

Tool 12: Transformed men for a just world



***"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!"
(1 Corinthians 5:17)***

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Introduction and Purpose of this Tool

This Tool specifically addresses the question of why men are often labelled as 'the problem', and also looks at their roles in building a transformed society. While men are indeed part of the problem, they are equally part of the solution.

This Tool is designed to help men in churches to think through why it is important for men to change. It opens up spaces to talk about how they feel about this, and offers some ways to help them understand manhood in society today. It revisits the Bible in a fresh way, to enable the church to speak and act more effectively in relation to questions of gender and power in the family, church and society. It ends with some ideas for men to encourage, promote and build positive and transformative masculinity in Church and society.

Let us begin with a personal reflection that cuts to the core of what we are talking about.



Time to talk: Reflecting on our own experiences

On your own:

1. Think back on times in your life (as a child or adult) when you experienced one of the following:
being ignored, or your voice was not heard, not being allowed to do what you felt strongly you needed to, or an experience of violence.
Ask yourself:
 - What was happening between you and the other person/s?
 - Did you feel you had power to change the situation? Where did your power come from? Where did the power of the other/s come from? How did you feel at the time?
 - How do you feel about that memory now? Did your being a man, or woman, play any role at all?
2. Now think back on times when you were able to influence others – how they thought or what they did. Ask yourself:
 - What was happening between you and the other person/s?
 - How did you feel?
 - Where did you get the power and respect from? How did it relate to your gender, social / cultural beliefs about status and rights in your church, workplace or family, race, economic standing? Did your being a man, or woman, play any role at all?
 - How did you use the power you had?

Together with one or two others:

3. Talk about the difference between feeling powerful and when someone else has power over you.
 - Is it better to have power or not?
 - How would a relationship which is not based on one person having more power than the other look like? How would it feel for both of them?
 - Why is this kind of relationship so hard to find in the world today?
4. Think about the person who is the centre of our faith, Jesus:
 - How did Jesus relate to ordinary people in his life?
 - How did he relate to those with religious or political power? (Luke 19: 45-46; Luke 20)
 - What does this mean for us as Christians and churches today?

Why should gender norms change in Southern Africa?

A common reaction to the call for gender justice and to work towards gender equality is that this contradicts African culture; that it has confused people and has created a lot of unhappy families.

Many men and women in Southern Africa say nothing is wrong with the way the world is. According to them, it is natural that men are heads of households, senior politicians and business leaders. In their view, the Bible says so, and our cultures are built around this order of things. They say women were created to care for children, serve men in the home, church and workplace.

Are men and women in Southern Africa happy?⁶⁶

We don't know if men and women were happier in the past, when gender inequality was not even talked about. But somewhere along the line, things seem to have gone wrong, as shown in the box opposite.

Over the past 20 years at least, many women as well as men in Southern African countries, have been saying that we need to find ways to bring about peace and justice, and put an end to the violence that is not just on the streets, but in our homes. The main social problems we see are man-made: high levels of violence in general, violence against women and children, and the rapid spread of the HIV pandemic, which now mostly affects young women. This is why addressing sexual and reproductive rights is crucial.

Globally, a number of international agreements have been made between nations to address gender inequality and violence. SADC country governments have responded to these by changing legislation, and have set up a Gender Protocol signed by all but 2 SADC countries. It sets 6 key

Male abuse of power has led women to being extremely vulnerable¹:

- Many women's first sexual experience is against their will.
- Gender based violence is an epidemic in Southern Africa. Zambia and Lesotho recorded over 80% of women having experienced abuse in their lives in some areas. Zambia has the highest rape and domestic violence statistics, though South Africa is known as being the 'rape capital' of the world.
- Even some African UN Peacekeepers (alongside others) have recently been exposed as rapists, with the South Africans having the most cases against them.
- Over 60% of Southern Africa's people living with HIV are women, and most of these are between 15 and 24.
- More young women are using drugs, offer their bodies for sex so they can earn money to survive, or have luxuries and treats.
- Depression is very common among women of all ages.
- Human trafficking of both women and men is on the increase.

Although men generally benefit from male-dominated societies, they too suffer violence:

- In many cultures, boys may be half as likely to experience sexual abuse than girls; but they are twice as likely to experience physical abuse.
- Many more men than women die as a result of murder.
- Suicide rates amongst men are increasing yearly, even among African men where it used to be almost unheard of.
- Alcohol and drug abuse is almost an epidemic amongst men.

⁶⁶ Much of this information is taken from the SADC Gender Protocol Barometer, 2013. www.genderlinks.org.za and UNICEF's Gender and Health report http://www.unicef.org/esaro/7310_Gender_and_health.html.

milestones towards gender equality. All states that have signed the SADC Gender Protocol should by now (2015) have effected national laws and policies to address gender equality.

The Constitutions of South Africa and some other countries now refer to gender equality, and several SADC Governments have many programmes to try to bring that about. More than 10 of the 15 SADC countries now have gender equality legislation, and laws against sexual violence and human trafficking. More women than ever are involved in economic activity in many of the SADC countries, although less are economic decision makers. More women are political leaders, some reaching the highest political positions.

But it seems that, the more our governments and other organisations are trying to address gender inequality and empower women, the more the situation is getting worse for ordinary men and women⁶⁷.

IN SUM: We are not happy! Our societies are violent.

We have lost respect for each other, for our bodies, and even for life.

And the question on many people's lips is: If it's not working, what would work better?

Where is the Church?

While many in the faith communities are troubled by current levels of violence and social problems, few know how to respond in meaningful ways.

This is partly because church teachings and practices have mostly been male-dominated. Some say that this has made acceptable the kinds of abuses of power that are destroying our societies today.

Whether this is true or not, there is no doubt that the Church as a whole needs to move beyond condemning violence. It needs to make a meaningful contribution to building a new society where violence is not tolerated, and all people can live in peace and safety and live 'abundantly', as promised by Jesus (John 10:10).

There are some examples of church leaders who have begun to challenge the male order. For example, Adriaan Van Klinken⁶⁸, reports a key Zambian church leader saying that *"there is a 'distortion of manhood' in society, which has led to many social [problems like] violence against women, alcoholism, men's uncontrolled sexual behaviour, and men's overall irresponsibility in [their marriages and families]. [Bishop Joshua Banda] considers this 'crisis of masculinity' as a key factor in the major socio-economic problems of Zambia, and of Africa more generally.... [He refers to things like] the HIV epidemic, the high numbers of street children, the poverty levels and failing political leadership.Banda feels that... 'We have to restore a vision of biblical manhood'."*

⁶⁷ Morell, Jewkes and Lindegger (2012) *Hegemonic Masculinity/Masculinities in South Africa: Culture, Power, and Gender Politics* (Published online) that show how in South Africa, gender inequalities go hand in hand with racial and economic inequalities. This is likely to be similar in other SADC countries.

⁶⁸ Adriaan Van Klinken, 2013. *The Homosexual as the Antithesis of 'Biblical Manhood? Heteronormativity and Masculinity Politics in Zambian Pentecostal Sermons*. In *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* Vol. 17 No 2 (December 2011), referring to an interview with Bishop Joshua Banda, Lusaka: 6th November 2008.

There are many others, who in small and bigger ways, have begun to speak out, in response to the high levels of violence around them.

Churches and Christians usually turn to the Bible for answers – especially in times of change- to draw out principles for how to react to what is happening in our world. Today, we are challenged to go back to the Gospel with a new openness.

We may ask with Bishop Banda: Is there such a thing as 'Biblical manhood'? And if so, how might it be applied in Southern Africa today?

But we first need to ask: **What, indeed, is 'manhood'?**

The following section explores the meaning of manhood, or masculinity, more deeply. It also looks at some typical reactions to the gender equality agenda that exists in our countries today.

Then we try to find some common ground about how people study the Bible, before we search the Bible for ourselves, to try to draw out some useful lessons for our context today.

Manhood means more or less the same as masculinity: Being a man.

But in society, some ways of being a man are seen as more acceptable than others. So a man may choose to act in a certain way or risk being accused of being weak, unmanly, or feminine.

What does it mean to be a man in Southern Africa today?⁶⁹

Let us start by listening to the stories of some men, and using them to reflect on our own stories.



Time to talk: Men telling their stories

(If it feels more comfortable, you may talk in groups of only men or only women rather than mixed groups.)

