

# Contextual Bible Study Manual

Churches advocating for justice!



# GRAPE

Global Reformed Advocacy Platforms for Engagement

[www.grape-wcrc.org](http://www.grape-wcrc.org)

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# Foreword

The Global Reformed Advocacy Platforms for Engagement (GRAPE) is a flagship project of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), developed in partnership with the Economic Policy Research Institute. Over the past three years, the project has trained grassroots communities across multiple contexts in advocacy tools and methods, using a local-to-global and back-to-local methodology that takes seriously both the particularity of each community's struggle and the interconnections between these struggles and global issues.

This volume represents the fruits of that labour. It is a manual on how contextual Bible study can be used as a tool for advocacy and policy engagement, in this case, on the urgent question of Universal Basic Income (UBI) in South Africa, a country where the legacy of apartheid continues to shape deep economic inequalities, and where millions continue to bear the brunt of living on the margins of an economic system that was not built for them.

The Bible lies at the centre of Christian faith and practice. For Reformed Christians, however, the Bible is not a text that stands over and above us, prescribing mandates for life from a safe distance. It is a text that invites us into dialogue, a conversation that includes both the world of the text and its context, and the world of the reader and their context. The contextual Bible study method developed by the Ujamaa Centre in Pietermaritzburg does precisely this. By bringing an analysis of the local context into a genuine encounter with the Biblical text, it rejects the false dichotomy between faithful reading and engaged action. This conversation, conducted through the liberation methodology of See, Judge, and Act, is directed towards discerning the signs of the times and towards community-based transformative action.

This work is rooted in the WCRC's vision and mission. The Accra Confession, adopted by the Reformed family in 2004, called our churches to confess that the current global economic order is a matter of faith and that systems producing poverty and exclusion are a theological problem, not merely a political one. GRAPE is one way that confession becomes action: grounded, trained, community-led, and directed towards concrete policy change.

My sincere thanks go to the South African cohorts, whose commitment, courage, and hard work over the past three years have made this volume possible. I am deeply grateful to Claudia and Dirk Haarmann, who have

provided training and support from the outset, and to Muna Nassar, Executive Secretary for Mission and Advocacy, under whose able supervision this manual has reached its fruitful completion. May this manual serve communities far beyond those who produced it, and may it be a small sign of the world that is coming.

***Philip Vinod Peacock***

General Secretary WCRC

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# What is a contextual bible study?

Contextual Bible Study is a contextual reading of the Bible for both individual and social transformation (Ujamaa 2022). The Warehouse define Contextual Bible Study as studying and interpreting the Bible through bringing an analysis of the local context into conversation with an analysis of the Bible (The Warehouse 2022). Contextual Bible Study (CBS) focuses on bringing the ancient text of the Bible into the lived reality of people. It does that through identifying Biblical stories that relate and speak to the challenges that communities face.

Contextual Bible Study reaches this goal through three movements, namely: SEE, JUDGE and ACT.

SEE - This is the first movement of CBS and it invites the individual to look and study its own lived reality. It requires of the individual to study the community and society of which he/she is part and to identify the challenges that cause injustice and suffering.

JUDGE - The second movement of CBS focuses on relating the identified challenge of the SEE movement with a Biblical story. Here, the individual is asked to consult the Bible. In the consulting process, the individual wrestles with the question “what does the Bible say about the challenge that I have identified?”.

ACT - The last movement of the CBS process moves back to the individual’s community and lived reality. In this movement, the individual is confronted to act practically in light of the Biblical truths that have been discovered from the previous JUDGE movement. This is the culmination of the CBS process that drives active engagement in one’s community and society.

In each of these three movements the individuals who engage CBS are invited to reflect on questions that either speak to their communities or the Bible.

Other than conventional Bible studies within the church, CBS challenge the individual to act in light of what has been discovered in the Bible study. It moves the individual to respond from a Biblical perspective to the challenges confronted within communities and society at large.

Findings and new biblical understanding are to be recorded so that they can be shared with other communities in similar situations. This is done with the firm

believe that the Living God is revealing him and herself concretely in our context through the reading and discernment of the Bible.

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## Introduction Universal Basic Income

The Universal Basic Income (UBI) is not an entirely new concept. While it has not yet been implemented in the South African context, there have been decades of discussion, research and policy consultation around the idea. Initially the concept was developed in 1997 by COSATU<sup>1</sup> to give effect to a comprehensive social security system in South Africa. As high levels of poverty, unemployment, inequality, and food insecurity continue, the conversation around UBI has become evermore urgent. A UBI is increasingly recognised as a potential tool to strengthen South Africa's social protection system, ensuring that all people have access to a minimum level of income security. A UBI is furthermore an economic stimulus for individuals and communities, enabling them to become drivers of local economic development. However, it represents not only an economic intervention, but also a commitment to human dignity, social justice and the constitutional values of equality and care for the most vulnerable in society.

