to the Middle East. Many other young girls are trafficked to Europe, where they are exploited as sex workers. Poverty, gender discrimination, violence, lack of free migration, and conflict facilitate human trafficking today.

There is need for families, churches, communities and governments to be more proactive in addressing the challenge of human trafficking. By increasing resilience, families and communities will be better prepared to address human trafficking. The UN Trust Fund for Human Security states that trafficking in persons separates families, erodes social bonds, and undermines the political, social, economic, and cultural prospects for communities. Families, churches, communities and governments must be actively involved in addressing human trafficking.

Read Genesis 37: 18-36

Questions
1. What are the themes in this story?
2. Who are the characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. Joseph was trafficked by his own brothers. Discuss the role of relatives in human trafficking in your community.
4. Some young people might not have been sold off, but are living in oppressive circumstances. What are these different exploitative circumstances in your context?
5. What are the factors that make it difficult to detect and stop human trafficking?
6. What can we do as families, churches and communities to combat child/human trafficking and to address the circumstances of children living under exploitative circumstances?
4. The Life of Young Moses: Negotiating an Identity Crisis
Exodus 2: 1-11

Pauline Wanjiru Njiru

Purpose of the study: This Bible study helps us to understand the struggles the young people go through as they grow up without fathers or with absent fathers, as they search for identity and how they often feel misunderstood. It helps us also to see the key role that women play in raising children and invites us to be more proactive in the lives of young people in our circles.

The Story: The story of young Moses raises many issues which are not new to the lives of many young people today. Moses is caught up in a political crisis, when the king of Egypt is building his kingdom, but is also afraid of the potential of the Hebrews who were growing in number. For this reason, all baby boys born to Hebrew women must be put to death at birth. The women across the political, economic, religious and social divide conspire to save the baby Moses. The midwives let the children live, Moses' mother crafts a plan, Miriam has to keep watch over the floating baby, pharaoh's daughter has pity on the child floating on water and so Moses lives! He is once an endangered species and at the
mercy of the Nile waters and the creatures therein. The midwives had defied that king's order out of their fear for God; they had let baby Moses alongside others live, leaving the mother with a hard task to nurse him out of danger. Moses survives because of his mother's wisdom, the help from God and support from Moses's sister. There is a miracle when Pharaoh's daughter eye caught the floating basket and by divine intervention the guard is entrusted with the responsibility to look for a Hebrew nurse. Moses is nursed by his mother as a nanny and faithfully when he is of age she delivers him to the princess. Little is told about the influence that the father had on young Moses.

Read Exodus 2: 1-11.

Questions

1. If you were a journalist, what title would you give to this story and why?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Describe /discuss the conflict in Moses' birth and upbringing.
4. Who really is Moses? Who is his father? Who is his mother? Where does he belong? With the slaves or with the royal family? Is he a Jew or is he an Egyptian?
5. Describe the strength of women working together to save life (here the facilitator aims to capture that the women in different social classes and how the barriers are broken by the desire to save life and also how the political barriers are broken)
6. How can we step out of our comfort zones to help young people facing various crises in our homes, churches and communities?
5. Girls Can: Positioning the Girl Child to Influence History
Numbers 27: 1-11

Bongi Moyo-Bango

Notes to the Facilitators

Purpose of the study: This Bible study seeks to inspire community action and transformation by showing how cultural practices, as well as traditional norms and values are not cast in stone. It challenges the dominant phrase that has been used in resisting change; “our culture/tradition does not allow this.” In the story, the daughters of Zelophehad engaged in collective action that results in the rewriting of the law and a change of practice. Their activism gives rise to a new reality. Similarly, girls and young women can act to change their circumstances in the contemporary period. Although traces of patriarchy still remain (the emphasis on the son continues to feature), it remains important to note that the daughters were able to contribute to the transformation of tradition and culture.

The Story: The narrative on the daughters of Zelophehad can be read as inspiring girls to be actively involved in changing their
situation. It is a story that confirms that when girls plan and act together, they can oppose harmful cultures and traditions. In this story, the daughters of Zelophehad are involved in collective action. As a result, they change the accepted cultural norms. Significantly, Moses and other male leaders do not oppose the girls, but act in ways that facilitate cultural transformation.

Read Numbers 27: 1-27.