1. Read through the two stories below, and then use the following questions to talk about them:
 - These stories are quite different, but what do they have in common?
 - What were the different influences on the men as they were growing up? How did they shape them as men and as people?
 - The first one seems quite happy with the way things are. Do you think his wife and other people he relates to are also happy?
 - The last three carry heavy burdens at the end of their stories. Talk about what they could each do to move forward with their lives? What challenges would they meet?

⁶⁹ The stories and quotations used in this Tool have come from various sources, with permission. Some come out of workshops, community dialogues and round table discussions, where permission was granted to use people's words but not their names. This shows how hard it is for men to talk about these things, for fear of being judged or disrespected for their views.

It is great to be a man!

"As the head of the household, my wife has to listen to me and serve. It is exciting, because we can go out there and be part of things. Even our training as boys to become men is fun. I remember having to kill a cow – holding it by its horns and killing it was exciting!"

Manhood is not easy

"It is harder these days [to be a man than a woman]. Traditionally, a man was made, through various strategies to build him up as a king, but these mostly don't exist anymore. So it is hard to live out those responsibilities without having had that training. It depends on the era. In the old days, maybe it was nice. But even then, that training was hard and sometimes even now in rural areas it is not properly done.

A man has to take responsibility and he can't pass that on to anyone else. Even God speaks to the man to guide the family. There is no way out.

It is hard to make decisions alone sometimes, and always has been. Sometimes decisions are painful, because as a man it is my task to uphold the tradition and culture, and there is pressure to do this right. This was so even long ago and is in the rural areas. For example, when a man has twins, one has to die and the man has to enforce that. It is very painful.

Today it is said that it is nice to be a man. But it is much harder to take responsibility. There are so many battles to fight. It is no longer right for a man to enforce his decisions, and life is complicated. If I marry you, I want you to treat me like a king; and I also will treat you like a queen. But there is too much competition now.

Sometimes, I even wish to be a woman."

Learning to be strong

"Michael Ryan describes the ...humiliation he suffered when his father called him over to where he was sitting and then abruptly grab his wrists and started squeezing them. 'The idea, he said, was to see how long I could keep standing, to see how tough I was. The first time I lasted about 3 seconds and it probably would have been less had I not been so surprised...I screeched for him to stop, which he did after I fell at his feet with my face in the rug.' To the boy it was simply an assault at the hands of someone with overwhelming power. But his father presented it as a 'lesson' in how to overcome vulnerability.: 'I was crying, my face was hot with tears, but he wasn't about to console me. He said I better get much tougher if I wanted to be a man, that as I grew up there was going to be plenty of pain, this was nothing. He told me... that he wasn't punishing me but teaching me to be strong.'" (Michael Ryan, a well-known poet, quoted in Steven Wineman. 2003. Power-Under (pg. 130))



Source:
Sonke Gender Justice

Becoming a better man

"I didn't have any goats or cattle, which brought a lot of ridicule from my peers. There was constant jeering that I wasn't a real boy. Some of them said, 'There's a girl who's full of herself and doesn't want to know us; you need to be party to disciplining her.' "I made the decision to agree to it. I was given beer and I smoked. I remember that, after the act, it was reported to the whole soccer team and my friend and I were given a standing ovation. I moved away and it faded from my mind.

It took me 20 years to realise that I'd done something wrong. In my work in the HIV field I met unemployed women and every single week they reported violence from the men. I couldn't help but admit that this was something I had done myself.

I went to see my religious mentor and said, 'I have to go and apologise to my victim.' He said, 'You were only 15 years old. It's in the past, what if she reports it?' I said, 'That would be justice for her.'

When we met, she recognised me and was surprised. I told her, 'I realise I caused you pain 20 years ago. I understand how wrong this was and I came to apologise.' She was silent and she started crying.

She said, 'After you, two other men raped me. I've never told anyone that. Every time I think of it my whole body shudders. I've never really been well. Sometimes, when my husband touches me, I cringe and he wonders why.

She said, 'The fact that you've come 600 miles to apologise helps me believe you, and I'm grateful. Do me a favour. Teach your son not to do what you did to me.'

I thought I was going to leave my load behind, but when she said that, I had a new load to take with me." Dumisani Rebombo⁷⁰

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2. When you have finished talking about the stories, get into pairs or threes, and talk about the following:
- Think about your own life story as a man. What do you enjoy about being a man? What are the things you are struggling with? How are they different or similar to those you have read?
 - What are some things you are proud of in the way you have lived your life as a man?
 - Share your story with at least one other man (you only need to tell as much as feels safe for you). What do your stories share in common, and how are they different?
 - How does it feel to tell a bit of your own story? What would you need in order to feel safe to do this?

⁷⁰ Quoted by David Smith in The Guardian Newspaper, Wednesday 17 June 2009. Used with permission from Guardian News & Media 2009.



Ordinary men often feel accused of being bad people, because of all the social problems that are caused by men.

But the situation is complicated. While it is true that men have to take responsibility for their decisions, all human beings are the products of how they were raised. This is not just about what they were taught about how to be men, but is also about their life experiences. These are influenced by whether their home felt safe or was violent, what kind of neighbourhood they grew up in, what behaviours were encouraged or allowed, and what kind of role models they had.

"... [U]nderlying everything, there is a deep anger behind the way some men are behaving. These men are violent and cruel, but it is not just that, it is because of this underlying anger. They are destroying things out of anger."

So in a society where a man has to constantly prove his masculinity, and he is terrified of not being accepted as a man, being asked to use a condom or being turned down by a woman would not be seen just as small setbacks, but as challenges to his very identity as a man. This kind of man would be more likely to resort to violence or emotional abuse to get his way.

Power, patriarchy, and manhood

In societies everywhere, there is constant competition for power, dominance and authority. Why?

Power gives a person access to the most valued resources as well as position. These in turn, give one the power to remain dominant and in leadership, by maintaining the status quo. Those in leadership make the rules, or influence those who do, and benefit from the privileges society bestows on those in power. So they have an interest in keeping powered inequalities the way they are.

In most societies of the world, those in power are men, and those who have the most power, are men. This is called a **patriarchy**.

Patriarchy: a social system which gives men power over women (and children and the environment), and gives them status, power and privilege just because they are men. It is less about individuals, as much as whole social systems and structures that define men's and women's roles, rights, responsibilities and privileges.

But there is not just one way to be a man. And not all ways to be a man have the same value in a society. The type of man one is, influences how one fits in, what chances one has to succeed, and whether one is elected to be a leader. This means that in the end, many men do not benefit from the social order they are living under.

Men are not only constantly in a struggle to prove their dominance over women, but also to prove their power and dominance over other men as well. Especially young men are not always sure of their masculinity, and they often compete for dominance by proving who is 'more of a man'. Stick fighting is a traditional example of this. More destructive forms include pressurising each other to have sex at a young age, or even gang warfare.

But when it comes to relationships with women, in most cases men still benefit from what is called the 'patriarchal dividend' - no matter how little power a man has in wider society amongst other men, he still has power over the woman/ women in his personal life.

Forms of Masculinity (ways to be a man)

In any society, there are at least four different types of masculinity⁷¹.

Men learn how to be a man as they grow up. The rules about what makes a 'real man' are not exactly the same in different societies, although they are quite similar between Southern African countries.

"Traditionally, a man was made, through various strategies to build him up as a king."

Hegemonic or dominant masculinities: This refers to ways of being the 'ideal man'. In most societies, a 'normal man' is a powerful, aggressive, competitive man, who is always in control and may even become violent to maintain his authority and access to the resources he needs to keep his power.

"When we are married, I can force you to have sex with me...because I know that I will pay my money to buy you."

People tend to respect successful sportsmen, soldiers, businessmen or politicians, because they exhibit these characteristics. This type of masculinity is promoted and even glorified in culture and tradition, religion and the arts.

The 'profit above people' approach adopted by many hegemonic men in business has led many non-hegemonic men to no longer be able to provide for their families. Being a provider goes together with household headship, and together these form the basis of manhood in hegemonic masculinities. As a result, many Southern African men are said to be experiencing a crisis of identity, which may be one of the reasons for an increase in male violence against women and children.

This can be even worse for young men. Marriage is seen as an essential part of being a real man in many African societies⁷². Consumerism has led to many parents demanding exorbitant amounts of *lobola* (bride price), while high unemployment is making more and more men very poor. This has led many young men into a crisis of confidence. They are deprived of the chance to prove their manhood in the traditional sense.