### Concept

Universal Basic Income, also referred to as a UBI, is the idea of a guaranteed, regular, unconditional and dignified cash transfer provided to individuals to meet their basic needs. At its core, UBI is based on the principle that every person deserves a minimum level of economic security, regardless of employment status or personal circumstances. In many international contexts, UBI refers to a grant available to all citizens or residents. A UBI is redistributive by using progressive tax mechanisms to fund it. A basic income grant is more than financial support; it is an investment in people. By reducing poverty and hunger, it enables individuals and families to participate more fully in society, pursue opportunities, care for their households and contribute to local economies. Importantly, it shifts social protection from a model of crisis response to one of long-term social and economic resilience.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cdhaarmann.com/resources/publications/COSATU\\_1997-98\\_Haarmann---Towards-a-comprehensive-social-security-system-in-South-Africa.pdf](https://www.cdhaarmann.com/resources/publications/COSATU_1997-98_Haarmann---Towards-a-comprehensive-social-security-system-in-South-Africa.pdf)

## Current proposal

The current proposal in the South African context is a UBI of R760 per person, which is the current food poverty line in South Africa. The GRAPE SA Team, together with other like-minded organisations in the Universal Basic Income Coalition (UBIC)<sup>2</sup>, actively campaigns to see this implemented in South Africa. Unlike the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) Grant, which was introduced as a temporary emergency response and currently provides limited support, a UBI is envisioned as a permanent, predictable, and rights-based social protection measure. While the SRD grant has played an important role in protecting millions from extreme poverty, its low value and temporary nature mean it does not adequately address long-term poverty, unemployment, and inequality. A UBI offers several key advantages:

- \* **Dignity and security:** It provides reliable monthly support, enabling individuals and families to plan, budget, and meet basic needs with dignity.
- \* **Reduction in poverty and hunger:** By aligning the grant to the food poverty line, UBI directly addresses food insecurity and extreme poverty.
- \* **Economic stimulation:** Recipients spend locally, which supports small businesses and stimulates township and community economies.
- \* **Administrative simplicity:** A universal or broadly inclusive grant can reduce exclusion errors and the administrative burdens currently experienced in SRD applications and appeals.
- \* **Social justice:** UBI recognises income security as a foundation for human dignity and socio-economic rights, as envisioned in South Africa's Constitution.

For these reasons, many civil society organisations believe that transitioning from the SRD grant to a permanent UBI is both a more feasible and transformative solution to South Africa's ongoing poverty and unemployment crisis.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ubic-sa.org/>

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# Contextual Bible Study Methodology

## Preparation

When preparing a Contextual Bible Study, the role of the facilitator is pivotal in the presentation. We will seek to identify a few helpful tips for the facilitator to utilise when presenting a CBS.

1. It is important that the facilitator familiarised him/herself with the content of the Bible story. Therefore, we suggest that the facilitator at least reads three different versions of the Biblical story that are being studied.
2. It is helpful to make copies of one translation that will be used by everyone to avoid confusion with different translations of participants.
3. The facilitator needs to be prepared for the event that participants are not prepared. It is therefore advisable to have a stationary box with enough markers and clean sheets for the groups.
4. The facilitator directs the conversation. Therefore, it is important to foster community and collaboration amongst participants and avoid domination by a few. Create a safe environment where participants feel free to share.
5. It is important that the facilitator foster consensus amongst a group so that collective ownership is achieved once the CBS is completed.
6. A CBS always concludes with an ACTION PLAN. It is imperative that the facilitator steers the group to reach a well-drafted action plan.

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# Contextual Bible Study Micah 6: Live justly and Act mercifully

## See the Context around us

This Contextual Bible Study focuses on the Universal Basic Income and an economic system that benefits the rich and powerful while leaving many struggling to survive. The participants of the CBS experience economic injustice firsthand, even though their perspectives on it differ according to their own circumstances and social position.