Questions

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters in the passage?
3. Are girls/women from within your context allowed to inherit from their fathers/parents? If not, why not?
4. Do we have girls in our communities who would summon the courage to address a gathering of (male) leaders and eloquently state their case? How are they viewed by: (i) other women? (ii) male authorities?
5. What do we need to do in our homes, churches and communities to ensure that we bring up girls/women who are as empowered as Zelophehad’s daughters?
6. Comment on the attitude of Moses and the other male leaders in this story.
7. What can we do in our families, churches and communities to have male leaders who are willing to challenge beliefs and practices that oppress girls and women today?
6. Hannah: The Woman who appreciates the value of children  
1 Samuel 1: 1-2:10

Masiiwa Ragies Gunda

Notes for the Facilitator

Purpose of the study: The study seeks to underscore the point that children are a real gift and that, indeed, we can have them biologically, but we can also have them socially and either way, our children will grant us an opportunity to live after death. It is also anticipated that the passage will facilitate sensitive dialogue around the issue of childlessness in society.

NB*: As this can be a very sensitive topic, the facilitator must make sure that s/he has created an atmosphere where all participants are at ease to participate in this Bible Study.

The Story: In many communities, childlessness is considered a curse from the divine sphere. In our text, 1 Samuel 1: 1 - 2:10, we encounter a woman named Hannah, the wife of Elkanah. Hannah was “barren” because she had not given birth to a child in her marriage. As was the tradition then, Elkanah married another
woman Peninnah, who gave birth to many sons and daughters. The second wife could have eased the pain of Hannah by allowing Hannah to be a mother to her children, but it appears that the second wife reminded Hannah of her childlessness at every given opportunity. Hannah was treated like an outcast or a defeated foe by the rival woman. Even though Elkanah continued to love Hannah, the love of her husband did not ease her pain because she did not have children. Since she would not have children through the second wife, as was the tradition in ancient societies, she turned her attention to the Lord. She begged for a child, a son from the Lord! She is a sad woman because of the taunts that are directed at her by the second wife.

Hannah was clear in her mind: she was not sad because of the husband. She had a wonderful husband, but she would be forgotten because the wonderful husband had already married a second wife and if she died, he could marry yet another wife. As long as the husband could remarry, Hannah could be forgotten after death. Hannah appreciated that no-matter how hard they might try, children would never manage to have another mother and in that lay her comfort! In her children, she would not die after death! Having a husband was, therefore, not considered good enough to negate the desire for children. Further, having children was the only way to silence the taunts of Peninnah, the second wife. She could not silence those taunts by pointing to "their" husband, he was shared property hence her desire was for children, her own children! She vows to dedicate her son to God, in the event that God would grant her the gift of a child.

Read 1 Samuel 1: 1-2:10

Questions
1. What themes do you find in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what are their attitudes?
3. How is childlessness viewed in your community and how are childless couples treated?
4. How does your community solve or mitigate the problem of childlessness? What are the advantages and challenges associated with some of these approaches?
5. What can we do to in our families, churches and communities to avoid causing pain to, and to support, those who are childless, while upholding the importance of children?
7. The Youth vs Giants: Reflecting on Young People Overcoming the Odds
1 Samuel 17: 22-50

Bongi Moyo-Bango

Facilitators' Notes

Purpose of the study: This study intends to draw attention to the agency of young people. It challenges the popular assumption that young people should not be trusted with leadership because they are immature. It questions the tendency to underrate young people.

The Story: David, a youth, comes face to face with Goliath, a giant. David’s ability to do battle with Goliath is questioned by his own community. On his part, Goliath also mocks David. However, David succeeds in his mission, thereby confirming that being young is not a barrier to success.

In Plenary/Group work

Having read I Samuel 17: 22-50, answer the following questions:

1. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?
2. Why are young people generally considered immature and naive? What lessons can be learnt from how the story juxtaposes the untested youth and 'weakness' of David and the seasoned strength and power of Goliath?

3. What lessons can be drawn from how David handles himself before:
   1. His brother Eliab
   2. King Saul and
   3. Goliath

4. What 'social giants' (contemporary challenges) do the youth of today face and what can we do to nurture their ability to 'slay' (overcome) them?