"To call oneself a man it is simplest after (one is) married with children. No children and you are still a boy."

Let us look, then, at men who 'fail to be real men' in the above sense. What choices do they have?

"I cannot call a man who sleeps with other men a man. I don't know what he is, but he is not a real man."

⁷¹ R Connell 2005, 2014. www.raewynconnell.net

⁷² Baker, G. & Ricardo, C. 2005. Young men and the construction of masculinity in sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, conflict and violence. *World Bank Social Development Papers: Conflict and Reconstruction*, Paper No. 26. Cited in Lovemore Togarasei. Pauline challenge to African masculinities: reading Pauline texts in the context of HIV/AIDS. *Acta theol.* vol.32 suppl.16 Bloemfontein Jan. 2012

Subordinate Masculinities: refers to ways of being a man that do not live up to the 'ideal man'. Subordinate men generally do not 'make it' in sports, business or politics, and may even be disadvantaged in religious or cultural institutions.

Heterosexual: being attracted to the opposite sex.

Homosexual: being attracted to the same sex.

E.g. Men who are not formally educated and cannot get work are marginalised from mainstream economic activity, and so are seen as 'lesser' men. **Homosexual** men, who do not fit into **heterosexual** stereotypes, are often excluded just because of their sexual orientation.

Complicit Masculinities: are lived out by men who accept the rewards of dominant masculinity and behave in dominating ways, but do not defend the patriarchal system as a whole. Such men often accept oppressive beliefs and structures as a given, but they do not force their dominance on women.

"Come on, stop crying, be a man and go and fight back against those bullies!"

For example, they may enjoy the benefits of 'doing business' as a man (easy access to finance, etc.), but they choose not to pay women workers lower wages than men.



Source: Sonke Gender Justice

Marginal Masculinities: show many of the features of dominant masculinity, often in extreme forms. But these are lived out in exploited or oppressed groups, such as the poor and unemployed, or immigrants. They feel inadequate because they are discriminated against because of their race, class or status.

Young men who are seen not to 'have what it takes' in a man's world can end up involving themselves in crime or gangs, but any groups of young men who compete with each other to prove they are more 'manly' than the others also take on these behaviours. They often take enormous risks to prove their manhood to themselves and others.

"It's better to beat her. You get back respect if you sometimes wake her up."



Time to talk: What does it all mean in practice?

While most people agree that violence is not the right way to live out one's manhood, the many social influences in our lives can make it difficult to know what is the best way to be a man in today's world.

Jesus gives us a clue, when he says: *"You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns...? A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit."* (Matthew 7: 15-19)

- What do you think are the results of the different ways men are in the world today? Think about who the different kinds of men are in your society –
 - Hegemonic men – e.g. rulers or leaders in business, politics or church;
 - Complicit – men who do the bidding of leaders or rulers;
 - Subordinate – Men who don't fit in – e.g. poor, uneducated men; homosexuals
 - Marginal – Men who form in-groups and create their own new power relations.

- Think about specific men you know who might fall under each type of man, and talk about:
 - their attitudes
 - what they do, or think, is acceptable to do, and
 - how they affect those around them (men, women and children)
 - how their actions influence society as a whole.

Even being a 'successful' (hegemonic) man is not always easy, as Ezra Chitando shared at a Meeting in Pietermaritzburg in June 2014:

"Do we as men enjoy patriarchal privilege? It is expensive to be a man. I think it's Oliver Mtukudzi who said: 'Why didn't you tell me that when I grew up to be a man the burdens would be terrible?' I agree. Because patriarchy gives me privilege but it also burdens me. I can't be myself; I'm told not to cry in public, but in private we can't stop crying once we start; the burden on me as a man is massive."

But the story does not end here!

Transformative Masculinities⁷³

As more people have been realising that it is mostly certain types of men that are the driving force behind the twin epidemics of HIV and gender based violence all over the world, the idea of transforming the acceptable norms of what makes a real man is being talked about more and more.

The World Council of Churches has started a campaign for transforming masculinities to help churches and people everywhere to 'become born again' in relation to how they understand themselves and their relationship to women and other men. The campaign is inviting men of all ages to embrace more constructive ways of being men.

"You need to prove you are a man. So how do men prevent gender based violence when they are expected to appear as strong and masculine? How do they practise that change in their own relationships?"

⁷³ Another term for this is 'positive masculinities' but we use the term 'transformative' to highlight that positive masculinities can serve to transform both men and through them, their churches and communities.

Some anti-gender based violence campaigns, such as 'Not in my Name'⁷⁴ and the Fatherhood Campaign have opened up spaces for alternative men's voices to be heard that distance them from the dominant, domineering and often violent masculinities that have often gone unchallenged by other men. As movements of men grow and more and more join them, the hope is that public opinion may also shift.



Time to talk: Characteristic of a transformative man

- As a group, complete the list below: Transformative men:
 - Are caring and sensitive about the needs of others
 - Resolve conflict by talking about it
 - Are able to express their feelings
 - As leaders, they....
 - As partners, they....
 - As fathers, they....
 -
- Ask yourself, and then talk with one or two other people:
 - If you are a man: Where do I fit in? What kind of man would I like to be?
 - If you are a woman: What kind of man would I prefer? Why?
- (How) Do you find the concept of multiple masculinities helpful in your life?

"When I hear of a rape, I feel like I am somehow partly responsible. I feel associated with it just because I'm a man."

Responses to the challenge of change:

Above we saw that men relate in different ways to what are socially defined ways to be a 'real man'. In the same way, men have not all reacted in the same way to the challenges brought by the gender equality agenda that most Southern African governments have adopted as a result of international and SADC level programmes and agreements.⁷⁵

The most common reaction amongst men (worldwide) is **backlash**, against women as well as men who are working to change the prevailing social norms based on male superiority, privilege and control over resources. This response is common across all race and class groups in all countries of the world.

"I have no clue about the Constitution but I would not allow a woman to abuse my authority, e.g., by being asked to wash dishes and cook."

⁷⁴ Brandon Hamber (2009). Masculinity and Transition: Crisis or Confusion in Southern Africa? Summarised in: Gennrich, D. (ed). 2013. Men and Masculinities in Southern Africa: Volume 2 Understanding Masculinity in Southern Africa – Essays and Perspectives. Pietermaritzburg: PACSA and Sonke Gender Justice.

⁷⁵ See Tool 4 for a discussion of the SADC Protocol on Gender Equality and other international agreements.

Morrell (2001) has identified at least **3 different types of reactions** to the changing gender expectations of men in Southern Africa today:

"It is better to be a prisoner than a free man who is not really free. Women are now more important than men.... Something needs to be done."

Defensive men try to reassert their traditional power, through forceful or even violent means. They may refer to conservative traditions or specific verses of Scripture to re-establish their authority. They tend to blame women for the problems they have, and see themselves as victims. Some may call on men to be responsible, so that they can better fulfil their traditional roles as patriarchal men.

Men who are **Accommodating** do not react against the changes, but they just go on with business as usual.

They still uphold traditional patriarchal ideals of masculinity. They continue to teach their sons to be dominant, and maintain their leadership in the household or workplace. They may encourage individual men to change risky behaviours, or speak out against sexual violence (like many government HIV prevention campaigns), but they don't question the power inequalities that make it possible for men to abuse their power in the first place, and that makes it difficult for women to negotiate for condoms or to say 'no'.

Responsive men accept the changes and promote gender equality in all areas of their lives. They are not afraid to care or express their feelings, and are committed to journeying with women to find alternative ways of being men and women in a fair and democratic society.

'Touching a girl or woman without her consent does not make you a man, it makes you a coward.'

Slogan of anti-rape campaign

More and more men are beginning to ask the hard questions and try to find new ways to be men.

Responsive men and women try to understand how gender, race, economic and social status and ethnicity influence the way men live. For example, they understand that an unemployed man who feels bad about being unable to provide for his family may be more likely to take his frustrations out by beating his wife than a successful businessman. However, other social factors may also make a difference. For example the successful businessman who was beaten by his father as a child has a high chance of being abusive himself.