NIV:	The Message:
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Lord's Case Against Israel</b></p> <p>1 Listen to what the Lord says: "Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say.</p> <p>2 "Hear, you mountains, the Lord's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel.</p> <p>3 "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me.</p> <p>4 I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.</p> <p>5 My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord."</p> <p>6 With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?</p> <p>7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?</p> <p>8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Israel's Guilt and Punishment</p> <p>9 Listen! The Lord is calling to the city— and to fear your name is wisdom— "Heed the rod and the One who appointed it.</p> <p>10 Am I still to forget your ill-gotten treasures, you wicked house, and the short ephah, which is accursed?</p> <p>11 Shall I acquit someone with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights?</p> <p>12 Your rich people are violent; your inhabitants are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully.</p> <p>13 Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins.</p> <p>14 You will eat but not be satisfied; your stomach will still be empty. You will store up but save nothing, because what you save I will give to the sword.</p> <p>15 You will plant but not harvest; you will press olives but not use the oil, you will crush grapes but not drink the wine.</p> <p>16 You have observed the statutes of Omri and all the practices of Ahab's house; you have followed their traditions. Therefore I will give you over to ruin and your people to derision; you will bear the scorn of the nations."</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>What God Is Looking</b></p> <p>1-2 Listen now, listen to God: "Take your stand in court. If you have a complaint, tell the mountains; make your case to the hills. And now, Mountains, hear God's case; listen, Jury Earth— For I am bringing charges against my people. I am building a case against Israel.</p> <p>3-5 "Dear people, how have I done you wrong? Have I burdened you, worn you out? Answer! I delivered you from a bad life in Egypt; I paid a good price to get you out of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you— and Aaron and Miriam to boot! Remember what Balak king of Moab tried to pull, and how Balaam son of Beor turned the tables on him. Remember all those stories about Shittim and Gilgal. Keep all God's salvation stories fresh and present."</p> <p>6-7 How can I stand up before God and show proper respect to the high God? Should I bring an armload of offerings topped off with yearling calves? Would God be impressed with thousands of rams, with buckets and barrels of olive oil? Would he be moved if I sacrificed my firstborn child, my precious baby, to cancel my sin? * * *</p> <p>8 But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously— take God seriously.</p> <p>9 Attention! God calls out to the city! If you know what's good for you, you'll listen. So listen, all of you! This is serious business. * * *</p> <p>10-16 "Do you expect me to overlook obscene wealth you've piled up by cheating and fraud? Do you think I'll tolerate shady deals and shifty scheming? I'm tired of the violent rich bullying their way with bluffs and lies. I'm fed up. Beginning now, you're finished. You'll pay for your sins down to your last cent. No matter how much you get, it will never be enough— hollow stomachs, empty hearts. No matter how hard you work, you'll have nothing to show for it— bankrupt lives, wasted souls. You'll plant grass but never get a lawn. You'll make jelly but never spread it on your bread. You'll press apples but never drink the cider. You have lived by the standards of your king, Omri, the decadent lifestyle of the family of Ahab. Because you've slavishly followed their fashions, I'm forcing you into bankruptcy. Your way of life will be laughed at, a tasteless joke. Your lives will be derided as futile and fake."</p>

# Discerning God's will

## For the Facilitator: Background on the book of Micah

In Micah 6, discerning God's will is not about discovering something hidden.

God has already shown His will — to live lives shaped by justice, mercy, and humble obedience before Him. The book of Micah is set in the 8th century BC, during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Micah 1:1). This was a time of:

- \* Economic inequality
- \* Corrupt leadership
- \* Religious activity without justice

Micah prophesies to both Judah (Jerusalem) and Israel (Samaria).

Micah speaks within the framework of God's covenant with Israel — not abstract morality. God's will is covenantal, not optional.

- \* Israel is not judged because they are “bad people”
- \* They are judged because they are breaking the covenant with God

### The “Covenant Lawsuit” (Micah 6:1-2)

Micah 6 opens like a courtroom:

- \* God calls creation as witnesses
- \* He brings a case against His people

This reflects God as:

- \* Just Judge
- \* Faithful Covenant Lord

God's will is revealed not only in commands, but in His righteous character.

Discerning God's will begins with knowing:

- \* Who God is

- \* What He has already done (Micah 6:3–5)

### **False vs True Religion (Micah 6:6–7)**

The people respond with exaggerated religious offerings:

- \* Burnt offerings
- \* Thousands of rams
- \* Even child sacrifice

This is a critique of external religion without heart obedience. Worship without obedience = hypocrisy

- \* Sacraments without faith = empty signs

### **The Clarity of God's Will (Micah 6:8)**

“He has shown you, O man, what is good...” God's will is not hidden or mysterious in its essence.

This is crucial. God has already revealed His will:

- \* In His Word
- \* In His covenant
- \* In His law

God's will is known through Scripture — not speculation.