5. In what ways can the knowledge, experiences and abilities of young people be embraced, utilised and given centre stage in our families, churches, communities and countries?
8. Mephibosheth: The Israelite Prince
2 Samuel 4:4

Jessie Fubara-Manuel

Notes to the Facilitator:

**Purpose of the study:** The study seeks to encourage participants to reflect on children with disability. It endeavours to remind participants that children with disability can be found in families that belong to different social classes, and that there are different causes of disability. The story challenges participants to reflect on the rights of children/people with disability in church and society. Where possible, the facilitator must try to access material by the WCC Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) on responding to disability within church settings.

**The Story:**

Jonathan, son of Saul, had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became disabled. His name was Mephibosheth.
Everyone loves stories. Briefly tell the story of war in Israel, the huge fatalities across status, race and class, indicating the secondary effects of war which include violence, disabilities and orphaned children. One of the orphaned children was a little boy named Mephibosheth. He lost both his grandfather and father in the war. His grandfather was Saul, the first king of Israel and his father was Jonathan, the then heir to the throne of Israel. There was fear everywhere and people ran helter-skelter for safety and this little boy was hurt in the process, but he survived. And because of whom his grandfather and father were, Mephibosheth was a Prince in Israel.

In telling the story, describe the kingship of Saul and the associated privileges attached to royalty. Exemplify with privileges enjoyed by persons in power today within our localities.

Because this is a one-passage study with very thin story line, it must have a strong background to drive home the message that disability is no respecter of persons: it can happen to anyone, at any time, at any age, but what is important is our response and relationship with persons with disabilities. We should also consider the issues of rejection, stigma and disempowerment associated with disability.

Read 2 Samuel 4:4

Questions

1. Suggest a title for this passage.
2. What was the immediate cause of Mephibosheth’s disability? Point out and evaluate any remote cause(s) of the disability that could be discerned from the story.
3. What are the commonly believed causes of disability in your locality? What has been the Church’s response to these religio-cultural causes of disability?
4. Mephibosheth’s disability was physical. What other types of disabilities exist today?
5. Look closely at your translation of 2 Sam. 4:4. At what point was Mephibosheth's name mentioned? Is there anything positive about this way of describing a person with disability? What do you not like about this way of speaking about a person with disability?
6. What are possible ways in which children/persons with disability can be stigmatized? What are the effects of stigma on children/persons with disabilities?

7. How should children/persons who are living with disabilities or with illnesses be treated?
   a. By You – by individuals
   b. By the family
   c. By the church
   d. By the society?
Facilitator's Notes

Purpose of the study: This Contextual Bible study seeks to mobilise parents, teachers, and ministers to recognise and understand the signs of our times and include this text in their lesson plans and sermons. The Sunday school or children's churches do not generally discuss the issue of rape and sexual assault. There is a need for vigilant, urgent action. With the assistance of experts, the Tamar story can be developed for children between the ages of 3 to 5. It can also be used with adolescents, teenagers and young adults. For each of these age groups there are different methods of operation such as group readings and discussions, debates and talk shows, bibliodramas and the use of art and music. The children's campaign will confirm the strong agency children have in the fight against rape and gender violence. Children educate and alert each other and their parents/family on the lessons they learn from the story of Tamar. The facilitator must strive to acquire information relating to the Tamar Campaign and the Thursdays in Black Campaign that seek
to address sexual and gender-based violence in churches and society.

**The Story:** The story of the rape of Tamar has received a lot of attention in recent years. The Tamar Campaign to raise awareness relating to sexual and gender-based violence has been rolled out in most parts of Africa and other parts of the world. This has ensured that the silence, shame and secrecy around sexual and gender-based violence has been challenged. However, it is often overlooked that Tamar was a very young girl. She is raped by her half-brother, Amnon, in King David's palace. Further, children's Bibles often do not include the story of Tamar and most parents feel uncomfortable discussing stories with sexual content with their children. Yet, sexual violence has penetrated every place, even the sacred space of the home and the church. There is a marked absence of education regarding sexual violence for pre-school children and other young people. Children are hearing about rape and sexual violence from each other. They grow up amidst sexual assault, rape and gender violence. They are exposed to sexual violence through every form of media.