Women's reactions

Women also can respond in unhelpful ways to the gender transformation agenda. Like men, they are bombarded with conflicting messages about the way they should be and act during this time of transition to gender equality. There are at least 4 unhelpful ways⁷⁶ that women commonly respond:

- aggressively demanding their rights, sometimes in damaging ways,
- making sure they always look 'perfect' so they are not stigmatised as women,
- trying to imitate men to be acceptable, or
- being "truly woman" in caring, making peace and creating warmth (even when they are unhappy).

These responses don't really change the situation for women. They may even have destructive consequences for their relationships.

There are also more helpful options for women. Many women find new and authentic ways to be women. They may work together with responsive men as described above.

Of course, **these categories are not fixed**.

Sometimes even men and women who are trying to live differently and believe in gender equality, may occasionally slip back into unhelpful ways in private, or men may be influenced to engage in risky behaviours when amongst a group of friends at a party.

This is because **gender transformation is a journey**, like any process of change - for men and women, and for society as a whole.



Time to talk: Different responses, different approaches

- Which of the above responses do you think is/are the most common in your community? And in your church?
- How helpful do you think it is to understand how and why different people respond in these ways? How can you use this understanding to bring about change in your community or church?
- How have you most often responded to gender equality initiatives in the past? How do you feel about them now? Do you still have questions that you feel are unresolved?

As people of faith, we may have heard conflicting teachings, and many of them use the Bible to back up their views. What does the Bible really say about the relationship between men and women?

⁷⁶Rev Professor Christina Landman. Gender and Human Rights – A presentation at FOCCISA Conference on Human Rights and Theology. Johannesburg. April 2014.

How can the Bible help?

"Test all things; hold fast to what is good."
(Thessalonians 5: 21)

We have been reflecting on stories of how different kinds of men are trying to live out their manhood in a complex and changing world.

Quite often, men and women use the Bible to justify that men have a right to dominate women, control them and be served by them. But others use the Bible to show that this is not the right way for men to behave.

How is this possible, when we are all using the same Bible?

The Bible does not seem to have a single, clear position on many life issues. Before we take this conversation further, it is worth going more deeply into how the Bible was written, what it is used for and how it has been misused.

Christians believe that the Bible is our ultimate standard of faith, and that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit ("all Scripture is inspired by God..." 2 Tim 3: 16). But there are many different views on exactly what this means in practice, and how we should interpret the Bible.

Different ways people understand the authority of The Bible

- Some believe that God actually breathed God's Word through the men who wrote down the exact words dictated by God;
- Others say that ordinary people of faith, who were inspired by God's Spirit, interpreted the age-old stories and wisdom through their personal experiences in their cultures and societies, and wrote them down in their own language/s.

Different ways to read the Bible:

How we understand the Bible's origins influences how we approach it.

As readers, we are influenced by the limitations of our own upbringing, experiences and the time in history in which we live - in the same way that the writers were influenced. This is why it is important to be humble when reading the Bible.

How was the Bible written?

The Bible is a collection of stories and other books.

The Bible is actually a library (literal meaning of *Biblio*) of books, written at different times in history.

Some are **historical** stories of people's journeys with God – not that different from our own stories we shared earlier.

Others offer **wisdom**, and still others (mostly in the Old Testament) offer lists of **rules** for behaviour.

The books were written down by many different people (men) who wrote in the languages of their day and were influenced by their cultural context.

But long before anything was written down, the stories, rules and words of wisdom had been passed down for generations by word of mouth.

Biblical historians have researched the origins of all the different books, and this has helped us to understand them better.

Neither the writer nor the reader can have a total grasp of the full Truth of God.

The two main ways of reading the Bible work with these limitations differently:

Literal interpretation: People take specific verses and apply them word for word to any situation, at all times. They believe that the words are unchanging because they are the actual 'Words of God' breathed through different writers.

Contextual (hermeneutic) interpretation: People believe the Bible has been inspired, but not dictated, by God. They do not read isolated verses and try to apply them directly to their lives for all times.

One model of contextual interpretation is Contextual Bible Study⁷⁷. This is best done in groups rather than alone, as the insights of other participants can open up the deeper meaning of texts in relation to current social realities. It is also done prayerfully and with humility, based on the understanding that no one of us is able to see the whole Truth of God, and our understanding is influenced by our life experience and our own limited vision.

The moral dynamics of Scripture⁷⁸ and the importance of dialogue

One thing that can be confusing is that **the Bible often seems to contradict itself.**

This is why it is **useful to read it in community**, as we can learn from each other. For example, Jewish men were expected to be circumcised, as a sign of their faith in God. But in the New Testament, Paul says (in Galatians 6:15) that "*neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!*"

It can be helpful **when we try and discern the truth for our lives, not to argue with the Bible.**

Instead we can use the internal contradictions in the Bible to teach us. We can **allow the contradictory verses to 'argue with each other'**. Then we can reflect on why there is a difference, and test what might be appropriate in our lives and society today.

A **Contextual Bible Study** helps us to try to understand whole passages more deeply:

- in the light of the rest of the story or other related stories, letters or poetic texts (**literary context**);
- by taking time to understand the kind of society that existed at the time when the passage was written (**historical context**); and
- thinking deeply about the issues in their own society, and using whatever scientific and other knowledge they can use to help them understand what the Bible might mean now. (**today's context**).

⁷⁷ Contextual Bible study (www.ujamaa.org.za) is not a totally new way to approach reading the Bible, and it is not just a way to water down the Word of God. Contextual biblical interpretation has been used for a long time. It has been used for thousands of years by Jewish rabbis, to try and make sense of difficult texts in the *Torah* (Jewish Scriptures) in the light of current social realities. In Jewish tradition it was called *Midrash*. Midrash accepts that any text has multiple layers of meaning, which can be uncovered in a variety of ways. A helpful process is to allow dialogue between different perspectives to allow for a deeper understanding of the text.

⁷⁸ This concept was shared by Professor Jan Jans of Tilburg University in a Skype conversation, May 2015.

This is the way this Tool approaches the Bible.

It looks at some Bible verses that are used to understand the dynamics of the relationship between men and women. Then it looks at other related verses, and sets up a dialogue between them. The TIME TO TALK exercises open up opportunities to do this in groups.

Our **ultimate authority is of course, Jesus**, and it is useful to test Scripture against Jesus' own teachings and actions. It is important to **read any extracts from the Bible against the background of its basic message**: the story of God's saving plan for all of humanity in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate Word of God (John 1) - the Alpha and Omega of our faith.

Some people try to use the Bible as a kind of manual for life, but it doesn't always work like that. Life can be complicated, and the world has changed drastically since biblical times. So we need to read the Bible with humility and openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Pitfalls when reading the Bible

We have seen that the Bible is a complex set of books, and jumping to our own conclusions too quickly about what it is saying can be dangerous. There are at least 4 pitfalls we can fall into when reading the Bible, which can lead us to making mistakes because we are not open to learning more deeply.

These include:

1. We can be tempted to **look for rules, and then impose them on others** in a top-down way, without really understanding what the writer originally meant or listening to those on whom they impose these.

For example, some churches still insist that women have to wear hats in church. The verse in the original Greek (1 Corinthians 11:5) referred to Corinthian church women never shaving their heads, to show they were not (temple) prostitutes, who shaved their heads. Most churches no longer insist on women covering their heads, because the social dynamics are different.

2. We can hold on to **isolated verses** that we think have the quick answers we need, and then we try to **apply them to all situations and for all of time**.

For example, many wedding sermons preach on Ephesians 5:22 ("Wives, submit to your husbands") without looking at the whole passage, which is introduced by verse 5:21: "Submit, therefore, to one another out of reverence for Christ". If more marriages were based on verse 21, there would perhaps be many more happy marriages.

3. We **apply the different verses and/or rules inconsistently**

We often prefer those verses that refer to sins we are not likely to commit anyway (like homosexual practices if we are heterosexual), while ignoring those that we know we do (like judging others and speaking badly about them). We even manage to isolate a few words (like those referring to homosexuality), when it is referred to in a list that includes other sins, many of which relate to unhealthy sexual habits that are seen as acceptable today.



4. We **select those verses that justify our opinions**, and ignore others. There are many examples where this has caused a lot of pain and suffering in the church.