### **The Threefold Expression of God's Will**

Micah 6:8 gives a summary of covenant life:

#### **1. Do Justice**

- \* Public righteousness
- \* Fairness, especially toward the vulnerable
- \* Reduce inequality and economic injustice

- \* God's law reflects His justice
- \* Society must reflect God's order

## 2. Love Mercy (*hesed*)

- \* Covenant loyalty
- \* Steadfast love
- \* Not just doing mercy — loving it
- \* Flowing from God's grace
- \* Rooted in God's covenant faithfulness

## 3. Walk Humbly with God

- \* Daily dependence
- \* Relational obedience
- \* Sanctification
- \* A life lived coram Deo (“before the face of God”)

### Discerning God's Will

In many Christian contexts, “discerning God's will” is treated as:

- \* Finding a hidden plan
- \* Waiting for signs

God's will is **primarily revealed, not hidden**. We discern God's will by:

1. **Scripture** (primary authority)
2. **God's character** (justice, mercy, holiness)
3. **Covenant calling** (how we live as God's people)

### **Summary Statement for Facilitator:**

You can say this clearly in your CBS: “In Micah 6, discerning God’s will is not about discovering something hidden. God has already shown His will — to live lives shaped by justice, mercy, and humble obedience before Him.”

### **Prophetic Edge (Important for GRAPE)**

Micah is not just personal — it is **deeply social and political**. Faith is never private only - God’s will includes **public and economic justice**, this connects strongly with:

- \* Advocacy for UBI
- \* Justice work for reducing inequality
- \* Community transformation
- \* A simplification of faith

## **We read and listen to Micah 6 together**

The Devotional facilitator guides the group through reading the Scripture once. After a brief pause, the Facilitator allows the group to read the scripture again in silence.

### **I. Standing in front of the text:**

The facilitator leads the group in reflecting on the question: *What is the text/ scripture reading all about?*

Notes to the facilitator:

- \* This is the question that usually sparks a lively discussion.
- \* The facilitator should allow as much discussion time as possible.

### **II. Standing in the text:**

Character analysis: After all responses and inputs have been received, acknowledged, and listed, the facilitator guides the group to delve deeper by analysing the characters in the passage with the questions:

- \* Who are the characters in the story, and what does the text say about them?
- \* Are there any connections and/or power relations at play between the characters?

### **Key Characters in Micah 6**

Guide participants to identify these (they may not see all immediately):

#### **1. God (YHWH)**

##### **What the text shows:**

- \* Initiates the “court case” (v.1-2)
- \* Speaks directly to the people
- \* Reminds them of past salvation (v.3-5)
- \* Declares what is good (v.8)

##### **Facilitator’s insight:**

- \* God is not distant — He is relational and covenantal
- \* Acts as both:
  - Judge (justice)
  - Redeemer (reminds of Exodus)

God’s authority is moral, relational, and covenantal

#### **2. The People (Israel / Judah)**

##### **What the text shows:**

- \* Are being accused (v.2-5)
- \* Respond with religious questions (v.6-7)
- \* Seem confused or defensive

**Facilitator's insight:**

- \* They are religious but disconnected
- \* They assume God wants:
  - More sacrifice
  - Bigger offerings

Key tension: They misunderstand God's will

**3. The Mountains / Creation (Witnesses)****What the text shows:**

- \* Called to "hear" the case (v.1-2)

**Facilitator's insight:**

- \* Symbol of permanence and truth
- \* Suggests:
  - This is serious and public
  - God's justice is cosmic, not private

Important for participants: Faith is not just personal — it has public consequences

**4. The Prophet (Micah - implied voice)****What the text shows:**

- \* Mediates God's message
- \* Speaks truth into society

**Facilitator's insight:**

- \* Represents the prophetic role
- \* Bridges:
  - God's voice
  - People's reality

**Guiding the First Question**

**“Who are the characters and what does the text say about them?”**

**Facilitator tips:**

- \* Let groups discover — don't supply answers too quickly
- \* Encourage them to:
  - Point to verses
  - Describe actions and words

**Prompt if needed:**

- \* “Who speaks first?”
- \* “Who asks questions?”
- \* “Who holds authority in the text?”

**4. Power Relations in the Text**

This is where the study deepens significantly.