**Read II Samuel 13: 13-22**

**Questions** (NB: The facilitator can vary the questions in light of the age group participating in the Bible study)

1. What do you think this story is about?
2. Who is the person that you like/is good in the story, and why?
3. Who is the person that you dislike/is bad in the story, and why?
4. What did you think about David, Absalom and Jonadab?
5. What did Tamar say to Amnon when he was attacking her?
6. How did Tamar feel in the story?
7. Do you know any children like Tamar?
8. What can we learn from the story of Tamar?
10. Job did not bury his head under the sand: he left nothing to chance

*Job 1:1-6*

**Pauline Wanjuru Njiru**

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**Notes to the Facilitator**

**Purpose of the study:** This Bible study is aimed at showing that young people must be recognised as such. They need respect, guidance and patience. Instead of assuming that young people in religious circles are ultra-holy, it is better to accept that they are human and can make mistakes. In the era of HIV and AIDS, it is good for parents and church leaders not to bury their hands in the sand and let young people have access to knowledge and resources that would keep them safe from infection. Job was a friend of God, yet he still took precautions. So should we! Further, the story is also about emerging patterns of consumption where many young people, including those from humble backgrounds, are keen to pursue material goods at all costs.

**The Story:** Job was a righteous man and a friend of God. God was so confident about Job’s faith that he was ready to dare the devil to
tempt Job. Job was wealthy and pious. He revered God and brought his children in the fear of God. He was a normal family man, with normal children who would party outside the home and may be even indulge in things that might have not pleased God. Job was not ignorant of the capacity of his children to indulge; he did not barricade them from making merry, neither did he deter them from enjoying their youthfulness. Instead he trusted God for them, facilitated their parties, but also surrendered them to God for mercy and pardon.

Today, when partying by young people has become the order of the day with it being baptized using all kinds of names, parents of young people are having a hard task to contain the children and ensure their safety. At one WCC-EHAIA workshop in an African country, we were told a true story of how a reputable man and a church leader received a call at 02.00 hrs summoning him to the police station as his daughter, 18 years old, had been involved in a fatal accident. The man dismissed the call, arguing his daughter was fast asleep in her room. This was based on the fact that the daughter had a stern warning to be home by 18.00hrs daily, and on this particular day she had been home and had dinner with her parents. She then bid them good night as they all retired to rest. The police positively identified the girl in the accident as this man's daughter and they insisted he had to go the station. With outrage, he stormed into the daughter's bedroom to prove the police wrong, but he was wrong: in place of his beautiful daughter was a beautiful doll, well covered. She had used it as a decoy.

Many people, particularly religious leaders and those with positions of responsibility in church, find it hard to reconcile their status and the behaviour of their children. They tend to portray artificial images of model families. They struggle when their children do not live up to the images of angels that they would have painted to the outside world.

Read Job 1: 1-6

Questions for discussion

1. What is this text about?
2. Who are main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Job had a big heart, he let his children indulge in partying, yet he was scared to death. He prayed and appeased God, just in case they sinned. Discuss the fears that Job might have had as he released his children to party?
4. What do you make of Job, a righteous man who allows and finances the parties of his children?

5. What fears do parents have about their children and parties? How can they overcome these fears?

6. What should be our attitude towards parties attended by our young people? What precautions might we take (in case we have legitimate concerns)?

7. What practical steps will you take to accompany/support children/young people today in your family, church and community?
Purpose of the Study: The study focuses on a text which is often used to justify corporal punishment against children. It draws attention to the circle of violence that often accompanies corporal punishment where one generation inflicts it on the next. It seeks to promote children's rights.

The Story: Once upon a time I was a child the last born among nine sisters. At the age of 11 and 12 I spent quality time home alone with my parents (now in blessed memory) when all my siblings were in boarding schools and/or married and living away from home. My father did not talk much but my mother loved to tell about her childhood, about her four siblings and their single mother (by choice) who died six years before I was born.

One piece of memory my mother repeated regularly is the kind of punishment she and her older brother got for any wrong doing. According to mum my grandmother believed in “double punishment” in case anybody in the community alleged that her
children were not disciplined because they did not have a father. The beating was administered in two dosages and at times they were beaten over a bush with a plant that irritated their skin. Mum was quick to remember that the last born and the only sister did not suffer the same fate even though she too did not escape the “rod”.

Let me be quick to say grandma attended a missionary school for one year but dropped out because of pregnancy. She rejected Christianity. Her argument was “there was no difference between the colonialist and the missionary”. However, she embraced modernity as far it was good for her wellbeing and that of her children. As a result, she learned from the missionary doctors and Bible women that female circumcision (female genital mutilation or cut) may cause health challenges that interfere with childbirth, as well as women's sexual gratification.

But it was never clear to me if grandma believed “in not sparing the rod” as in Proverbs 23: 13-14 read to her in school or because Gikuyu way of life allowed children to be beaten as a form of punishment / discipline of from both.