- Passages like 1Timothy 2:11 (“I do not permit women to teach...”) have been used by churches to block women from taking up positions as pastors and clergy. Others argue for women’s ordination by using the verses about Jesus sending Mary Magdalene to teach about the resurrection (Matthew 28:10; John 20:16-18). While some denominations still insist on all-male clergy, many churches now allow women into ordained ministry.
- Slavery was justified for many years by quoting individual verses in the Bible, like Leviticus 25:42. Even beating or raping a slave was supported using Exodus 21: 20-21; and Leviticus 19:20. Several New Testament passages were also used to justify keeping slaves (Luke 12:43-47; Luke 17: 9; Matthew 18:33; Philemon 1:16). The anti-slavery lobby could not quote verses that oppose slavery because no verses explicitly forbid it. It took many years to convince the churches of their time to change, by challenging them to go back to the Spirit of love and respect of the Gospel. Nowadays, there is no argument about this.

The above examples tell us that biblical interpretation is likely to be influenced by what is happening in the world at different times, including current social norms, new scientific knowledge and cultural transformation. The choice then, is either to become narrower and hold onto isolated verses that keep us from moving forward, or to explore more deeply, even if we are uneasy about it.

Sometimes the Spirit pushes us out of our comfort zones

There is ample evidence in the Bible that people do change their minds about what God may be saying in their lives through revisiting Scripture.



Time to talk: Reading ‘the signs of the times’*

Together, talk about the following examples from the Bible:

- Leviticus 11:7 and Deuteronomy 14:8 contain the instruction never to eat pork, because “it is unclean for you” (Lev.11:7).
 - Why do you think pork was regarded as unclean, whereas cow’s meat was not?
 - Do you eat pork? If not, why not, and if yes, why is it OK?⁷⁹

There are other examples where the Holy Spirit has completely changed a person’s views on a principle or law that they have felt strongly about.

⁷⁹ Historically, this made sense, because pork could make people incredibly ill. Medical science has uncovered why this was the case: there was a small parasite that would settle in the brain and cause brain disease. Nowadays, all countries regulate how pork is processed and tested for this parasite, so pork is now quite safe to eat. In many countries, pork is eaten freely, and Christians do not regard it as sinful.

- Read Acts 10: 9- 11:18. It tells the story of how the Holy Spirit deals with Peter, changes his mind and uses him powerfully to spread the Gospel to all nations rather than just the Jews. 80 Peter was sharply criticised by the other apostles for contradicting the Law.
- Read through his argument in Chapter 11 carefully, and consider why it was so convincing.
- Another example is Paul himself. He completely changed his mind when challenged by Jesus - from being a staunch Jew that persecuted Christians, to becoming a central figure in the early Church.

* Jesus criticises the religious leaders of his day for not being able to “*read the signs of the times*” (Matthew 16:3). In three of the Gospels (Matthew 9, Mark 2 and Luke 5), when Jesus is criticised for reinterpreting the Hebrew Scriptures for his context, he advises the religious authorities that one cannot “*sew a piece of new cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made.*” And “*new wine is poured into new wineskins*”. (Matthew 9: 16, 17b)

*When we read the Bible, it is important to **discern between teachings that were of the time** (usually linked to specific customs and outlooks of the day) **and those which are for all time** [usually representing a Gospel value or principle].*
Bishop David Russell, 2009

This is also our challenge in using the Scriptures to guide our lives today.

One example of this in the history of the Church in Southern Africa, is the churches' views of HIV/AIDS.

When the pandemic first had Southern Africa in its grip, Christians referred to HIV as a punishment for (sexual) sins (Deuteronomy 28: 27-29), and compared it to the plagues meted out on the Egyptians in Exodus (7-12). They used Deuteronomy 7:12-15 to justify expelling people living with HIV out of their churches: “*Do not bring an abhorrent thing into your house...*”. HIV activists worldwide challenged Christians to re-look at the Bible verses that they used to justify their behaviour. Many have overcome their prejudices and remembered that the overriding message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is one of love, mercy and forgiveness. This has led to more and more churches being less judgmental and reaching out to people suffering as a result of HIV, often in partnership with their Governments. And, slowly, the epidemic is retreating in most countries.

⁸⁰ Peter believed firmly that his ministry excluded gentiles (non-Jews), but his mind was changed completely by God's intervention (Acts 10: 9-17; 27). He ended up preaching the Gospel directly to some Roman soldiers (Acts 10: 44-48). This led to the apostles' early ministry first being opened to non-Jews (Acts 11: 1-4; 17-18). Without Peter responding to the Spirit's leading him in a totally new direction, Christianity as a world religion would not exist!

Transforming Masculinities: Returning to Scripture for guidance in today's world



Time to talk: The Church's response to gender transformation

Many churches today are on a similar journey of discernment as they were regarding HIV in the past. They are asking questions about how to build healthier relationships between men and women in ways that respect the dignity and equal potential of both men and women in church and society. Governments are taking this issue seriously also, as gender inequality hampers development and undermines human rights.

- Is your church also on such a journey?
 - If yes, talk about aspects of the journey that your own church may be on, and think of examples of Scriptures that you might have grappled with as a church.
 - If you have not noticed that this has become an issue for your church, talk about why you think it is the case.
 - What might be some of the main challenges on this journey, and how might your church overcome them?
- How does the journey of your church influence your own journey with this question?

"We men are the head, but you have to live up to it. We like to be the head, but we don't like to live up to the responsibility. That's our problem!"
Bishop Joshua H. K. Banda, Zambia

"Men must learn to forgive and to say 'I am sorry', and not to hold grudges against women. It is OK for a man to cry if he feels like crying. The nation will be built by men who have changed."

Tool 3 opened up some important questions about how the Bible talks about men and women. It showed that the Bible has been used to justify men's domination over women, children and the environment. But it also showed that it can equally be used to demonstrate the equal dignity of all human beings, as well as the integrity of nature.

In Tool 2 and above, we also learnt that underlying all human relationships, there is a basic **struggle for power**, and that the age-old social system of patriarchy has organised most societies under the control of men. This is also true of the Old Testament and New Testament times. So when we read these texts, we need to remember the cultures of the times.



Time to talk: Harmful ideas about what it means to be a man

- Complete the list below of the most negative and harmful ways of being a man that you can think of:
 - Uses force and violence in relationships
 - Has sex with as many women as possible
 - Feels entitled to have sex when he feels the urge
 - Does not have a relationship with his children
 - Calls out to women in public about their bodies and how sexy they are
 - Does not recognise the human rights of women
 - Emotionally, he...
 -
- Are there any cultural practices that are currently being misused in your community or your country that entitle men to selfish and destructive sexual behaviours in or out of marriage?
- Are any of these practices supported by quoting particular Bible verses?

The Bible contains profound wisdom, but it has also been misused throughout history, as we saw earlier.

If we are to gain new understandings of the changes in society, we have to **use Scripture as a mirror to our current context, rather than trying to impose it like a grid into which we expect the world to fit.** We cannot “*pour new wine into old wineskins*” (Mt. 9:18).

Men, masculinities and sexual ethics



Time to talk: Time to talk: Masculinity, sex and marriage in the Bible

In Old Testament societies, social regulations regarding sexual behaviours were influenced mostly by the priority to have many children and so grow their nation, and males' property rights over women. Here are some examples.

Choose one or two that interest you, and talk about them using the following questions as a guide:

- Did you know that these sexual practices existed in Old Testament Jewish culture? Why do you think they were acceptable? Do you think that these are acceptable practices today?

- How have the Old Testament passages influenced current views of acceptable masculine behaviours, men's entitlements and the impunity with which aggressive and violent behaviours are treated by lawmakers?
- How have they influenced myths today about rape, and the solutions devised by some families and communities?
- Using the principle of the moral dynamics in the Bible, can you think of other verses that support this practice, or reject it? Are they in the Old or New Testament?
- What are the consequences for women, men, children and communities, of people choosing certain verses over others?

Old Testament:

Polygamy - Deuteronomy 17:17, Judges 8:30, 2 Chronicles 11:23

Some passages discourage many wives, like Deuteronomy, while others refer to it as wise (Like Judges and Chronicles).

Reading the Bible from a historical point of view, it is interesting that polygamy is mentioned very early in the Bible – the first polygamist coming into the story only seven generations after Adam (Gen. 4:19). It was allowed under Mosaic Law (Exod. 21:10; Lev. 18:18; Deut. 21:15). It could be said that the 12 tribes of Israel only came into being because Jacob had two wives and two concubines, and fathered children from each of them! Many great men in the Old Testament are said to have had multiple wives and concubines, and there is no evidence that they broke any laws.