**1. God ↔ People****Observation:**

- \* God initiates the case
- \* People respond defensively

**Power dynamic:**

\* God = authority, judge, covenant Lord

\* People = accountable, but also invited

Not oppressive power, but covenant accountability

**Facilitator's note:**

Help participants see:

\* God's power is just and relational, not abusive

**People's Assumptions vs God's Will****Observation:**

\* People think in terms of ritual performance

\* God calls for ethical living

**Power dynamic:**

\* Competing understandings of religion:

○ Human control (we give → God must respond)

○ Divine authority (God defines what is good)

This is a theological power struggle

**Public vs Private Faith****Observation:**

\* Witnesses (mountains) make this public

**Power dynamic: (refer to this at – standing behind the text)**

\* Faith is not hidden — it affects:

- Society
- Justice systems
- Community life

Important for GRAPE: This opens a discussion on social justice and advocacy.

**4. Hidden Power Structures (refer to this at – standing behind the text)**

Even though not explicit in vv.1–8:

Micah’s broader context includes:

- \* Corrupt leaders
- \* Economic injustice
- \* Exploitation of the poor

So behind this text is:

- \* A systemic injustice problem

**Facilitator’s tip:**

You can gently ask:

“Who might be benefiting from injustice in Micah’s time?”

**Key Theological Insight for Facilitator**

Micah 6 is not just about individuals.

It reveals:

- \* A breakdown in covenant relationships
- \* A distortion of true worship

\* A tension between:

○ Religious power

○ God's justice

### **Bridging Question (Very Important)**

After discussion, you can ask:

“Which character do we most identify with — and why?”

This helps:

\* Personal engagement

\* Honest reflection

\* Movement toward application

What to Listen For

As facilitator, listen for:

\* Simplistic answers (“just be good”)

\* Over-spiritualizing (“it’s only about personal faith”)

\* Blaming others only (not self-reflection)

Gently guide toward:

\* Depth

\* Complexity

\* Community awareness

### **One-Line Summary for Facilitator**

“This text shows a powerful encounter between God and His people, where religious assumptions are challenged, and true covenant life — justice, mercy, and humility — is revealed.”

### **III. Standing behind the text:**

During this phase of discernment, the focus shifts to the connections between characters, the significance of status, class, and background in the text, the importance of place names, power dynamics, and other relevant factors.

Questions to continue the conversation:

- \* Does status, class and background play a role in the story/text?
- \* Are there any power relations at play, and how should they be understood?
- \* Does the location of the story have any significance in relation to the story or the characters?

Have a look at the tension between:

- \* Religious power
- \* God's justice

### **IV. Standing in front of the text:**

Here the facilitator invites the group to stand in front of the text again and discuss the questions:

- \* Is there a connection between the theme, the context of the story and the contemporary context of the group?
- \* Do we experience today what happened in the story/text and in what way (e.g. inequality and unfair economic structures)?
- \* What does it mean for us today if God truly requires justice, mercy, and humility from us in our context?

## **ACT – discerning action steps we can take**

This is the last phase of the CBS. Here, the facilitator leads the group discussion in answering the last set of questions:

- \* What is God asking from us in the light of what we have discovered?

- \* How does this discernment of Micah 6 relate to the concept of a UBI to reduce inequality?
- \* What does the Bible Story ask of us in the face of economic injustice and a campaign for UBI?
- \* What short-, medium-, and long-term actions can be taken, together and individually, from what we have learnt?
- \* What immediate steps can be taken to address the challenge from what we have discovered in the first (SEE) and the second (DISCERNMENT) phase?

“God has already shown us what is good (Micah 6:8). The question now is not what God wants — but how we will respond.”

**Facilitator’s tips:**

Keep it grounded in Micah 6:8:

- \* Economic and Social Justice
- \* Mercy
- \* Humility

Probe deeper:

- \* “Where is God challenging us personally?”
- \* “Where is God challenging our church or community?”

Encourage:

- \* Honest, not “safe” answers

Push for:

- \* Specific actions
- \* Realistic steps
- \* Clear responsibility

Facilitator prompts:

- \* “What can we do this week?”
- \* “Who will take responsibility?”
- \* “What is our first step?”

- \* What does it mean for us in relation to the GRAPE campaign?

**Further important pointers for the ACT part:**

- \* Coordinating the implementation of this part is critical, hence we suggest a Coordination and Implementation team (CET). This team needs to ensure that the action plan is executed.
- \* The CET will also call the whole CBS team together for the evaluation of the outcomes and to assess the impact of the action plan.

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# Contextual Bible Study Luke 19: 1 - 10: Leading transformation towards justice

## See the context around us

This Contextual Bible Study focuses on the Universal Basic Income and economic injustice and inequality. It is positioned in a South African context, which is unfortunately known as the most unequal society in the world. The participants of the CBS experience economic injustice and high inequality firsthand, even though their perspectives on it differ according to their own circumstances and social position.