I still have “imaginary screams” of my beloved late mother and uncle who were only one year apart (they were like twins in older age and no matter how they disagreed on issues they remained good buddies until death parted them). But my mother's dislike of what happened to them did not stop them from using the rod to punish and discipline their daughters. Apparently, during our annual family reunions my sisters and I once in a while still argue who got the worst of it!

And your guess is as good as mine I too did not spare my two children from using the rod until I started rereading the Bible in different ways, as well as learning to listen to my children reasoning with us that spanking or beating or any other cruel way of instilling discipline does not resonate with gospel message that I was studying and preaching. My children also had the opportunity to learn in school that children too have rights!

Writing this study is my personal way of repenting the injustices I have inflicted on my children in the name of wanting them to be of best behaviour.

Second, recently I listened to a national church leader on Kenyan TV calling upon the government to repeal corporal punishment enacted in 2001 (Children's Act), arguing that students have
become too undisciplined after incidences of students burning dormitories resulting in some deaths. Further reading revealed that more than 70% of school teachers agreed with the clergyman. In other cases, arguments are made that it's biblical! God actually encourages the use of the stick, as it is an expression of love and will not kill anyone based on Old Testament texts. Or, as Ezra Chitando (personal communication) notes, others say: "Look at me! I am successful and disciplined because my parents disciplined me." Or, "This whole business of children's rights is a Western agenda, upper middle class preoccupation."

I suggest that our experiences and that of our dear children invite us to reason together in interactive engagement with the texts that are commonly used to justify using the rod. Our different cultural backgrounds, as well as other texts that may suggest different ways of disciplining and nurturing children to responsible adults.

QUESTIONS
1. Who are you in the text: Proverb 23:13-14?
2. From the text, what does “rod” mean to you?
3. Are there any scriptures where word “rod” was used differently? Does this change your understanding? (Example Psalms 23:4)
4. How were you disciplined? What do you remember most?
5. What relationship should parents, (guardians, older siblings, aunties, uncles and grandparents) and children have in the context of discipline and Christian nurture?
6. How can churches (or how do they) participate in creating laws that uphold the dignity and wellbeing of children in the context of the Convention of the Rights of Child (which 194 states ratified in 1990 except Somalia, South Sudan, and the United States)?
7. What can we do in our families, churches, schools and communities to promote positive behaviour in children and not resort to corporal punishment?
12. When God Speaks through Children
1 Samuel 3: 1-20

Nakai Godfrey Nengomasha

Notes to the Facilitator

The Purpose of the Study: This Bible study seeks to encourage parents and church leaders to take young people seriously in religious, as well as other engagements. It challenges the tendency to dismiss young people. Samuel was called by the Lord when he was a boy.

The Story: Samuel was a boy who ministered to the Lord under Eli. He experienced his call when he was still a boy. Eli recognised that the Lord was calling Samuel and facilitated his call.

NB* For the purposes of this study it will be helpful and motivating for older participants to have a song that addresses the issue of God speaking to them. This can be followed by a discussion on the role that children play in the church, the places they have access to, when they are allowed to speak and to who.
Read 1 Samuel 3:1-20

Questions

1. Suppose you were a journalist. What would be the headline that you would use to capture this story?
2. Who are the characters in this story and what do we know about each of them?
3. What is the status of children in our homes and churches in our contemporary period?
4. How seriously are children's contributions taken regarding hearing and listening to God's voice?
5. What challenges do children face in trying to let elders know of their experience with God and in other spheres of life?
6. What can we do as families and churches to empower children to participate and share their experiences in the religious and other sectors of life?
13. The underrated little missionary young girl
2 Kings 5:1-3

Ayoko Bahun-Wilson

Notes to the Facilitator

Purpose of the Study: The study seeks to draw attention to the need to acknowledge the role of young people, especially girls, in the lives of others. It challenges the tendency to dismiss girls as being of very little value in their homes, churches and communities.

The Story: Naaman, commander of The Syrian army, was a leper. It took the intervention of a “little maid from the land of Israel” for him to be healed.

It is important to listen to young people as there is always something to learn from them. In life, sometimes the very “insignificant” people are the one who have solutions to problems and challenges. How often do answers lie in “not considered or remembered” people’s hands? There is need to respect the
vulnerable, young girls, etc. as they have the capacity to make significant contributions.