On the other hand, see Matthew 19: 3-9 and 1 Corinthians 7:2: "*Because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband*"

Adultery – Exodus 20:14

The 7th Commandment clearly states: "*You shall not commit adultery*".

But adultery was not seen in the same way as today. Because women were generally seen as the possessions of men, adultery was seen as stealing another man's wife or betrothed. If the woman was not married, it was not seen as adultery, even if the man was married, because men in ancient Hebrew culture could marry more than one wife, and could even own concubines (sex slaves, or sexual companions).

Women who committed adultery sinned against their husbands, and were often referred to as whores or prostitutes.

But we see a progressive shift through the Bible.

In Hosea 3: 14, men are also judged for similar behaviour (and God is seen to forgive the women):

"I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with whores, and sacrifice with temple prostitutes; thus a people without understanding comes to ruin."

There is a wonderful example of a different kind of powerful man, in Joseph, who took a principled decision against responding to the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife. [Genesis 39: 1-23]

The New Testament takes this further: See Mark 10:19, and Rom. 13:9 shows that adultery breaks the Law of love.

In Matthew 5:28, when Jesus says: *"But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart"*, he seems to refer to any woman.

But he takes this much further. Many women who suffer from **sexual harassment** and verbal abuse on the street would feel much freer if this teaching was more prominent today!

"Biblical manhood is not just defining yourself as a sex machine." Pastor Joshua Banda, Lusaka

Prostitution - Genesis 38: 13-19; Joshua 2: 1-2; Judges 16:1; Leviticus 21:14

In ancient Hebrew culture, prostitution was considered quite natural and necessary to protect the virginity of young unmarried women and the property rights of husbands. In later Jewish texts, a man was not guilty of sin for visiting a prostitute, though the prostitute herself was regarded as a sinner.

It was always rejected, however, when it was linked to temple prostitution, as it was part of idol worship.

Paul is very opposed to prostitution, but he seems to see it in the same light as adultery - 1 Cor. 6:12-20:

"Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."

Jesus, on the other hand, is criticised for taking prostitutes seriously (Luke 7:37-50), and dining with sinners (Luke 5:30).

Male dominance in sexual decision-making – Genesis 38: 16-18; Genesis 4:25

In the Old Testament, the way sex is described is always from the perspective of the man: He 'went into her', 'he lay with her', or 'he knew her'. Except in Song of Solomon, women's sexual rights or desires are not discussed at all.

A powerful man could choose whoever he wanted to sleep with, but a woman's own will was almost never asked, and women who took the sexual initiative are usually presented as adulteresses or prostitutes (e.g. Potiphar's wife).

But notice what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:3: *"The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights (i.e. in bed), and likewise the wife to her husband."*

and in 1 Corinthians 7:4 *"For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does."*

Widow inheritance - Genesis 38: 7-10, and Deuteronomy 25:5-6. According to the Law of Levirate marriage:

"When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. "It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel."

However, in Jewish culture, if either the man or the woman refuses, both have to go through a ceremony releasing them from this marriage. In fact, levirate marriage is hardly practised among Jews today, and even frowned upon.

This practice is not mentioned specifically in the New Testament.

Rape and Bride abduction

Sexual violence, like violence in general, was quite common in Old Testament times.

According to the Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy 22: 23 -27, a woman was guilty of adultery if she was raped but did not scream, but not if she did.

Deuteronomy 28-29 proposes a remedy for rape still used in some rural areas today: *"If a man meets a virgin who is not engaged, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are caught in the act, the man who lay with her shall give fifty shekels of silver to the young woman's father, and she shall become his wife. Because he violated her he shall not be permitted to divorce her as long as he lives."*

The story of Tamar's rape by her brother in 2 Samuel 13 1-22 shows how such an act can be minimised in a culture in which the needs of men (for sex, power, acceptance by friends) far outweigh the needs of women. She ends up living as "a desolate woman" (vs 20)

It seems women had so little value, that Lot (in Genesis 19: 7-8) and a Levite and his host (in Judges 19: 23-26) offered their daughters and concubines (sex slaves) to a huge crowd of men who intended to rape his male guests, because hospitality between men was deemed to be more important than the women closest to them.

Judges 21: 19 tells the story of young virgins abducted as spoils of war. It is interesting, though, that the last verse of the chapter (25) says: "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes."

The New Testament never specifically mentions rape or bride abduction. However, it is very clear that any actions that are not out of a place of love, and not for the good of the Body of Christ, are not acceptable.

So where does all this leave us?

On the face of it, the Bible does not seem to have a consistent position on all aspects of sexual ethics and acceptable masculinities. It does seem that the Old Testament supports, or does not condemn, some destructive ideas and behaviours.

One thing this quick overview shows is that it can be dangerous to simply take verses from the Bible and claim that the Bible says so, which a literal interpretation does. A contextual reading opens up a sense of the progression of thought between the Old and New Testaments.

So, how do we decide what is right?

Paul gives us a hint as to how to approach the Old Testament: "*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial...*" (1Corinthians 6:12)

And Jesus is clear that he came, not to abolish the Law (of the Old Testament), but to fulfil it. The rest of this section explores this dynamic a little further.





Time to talk: How do we decide what's right?

- Spend some time discussing what you think should be criteria for deciding whether a biblical interpretation is correct.
- You may want to make a list, and then number them, with 1 being the most important⁸¹.

Male headship, authority, responsibility and leadership

In many cultures all over the world, a man who is not the head of his household is seen as not a man at all. And headship is normally defined by his ability to provide for his family.

We talked earlier about the tragic loss of identity and self-respect that many unemployed men in Southern Africa suffer because they are not able to provide for their families, and many end up resorting to violence.

This understanding of masculinity is based largely on the first few chapters of the Bible: Genesis 2 and 3.

Gender activists have correctly challenged these patriarchal ideas because of the suffering patriarchal excesses have caused women.

But the agony of many men who feel they are failures because they cannot meet this basic standard of manhood, make it even more urgent to ask ourselves if these Scriptures have been used in ways that are consistent with God's plan for humanity.

Interpreting the Creation in society today

Let us listen to some of the different arguments for male headship in home and society based on Genesis and other Scriptures:

- Man (Adam) was created first as God's primary companion. Woman was created out of man's rib, to be his helper. Therefore, women are to submit to the leadership of their husbands. Their husbands have been given the responsibility to lead and guide them and their families by God, and so are wiser, stronger and more able to provide for the household.

This argument basically gives all power and authority to men, but also burdens them with all the responsibility. It is open to abuse, violence and destruction.

⁸¹ Perhaps the most important criteria for discerning what the Holy Spirit is saying through The Bible relate to whether our interpretation:

- is based on the core values of the Gospel: love and mercy,
- does not just serve our own interests, and
- respects human dignity and leads towards greater wholeness.

■ Some churches in Southern Africa⁸² have called on men to stop abusing their power, More churches are standing up against gender based violence and men's sexual behaviours that spread HIV. But they have **not challenged the idea of male headship**. Instead, they emphasise that this God-given role needs to be exercised with responsibility, and that men need to exercise their leadership role by following Jesus' example of servant-leadership. They do not challenge unequal gender relations because they believe these are God-given, based on Genesis 2. But they do expect men to fulfil their superior role responsibly, and with gentleness and love.

"We men are doing a bad job. It is a very serious problem. We love the power but we don't love the responsibility. Shame on us, men."
Pastor Joshua Banda, Zambia

■ A third response is more radical. **Genesis 1: 26-28** is often used to show that men and women are **created equally**, both representing the image of God, and thus should be given the same dignity and respect. They were **both given authority** over all living things. If men and women are created equal, then the different roles God has given men and women according to Genesis 2 and 3 should be respected equally. Men should not dominate and women should not be seen as inferior.



Time to talk: Genesis, gender equality and gender roles

Take time to read the above arguments through carefully, and make sure everyone in your group understands them.

- Jesus has warned that we can tell false prophets from true by judging them 'by their fruits'. Discuss each of the positions above, and talk about their consequences, for women, men and children and for society as a whole.
- Based on your conversation, which do you think would offer a more constructive teaching on the Creation in your church and society?
- What are some of the gaps, dangers and pitfalls of this perspective?

Going back to the roots Genesis 1 and 2: Creation of mankind or humankind?

NOTE: Tool 3 (*Exploring how the Bible talks about men and women*) examines the creation narratives more deeply, and interested readers are referred to pages 34 – 37 of this Toolkit.