## Discerning God's will

### **Luke 19:1-10 (ESV)**

#### **Jesus and Zacchaeus**

[1] He entered Jericho and was passing through. [2] And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. [3] And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. [4] So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. [5] And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." [6] So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. [7] And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." [8] And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." [9] And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. [10] For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

### **Brief background of the text Luke 19: 1 - 10**

The Gospel of Luke presents Jesus Christ as the compassionate Savior for all people and especially highlights His concern for justice, dignity, mercy, and inclusion. Luke, a close companion of Paul the Apostle, writes with special attention to those who were often ignored, rejected, or oppressed in society.

Luke, more than the other Gospel writers, highlights the “universal scope of the gospel invitation.” Jesus is portrayed as the Son of Man, who was rejected by many in Israel but offered salvation to the whole world.

Throughout Luke’s Gospel, Jesus acts as a just and righteous redeemer who restores people socially, spiritually, and physically. His ministry consistently moves toward the marginalized: Gentiles, Samaritans, women, tax collectors, sinners, the poor, and the sick. In a world marked by exclusion and inequality, Jesus becomes the embodiment of God’s justice.

One of the clearest themes in Luke is that God’s grace reaches those whom society has pushed aside. Luke records stories unique to his Gospel that reveal this justice-centered ministry. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), Jesus challenges prejudice and teaches that true righteousness is shown through compassion and mercy. In the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32), justice is expressed not through punishment alone but through restoring broken relationships with grace and forgiveness.

Luke also highlights Jesus’ concern for economic and social justice. In Mary’s song, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), God is praised for lifting up the humble and bringing down the proud. Jesus later declares His mission in Luke 4:18–19:

*“He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor... freedom for the prisoners... recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.”*

This statement becomes the foundation of Jesus’ public ministry. He does not merely preach salvation for heaven; He demonstrates God’s kingdom through acts of healing, restoration, inclusion, and justice on earth.

Luke repeatedly shows Jesus confronting systems and attitudes that dehumanize people. He defends the sinful woman at Simon’s house (Luke 7:36–50), welcomes Zacchaeus the tax collector (Luke 19:1–10), heals lepers and the disabled, and gives women a respected place among His followers. In doing so, Jesus restores human dignity and reveals the heart of God for justice and reconciliation.

Another important emphasis in Luke is justification by faith. Although Luke writes in his own style, the theology aligns closely with Paul’s teaching that salvation comes through God’s grace rather than human status or achievement. Justice in Luke is therefore not only legal fairness but

restorative justice — bringing people back into right relationship with God and community.

The Gospel ultimately moves toward Jerusalem, where Jesus suffers, dies, and rises again. Even on the cross, Luke portrays Jesus as merciful and just, praying for forgiveness for His enemies and offering salvation to the repentant criminal beside Him. The resurrection then confirms that God's justice and love triumph over sin, oppression, and death.

## We read and listen to Luke 19: 1 - 10 together

### **For the facilitator**

The facilitator reads the text for the large group once, and thereafter asks one of the participants from the group to read from a second translation, which is different from the one that was read by the facilitator. Once the reading in plenary is done, it is advisable to pause for a few minutes and lastly give the participants an opportunity to silently read the text on their own for a few minutes.

### **I. Standing in front of the text.**

After the silent reading of the participants, the facilitator leads the group through the discernment phase with the following sections:

#### **For the facilitator:**

After the facilitator read the text with the group a few times, the facilitator opens the discussions with the group with one question;

\* What is Luke 19: 1 - 10 about?

#### **Facilitator's insight:**

\* During this section of the CBS the facilitator should allow for as much discussion as possible, since it normally opens a lively discussion.

### **II. Standing in the text. (Textual/Critical Questions)**

#### **For the facilitator:**

When standing in the text, the aim is to focus the attention of the group and the participants on the Biblical text itself. The facilitator guides the group through the following questions;

- \* Who are the characters in this text of Luke 19: 1 - 10?
- \* What is the relationship between Jesus, Zacchaeus and the crowd?
- \* What is the individual role of the characters (Jesus, Zacchaeus and the crowd) in this story?
- \* What is the significance of Zacchaeus as a tax collector?
- \* What are the key concepts that emerge from this story?

### **Facilitator's Insight:**

The facilitator guides the group to identify the following insights from the text:

(NB: Not all the participants would see it at once. It is advisable to be open to more insights that emerge from the groups!)