**Read 2 Kings 5: 1-3**

**Questions**

1. Suppose you were to write a new headline to this story. What title would you give it?
2. Who are the characters in the story and what do we know about each of them?
3. What is the status of the girl child in our homes, churches and society?
4. How seriously do we take the young maids (helpers) in our homes?
5. Analysing our homes and churches, what are the challenges faced by children, particularly the young maids (helpers)?
6. What can we do as parents, churches and communities do to deal with the challenges that young maids (helpers) and other girls face?
14. “Let the Little Children Come”: Embracing Children and Young People  
Mark 10: 13-16

Ezra Chitando

Notes to the Facilitator

Purpose of the Study: This study draws attention to how Jesus had a very open and welcoming attitude towards the little children. Whereas his disciples sought to prevent the little children from reaching him, Jesus actively invited the little children to come to him. The study challenges participants to rethink the status of children in the homes, churches and communities.

The story: In this story, Jesus demonstrates his love and acceptance of children. While his disciples were preventing children from reaching him, Jesus declares that children are very important.

NB*It is very helpful to motivate older participants to enter into the world of children by utilising a song that is associated with activities for children, e.g., “Jesus Loves Me, This I know, for the
Bible Tells Me So”, or any other popular local song with a theme that focuses on children. Throughout the Contextual Bible Study, strive to describe proceedings from the perspective of the children who are described in the story: what were their feelings? What might they have said to their parents and guardians? What could have been their symbolic actions directed at the disciples when they were finally “allowed in” by Jesus? And so on…

Read Mark 10: 13-16

Questions

1. Suppose you were a journalist. What would be the headline that you would use to capture this story?
2. Who are the characters in this story and what do we know about each one of them?
3. What is the status/position of children in our homes, churches and communities in our contemporary period?
4. Analysing our homes, churches/institutions and in our countries, what are the problems/challenges that children are facing?
5. What can we do as children, parents or guardians, churches and communities to resolve the challenges that children face?
15. Girls’ Experiences as Community Education
Matthew 1: 18-25

Kuzipa Nalwamba

Notes to the Facilitator

Purpose of the Study: The story seeks to draw attention to the challenges associated with premarital pregnancies in churches and society. It encourages participants to have open and honest dialogue regarding premarital pregnancies and to reflect on effective responses.

The Story: Mary was betrothed to Joseph. Joseph realized that Mary had fallen pregnant, yet he was not responsible for the pregnancy. Joseph sought to resolve the situation by quietly bringing his relationship with Mary to an end. However, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and reassured him that Mary's pregnancy was of the Holy Spirit.

NB* It is very helpful to set the scene by discussing what happens in the community when an unwed young woman gets pregnant. What is the attitude of parents? What is the attitude of peers?
What does the church say and do? Does the young unwed mother ever get to tell her story? Throughout this Contextual Bible Study, help the group to strive to read the passage from Mary's perspective as an unwed young woman. Probe the passage (and historical context) for her likely feelings; what her parents/guardians might have said to and about her and the probable communal reaction to Mary. **Ensure that the group explores Mary's and other characters' human reaction to her pregnancy outside marriage before they appeal to the divine nature of the conception.**

Answer the observation questions quickly and with the aim to observe what the text says, overtly and implicitly. Application questions should allow for the specific application of the observations the group makes from text to the context.

**Read Luke 2: 1-7**

1. Name the characters in the story.
2. What feelings could Mary have been dealing with as an unwed mother-to-be?
3. What could Joseph, Mary's parents, her peers and her community have said (or not said) that impacted Mary's feeling at this time?
4. What is the attitude of families, peers, churches and the community towards unmarried girls who get pregnant? What is the attitude of the same towards the boy/man who would have impregnated the girl?
5. What can families, schools, the church and other community institutions do to give voice to the issues of young unwed mothers in the church and in the community?
6. What can families, schools, churches and the community do to address the issue of teenage pregnancy and to support young unwed mothers (and the boys/young men who would have impregnated them)?
16. Jesus the teenager
Luke 2: 41-52

Esther Mombo

Notes for the facilitator

**Purpose of the study:** The study endeavours to facilitate discussion and debate on the reality and challenges that teenagers face. While many people would like to focus on the adult Jesus, there is need to remember that Jesus was once a teenager himself!