In Tool 3, we re-read Genesis 1-3 using a more accurate translation of the original Hebrew for crucial words like 'Adam' (see page 37). And when we do that, it becomes clear that Genesis 1 and 2 do not actually contradict at all!

According to the original Hebrew, the first human being (*adamah*) was neither man nor woman, and the sexual differentiation only came about once this first 'creature of the earth' was

⁸² Such as Northmead Pentecostal Church, Lusaka, mentioned by Adriaan Van Klinken (2011) in *Male Headship as Male Agency: An Alternative Understanding of a 'Patriarchal' African Pentecostal Discourse on Masculinity*. *Religion and Gender*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2011), 104-124 www.religionandgender.org

differentiated into two equal parts. So we see a picture of two human beings, created as equals and partners in the Image of God.

When the man (*is*) awakens, he is excited to see another person, whom he identifies as woman (*isshah*), and recognises their oneness when he cries out '*this is flesh of my flesh*'.

What about Genesis 3, and man and woman's God-given roles?

Some writers⁸³ have pointed out that the role division only took place AFTER the fall from Grace, when Eve and Adam were banished from Eden. And it is only then, also, that Adam takes it upon himself to name Eve. They argue that God was not setting out an ideal order of being. These are the inevitable results of human beings having cut themselves off from God through their sin.



Time to talk: Genesis and gender equality and roles

- How do you feel about the interpretation of Genesis 2 using the original Hebrew word for the original human being? (How) does this change your view of yourself as a man, or as a woman?
- Do you think it was God's intention in creating humanity that man rules over woman? When would God have said this if that were the original intention?
- How would the world be different if the world was ordered according to this new understanding? What would be better, and what do you fear might be negative consequences?

Masculinities and the New Testament

Both Paul and Jesus refer back to Genesis 2. Let us briefly compare how they use it, taking into account the societies where they lived.

PAUL:

In 1 Corinthians 11:8,9, Paul referred to Genesis 2 to argue for men's superiority and authority over woman, and made very specific hierarchical rules for how women should behave in church. Some theologians argue that this letter was written early in his ministry, when he was still very influenced by his Jewish culture.

Later he wrote in Galatians (3:28): '*...there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female. All are one in Christ Jesus*'. This shows a big shift in his thinking: from a gender unequal view to one which goes right back to Genesis 1:27. Jan Jans (2015) sums it up like this: "*Now in terms of a 'new creation' in Christ,... all of us are no longer male and female, but first and foremost persons before Christ, [and our] sex or gender is actually irrelevant.*"

⁸³ An easy to read overview of this argument is given by Rachel Evans Read (2012). Is patriarchy really God's dream for the world? <http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/patriarchy>

JESUS:

Jesus made it clear that the Law of love (for God, ourselves and our neighbour) is to be the main criterion for right and wrong.

In Matthew 19: 3-9, he used Genesis 2 in a completely different way. He didn't talk about male superiority. (In fact, he NEVER mentioned it!) Rather, he argued here against the cultural practice of men divorcing their wives too easily, by reminding them that they had become 'one flesh' with their wives (quoting from Gen 2:24). So he challenged the cultural view of women as possessions of men. Instead, men should take women seriously, and their wives as part of their very selves.

Searching for role models

In the end, what matters is not our clever arguments, or who is right or wrong. What matters is how we live, and what fruits our lives produce. We have seen many negative role models in the Old Testament, as well as some positive ones like Joseph. Let us look at the lives of the two most influential role models in our faith.



Time to talk: Paul's call to a new manhood, a new society

There is evidence in Paul's writings that he was on a journey with Christ that changed him, both as a person and as a man.

In 2 Corinthians⁸⁴, Paul defends his ministry in what appear to have been bitter power struggles with other evangelists – although he shows an unwillingness to do so.

By the time he writes Galatians, his approach is very different.

Read the following extracts from Galatians. As you are reading, think of the following questions, and then go back and talk about them. Galatians 4:21; 5:1; and 13-26.

- What kinds of behaviours does he criticise? How similar are they to what is considered behaviour of a 'real man' today?
- What does he offer as 'fruit of the Spirit'?
- In vs. 23, Paul lists *self-control* as one of the fruits of the Spirit. He also warns in Gal. 5:1, that we should not use our freedom to "*submit again to a yoke of slavery*".
- What can we conclude from this about what Paul would say to men who do not control their passions and feel it is their right to have sex whenever they want to? Would Paul call them 'real men'?
- On what does he say are the negative behaviours based, and what perspective guides the 'new man' (or 'new woman')? (Gal 4: 21; 5: 13-15)?
- From what you know of Paul's ministry, how did he relate to women in the early church? (Look back at Tool 9, pages 140-141).

⁸⁴ 2 Corinthians 11 and 12.



Time to talk: Jesus the transformative man

Jesus, our ultimate role model, said that he had “not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfil” (Matthew 5:17). In fact, he often got into trouble with the religious leaders of his day for not obeying the letter of the Law.

- Read the following passages and talk about them:
 - He spoke to women in public and allowed them to speak to him (John 4: 4-26);
 - He broke taboos about speaking to women in public (John 4: 4-26) and he even invited them to tell their stories about bleeding disorders (Luke 8: 43-48)
 - He engaged in theological discussions with women, taking their opinions seriously (Matthew 15: 21-28; Mark 7:24-39)
 - He entrusted women with the task to spread the ‘good news’ that he had to share (John 4:7-12; John 20:17)
 - He challenged the lack of respect for children in his society, and called a child to be at the centre of his teaching (Matthew 8:14)
 - He challenged the misuse of power by religious leaders directly (Matthew 23:4, and 23-24)
 - He expressed his feelings publicly, and is even recorded as weeping John 11:35; Luke 19: 41.

In all these cases, Jesus was going against the cultural practices of his day.

Some people say that those who are calling for gender equality are just giving in to today’s liberal culture.

- What were the cultural norms Jesus stood up against? What norms should we be standing up against today? Are Jesus’ norms for how we should live still counter-cultural today?

Paul sums up how Jesus lived in Philippians 2: 5-8:

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.”

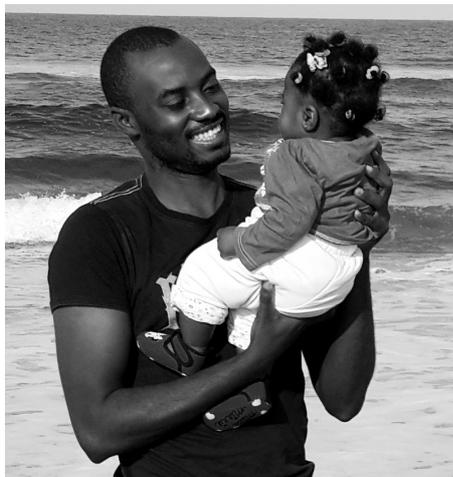
- What would men (and women) have to give up, to become more like Jesus? What would they gain if they did?
- What would have to change in your church, if it was built on the values and principles by which Paul and Jesus lived?

Why is it so hard to change, and what would help?

The many benefits of being a man in a male dominated society make it very hard to give up certain privileges one has become used to. Power is hard to give up, because it comes with privileges and entitlements – whether one has it because of gender, race, social class or economic inequalities.

It can be too comfortable, men are used to being able to influence others and be served by the women in one's life. After all, who would not rather sit and watch TV or read the paper than cook supper or do household chores?!

But it is more complicated than that. Even men who want to change find it hard to become the men they would like to be, and to own the promise that they are a 'new creation' [2 Corinthians 5: 17, and Galatians 6:15]?



Men who engage in raising their children contribute in important ways to building healthy communities. Yet, in many societies, fatherhood is not valued, and many children grow up without their fathers.

Tawanda Makusha with his baby girl Tadiwa ('we have been loved').

Source: Tawanda Makusha



Time to talk: Why is it hard for men to change?

(If it feels more comfortable, feel free to divide into groups of just women and just men.)

- What are the influences on men that make it hard to relate differently to women and other men?
- Why are these influences so powerful? (Think of your own life.)

Many men, even leaders in churches and society, have not developed a very rich inner life. Most men as they are growing up are discouraged from crying, have to be fearless and are told they should not talk about their feelings. Many men feel trapped inside.

Men are mostly rewarded for outward performance – the wealth they own, the number of people under their leadership, and their sexual success (measured by how many women and children they have). Men are constantly in competition, and are either 'winners' or 'losers.'