### **1. Zacchaeus**

- \* Chief tax collector
- \* Wealthy
- \* Socially rejected ("sinner")
- \* Seeks to see Jesus
- \* Climbs a tree (humility + desperation)
- \* Responds with repentance and restitution

Zacchaeus represents:

- \* Complicity in unjust systems
- \* But also openness to transformation

## **2. Jesus**

- \* Seeks Zacchaeus first
- \* Calls him by name
- \* Chooses to stay with him
- \* Brings salvation

Jesus' actions:

- \* Breaks social barriers
- \* Prioritises relationship over reputation
- \* Initiates transformation

## **3. The Crowd**

- \* Labels Zacchaeus as “sinner”
- \* Complains about Jesus

The crowd represents:

- \* Social judgment
- \* Moral superiority
- \* Exclusion

## **4. “The Poor” (Implied)**

- \* Recipients of Zacchaeus' restitution

They represent:

- \* Victims of economic injustice
- \* Those restored through true repentance

## **Power Relations in the Text**

### 1. Zacchaeus ↔ People

- \* Zacchaeus has economic power
- \* People have social power (they exclude him)

**Tension:** Wealth vs acceptance

### 2. Jesus ↔ Zacchaeus

- \* Jesus holds spiritual authority
- \* Zacchaeus responds with obedience

**Dynamic:** Grace leads to transformation

### 3. Crowd ↔ Jesus

- \* Crowd challenges Jesus' actions

**Dynamic:** Religious/social expectations vs Kingdom values

A key turning point in this story:

Zacchaeus says:

- \* Gives half to the poor
- \* Repays four times what he took

This is not symbolic—it is **real economic justice**

### One-line summary for the facilitator

What emerge from this text is that “Salvation” in this story is not only spiritual. It is social, economic and relational.

## III. Standing behind the text.

### **For the facilitator:**

In this section of the discernment phase, the facilitator guides the group to the world behind the text. The facilitator looks at the significance of places, status, class and power dynamics. The following questions can be asked in this regard;

- \* What is the significance of Jesus' passing through Jericho and the meeting with Zacchaeus?
- \* What is the socio-economic status of the people of Jericho?
- \* Who are the people of influence in this story, and what are they doing?

### **Facilitator's Insight:**

Here the guidance of the facilitator is central for discovering insights, and the facilitator may be expected to steer the group to discover the following insights;

### **Jericho (Location)**

- \* Wealthy trade city
- \* Strategic economic centre

### **Important because:**

This is a story about **wealth** and **justice** in a place of economic activity.

### Historical Context

- \* Tax collectors worked for the Roman Empire
- \* They often:
  - Overcharged people
  - Exploited their own people
- \* Seen as traitors

## **Social Context**

\* Zacchaeus is:

- Rich but rejected
- Powerful but isolated

## **Hidden Power Structures**

- \* Economic exploitation system
- \* Collaboration with empire
- \* Social exclusion mechanisms

A question that the facilitator can conclude this section with is:

\* **“Who benefits from injustice in this story?”**

## **IV. Standing in front of the text. (Community Conscious Questions)**

### **For the facilitator**

The facilitator invites the group to stand in front of the text again with all the insights that they have gathered from the previous section. The facilitator bridges the insights of the text with the context of the group. Bridging questions would include;

- \* What does this story say about economic injustice from a biblical perspective?
- \* What are the similar experiences that can be link between the biblical story and our context in South Africa today?
- \* How can we read this story in light of our context today, where people are treated unjustly and are often exploited?

**Facilitator's Insight:**

This section concludes the discernment phase; therefore, it is important that the expressions of the group should be carefully documented. This information would lead the group to formulate an action plan that is biblically oriented.

## ACT – discerning action steps we can take:

**For the facilitator:**

The ACT section is the last phase of the CBS. The facilitator leads the group in developing an action plan grounded in Biblical truth discovered in the discernment phase. When working through this section, it is important to keep the action within the Biblical text (Luke 19: 1-10). It is also important to ask deep and challenging question that could lead to concrete actions. The facilitator can use the following questions as guidance.

- \* What does God call us to do with regard to economic injustice?
- \* What steps can be taken to prevent economic exploitation?
- \* Based on what principles can a UBI be implemented?
- \* How can victims of economic injustice be supported?
- \* What resources can be utilized to ensure economic justice for all people in your community?

**Facilitator's insight:**

When guiding the group through the action section, it is important to lead the group with the SMART methodology. Furthermore, it is advisable to identify responsible persons for each specific task, so that the action plan is well coordinated.