**The Story:** The text of Deuteronomy 16:16, indicates that all Jewish males were expected to go to Jerusalem three times in a year for these festivals: the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles. During the festivals, especially the Passover, the temple was full of distinguished religious leaders. Jesus was drawn to them and this is where his family found him. His way of asking questions surprised the religious leaders, something that he continued with in his ministry. His parents thought he was still a child, but Jesus was no longer a child.
NB*
   a) Read the story in parts  OR
   b) Have the story dramatized so that you have the different characters in the story- Mary, Joseph, Jesus, relatives, teachers of the law, Jesus, and a crowd with boys and girls of the age of Jesus.

Questions

1. What is the theme of this story?
2. Who are the characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. What was Jesus doing in the Temple?
4. Why do you think the parents of Jesus were worried about him?
5. “Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” Was Jesus not rude to his parents? How do you think Joseph reacted?
6. In your society, what happens when a child goes missing from home?
7. Are children raised to be independent and to ask questions, especially on difficult topics relating to matters of faith?
8. Discuss how families, churches and communities can be more effective in interacting with teenagers in the different aspects of life.
Notes to the Facilitator

**Purpose of the Study:** This study is designed to facilitate discussion on the challenges that young boys and girls experience, particularly the tendency to be rebellious.

**The story:** In this parable, Jesus narrates the experiences of one son who requests his inheritance while his father is still alive. He goes away and squanders his inheritance and resorts to living rough. His elder brother remains at home and complains when his father throws a big party for the prodigal son.

**NB** Start this Bible Study by remembering the games and rhymes you used to play, dance and sing about during your childhood. Can you teach those songs to your children? Would they dance and sing exactly like you did? If not, why not? Let us reflect on how we felt about our parents then and now.
Luke 15:11-32

QUESTIONS

1. What is the text about?
2. What caring skills are demonstrated by the father? (Pay attention to the silent mother).
3. Does the situation portrayed in the parable happen in our context? (Namely, at home, in the family, etc.)
4. What are our present challenges when raising children?
5. What can be done to deal with these challenges as carers?
6. Develop an Action Plan that will enable you to plan for practical solutions in dealing with parental problems and how our children can be directly involved.
7. Write a charter for your children, with clear messages from Parents, showing how much you appreciate and respect them. (Where some parents are unable to write, get them to discuss the gestures they can use to show their appreciation of their children).
18. A little boy becomes of great help to a hungry multitude

John 6: 1-15

Peter Kang’ethe and Pauline Wanjiru Njiru

Notes to the Facilitator

Purpose of the study: This study strives to highlight that little children must be respected as they are capable of accomplishing some things that adults might struggle to accomplish. It intends to promote respect for and recognition of young people in families, churches and communities.

The Story: The story of the boy with two loaves of bread is a very interesting story. There are five thousand people following Jesus and yet the boy stands out. He becomes a powerful resource for Jesus to feed the crowd. There are a few things worth noting: the boy is young, innocently carrying his food which had been packed for him, most likely from home. He was not aware that his lunchbox would feed five thousand people. He did not dare go to Jesus to offer the food, as it was “nothing,” or so everyone would have thought. In fact, one of the disciples suggested that boy’s food was inconsequential.
Peter Kang’ethe and Pauline Wanjiru Njiru

It took Jesus to ask whether there was some food, it took Andrew to volunteer the information that there was a little boy with some two fish and five loaves of bread. Andrew must have held the boy’s hand and led him to where Jesus was. An opportunity was created for the little boy to hand over his food and a whole multitude was fed and a lot was left over. Jesus multiplied the food, thereby magnifying the generosity of the boy.

Today, many young people have solutions to some of the world's deepest problems, yet they lack the opportunity to share their gifts. We need leaders like Andrew whose voices are loud enough and can be heard to volunteer information that there are young people with the much needed gifts of life. We also need leaders like Jesus to amplify, multiply and magnify the gifts and voices of young people so that the world may be fed with information and ideas to a secure future.

Read John 6: 1-15

Questions for discussion

1. What is this text about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Discuss the characters of Jesus' disciples in responding to the hungry masses.
4. Exactly what does Andrew see in the young boy?
5. Do we have men or leaders in our churches and society like Andrew who are quick to notice the strengths/gifts/potential of young people and highlight this (by giving them opportunities?)
6. How is the boy noticed in this huge crowd?)
7. What do we need to do in our homes, schools, churches and society to notice and nurture the potential of young people amid the crowds of our times?