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# Contextual Bible Study John 6: 1 - 14: How shall we feed the people?

## See the context around us

This Contextual Bible Study focuses on the Universal Basic Income and a high rate of poverty, where many people go to bed hungry. It is positioned in the South African context, which is unfortunately known as the most unequal society in the world. The participants of the CBS experience economic injustice and high inequality firsthand, even though their perspectives on it differ according to their own circumstances and social position.

## Discerning God's will

### **Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand**

1 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), 2 and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4 The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

7 Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). 11 Jesus then took the

loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

14 After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

#### **Notes to the Facilitator:**

- \* It is important to make copies of the text for all participants for two reasons. So that everyone works with the same text during the discernment phase, and so that participants can make notes as the pericope is read and discussed.
- \* It is recommended that the facilitator read at least three different versions of the pericope and familiarize him-/herself with the main differences.

#### **For the Facilitator: Background to the Gospel of John**

The gospel according to John forms part of the 4 different versions of the story of Jesus' birth, ministry and death. However, there is a distinct difference in how John starts with his version of the narrative and how the gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke frame their versions. The three of them all start with the birth of Jesus, but John starts at creation. For John the story about Jesus did not start at his birth but from the beginning, in Genesis. This framing impacts the way John tells the whole story about Jesus, his understanding of Jesus' ministry, the accent he places on themes that the first three gospels not even include in their narratives.

This should be considered when reading the gospel of John or any part of the book. Only John starts by connecting Jesus's advent to the creation (John 1). Only in John we read about the wedding at Cana in Galilee (John 2), where

Jesus turned water into wine. The 'first miracle' which again has to do with the creation of something new. Its only in John the parable of the Shepperd (John 10), the story of Jesus as the Real Vine (John 15) and the priestly prayer of Jesus (John 17) are accounted. Stories and parables John tells to place the emphasis on belonging, inclusion and unity. These, and other text critical information should be considered when reading the gospel of John and specifically John 6, the feeding of the five thousand men.

### **We read and listen to John 6:1 - 14 together:**

The Devotional facilitator leads the group in reading the scripture once.

After a moment of silence, the facilitator let the group read the scripture again in silence.

### **I. Standing in front of the text.**

The facilitator leads the group in reflecting on the question:

- \* What is the text/scripture reading all about?

#### **Notes to the Facilitator:**

- \* This is the question that usually elicits a lively discussion. The facilitator
- \* must allow as much discussion as possible here....

### **II. Standing in the text: Character analysis**

After all responses and input have been received, acknowledged, and listened to, the facilitator leads the group to delve deeper by analysing the characters in the pericope with the question:

- \* Who are the characters in the story and what does the text say about them?
- \* Are there any connections and/or power relations at play between the

\* characters?

If there is time, here are other questions the facilitator can put to the group for table discussion and to report back on:

\* What do we learn from the two responses (schools of thought) on Jesus`

\* indication that the disciples should give the crowd something to eat?

\* Does the mentioning of the precise location and the approaching Jewish festival

\* of Passover has any meaning or impact on how the feeding story unfolds and ends?

\* Is this a real-life story or a miracle and what implications does it have for us

\* if it was either a lived experience or a miracle?

### **III. Standing behind the text.**

In this part of the discernment phase, the focus shifts to the connections between the characters, the role of status, class and background of the characters of the text; importance of names of places; power relations; etc. should be looked at

#### **Questions to continue the conversation:**

\* Does status, class and background play a role in the story/text?

\* Are there any power relations at play, and how should they be understood?

\* Does the location of the story have any significance in relation to the story or the characters?

### **IV. Standing in front of the text.**

Here, the facilitator invites the group to stand in front of the text again and discuss the question:

- \* Is there a connection between the theme, the context of the story and the contemporary context of the group?
- \* Do we experience today what happened in the story/text and in what way?
- \* What does it mean for us today that this was not a miracle but an exemplary deed sharing from what you have by Christ Jesus, that we can emulate today as well?

## ACT – discerning action steps we can take:

This is the last phase of the CBS. Here, the facilitator leads the group discussion in answering the last set of questions:

- \* What is God asking from us in the light of what we have discovered?
- \* If we experience a similar situation in South Africa, how does the UBI encourage the sharing of resources so that all can be satisfied (e.g. progressive taxes)
- \* What short-, medium-, and long-term actions can be taken, together and
- \* individually, from what we have learnt?
- \* What immediate steps can be taken to address the challenge from what we
- \* have discovered from the 1st (SEE) and 2nd (DISCERNMENT) phase?