Even most churches seem to focus more on outward things (like belonging, doctrines, tithing, fundraising, and leadership roles) than on the inner life. In Southern Africa, when men are active in their church, they are usually in leadership, even though the majority of members are women.

If our society is to be truly transformed, then as churches, we need to develop ministries that enable men and women to grow in an inner life that helps them discover their inner power. We need to help each other to develop a more authentic spirituality, so that we no longer need to prove ourselves, but can freely live out our call to love as Jesus loved. More about this below.

What can the Church do? Ubuntu and the Body of Christ

Given how hard it is for men to change and how deeply ingrained hegemonic masculinities are, the church needs to become a true community. Our understanding of the equal worth, dignity and capability of women and men to lead through service, needs to be obvious to everyone. In the same way that the Gospel and *Ubuntu* both teach us to treat everyone with the same respect we give ourselves, we also need to recognise that each of us is shaped by those around us. A whole-church approach creates the environment where transformative men and women can be nurtured and we can live out our calling as the Body of Christ in our daily lives.

Examining our own house



Time to talk: Power and privileges in our churches

(If it feels more comfortable, feel free to divide into groups of just women and just men.)

- List the privileges enjoyed by men, women, boys and girls in your church.⁸⁵
- How does the balance of power between men and women, old and young, in your church affect the lives of those with less power?
- How does it affect the life of your church? (See the footnote below for further ideas when you are done.)⁸⁶



Time to talk: What does this mean for the Church, in practice?

Read the discussion below, between two people in a masculinities workshop, and then talk about it using the questions that follow:

⁸⁵ This exercise is based on a similar one in The Church's Training Manual on Gender Injustice and Gender-Based Violence in Zambia. 2011.

⁸⁶ Power is about influencing decision making about what is important in the church, what kinds of ministries are better funded, whose opinions are given more weight, and what is seen as acceptable in relationships. If both women and men are involved in decision making, and especially if young men and women are also given space, then the interests of the whole church can be met (not just the male minority). The church might work together to try to do things differently, to allow more sharing of responsibilities in the different ministries. E.g. Imagine if more women and youth participated in planning your Sunday services.

"Where contestation comes in is that women now have an idea of taking over from men, and taking their positions. They can be equal but have different roles, because otherwise it can affect certain orders in the church"

"That assumes that those positions were meant for men, legitimately, and now women want to take over. But it is more like women were deprived of opportunities to be in those positions before, and are now positioning themselves to also take part."

"...[U]njust relationships between women and men actually undermine.. the nature and mission of the church that is called to be one." Fulata Moyo, WCC

These two positions come from different ways of thinking – one from the side of the church, and the other based on human rights discourse.

- Together, talk about possible ways that these two positions might be able to find some understanding and move forward together? What biblical basis can you find to support your ideas?

Promoting transformative masculinities

- First and foremost – be role models that live out the values of transformative masculinity (see pp 212-213).
- Use the pulpit and all other teaching spaces to challenge men within the faith community to uphold the values of transformative masculinity:
 - Clearly show what Jesus taught and how he lived as a man who respected women as equals and challenged the abuse of power wherever he saw it.
 - Emphasise mutual respect and love in marriage sermons. Use Jesus' interpretation of Genesis 2 in marriage (and other) sermons, as well as 1 Corinthians 13 about love, and if you use Ephesians 5, read the whole text (including vs 1, 21, 28).
 - Speak about the importance of following Jesus' example of loving and respectful ways of being a man in all the church's ministries– Sunday School, Youth group, as well as men's and women's ministries⁸⁷.



"Transformed men can mobilise others to join them to transform society.
Source: Brothers for Life

⁸⁷ Use Contextual Bible studies. An exciting resource is a *Contextual Bible Study Manual on Transformative Masculinity*, edited by Ezra Chitando and Nyambura J. Njoroge. 2013. Published by EHAIA, Harare. Download it in PDF at <http://thursdaysinblack.co.za/wp-content/uploads/TIB/Bible%20Studies%20and%20Worship%20Material/Transformative%20Masculinity.pdf>

- Show the parallels between the idea of neighbourliness (Good Samaritan), the Body of Christ and service as the ideal, and *Ubuntu* - the idea that our own dignity is closely tied to that of others. There is then no room for one ethic for certain people (men, the rich, etc.) and another for others (women, 'other' groups).
- Use special days like Father's Day, Children's Day, Youth Day and Mother's day to speak about transformative masculinities.
- Use inclusive language. Avoid using translations of the Bible that still use language that makes men the norm (such as "*sons of God*"). The New Revised Standard uses inclusive language like "*children of God*", for example.

"When read in creative ways, the Bible is a powerful resource for liberation. Transformed men [and women] will ... contribute towards the transformation of families, churches, institutions, nations and the world. Together, we shall overcome sexual and gender-based violence, stigma and discrimination, sexism, homophobia and other forms of marginalisation."

Fulata Moyo, Programme Executive, Women in Church and Society, World Council of Churches

Helping men explore a more authentic spirituality and way of life

An important role the church can play is to understand why it is hard for men to change (as discussed earlier), and to offer a way of making sense of this that can help men, and women, churches and society, to change.

Richard Rohr⁸⁸, a Franciscan priest, has some ideas about what men need if they are to live as whole people that contribute to a transformed society. He says **men need to change how they relate to power**. He describes power as something that one grows into, rather than something one just has because of externals. He described the stages of developing true inner power as follows:

An immature man often feels **powerless** and the need to prove his power. This can lead to aggression or 'becoming an operator' or 'hustler'. Such men live out of fear, and blindly obey those with power over them. Many groups of young men, as well as gangs, operate like this, and their show of power can be very destructive, to themselves and others.

One way to obtain **power is by** the people a man **associates** with, and by promoting an 'us and them' approach. We see this in churches which have a very strict rule system for who is in and who is 'of the world'.

The third and more successful way of feeling powerful is when a man owns the **symbols of power** – he is rich, has many relationships or a beautiful woman, and is a senior leader in business or in the church. Rohr says this kind of man is in 'golden handcuffs' because he is still not free. Such men put a lot of energy into keeping the things that give him this sense of power and control. (E.g. Solomon or David in the Bible.)

⁸⁸ Father Richard Rohr is the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and an international author and speaker. For more information see www.cacradicalgrace.org. This section is based on: *Men and Power*. In: Gennrich D. 2013. *Men and Masculinities in South Africa. Volume 3: Faith-Based and Community Resources for change*. PACSA, Pietermaritzburg.

Unless a man experiences some sort of crisis, he is unlikely to move to more inner forms of power – the **power within** given by **knowing oneself** and embracing the weak or 'bad' bits along with the good or strong. This also involves knowing their deeper **purpose** in life (e.g. Paul and Peter in the Bible). Ultimate personal power comes from knowing one is loved by God, without having to prove anything, and so is able to just be oneself (e.g. Jesus).



Time to talk: Time to talk: Developing an authentic spirituality

- Does Richard Rohr's analysis of men's journeys with power make sense to you?
- As a man, or a woman what are the traps in your own life that prevent you from accessing your true power within?
- How might you build this perspective into the teachings and ministries of your church? Use the list of ideas under 'promoting transformative masculinities' above to talk further about your ideas.
- What difference would it make in your church (and your family and workplace) if more men and women had a transformed relationship to power in their lives?

Creating healing spaces

More churches today run ministries for victims of violence, but these are usually for women.

Men are also often victims of (mostly male) violence, but they have no one to talk to about it, because men are not supposed to be weak or vulnerable. Create safe spaces where men can come together to talk about things they are struggling with. They probably won't come to 'victim support' meetings, but experience shows that they do talk about these things if safe spaces are created for them⁸⁹.

"I never knew that the things I did in my marriage were harmful to my wife and kids."

What about perpetrators? As they learn about the meaning of rape, many men come to realise that what they once assumed to be their right – to take a woman and use her sexually without her explicit consent – may have actually been rape and done her harm. But it needn't even be so extreme – just realising that they may have restricted the freedom of their partners or daughters can also be hard for men.

Talking about their feelings of guilt and finding ways to forgive themselves, deal with their anger and face their own vulnerability, can take place in such safe spaces. Once men are able to let these things go, they can become positive, transformative men, and influence others to go on similar journeys.

⁸⁹ Examples include Men as Partners and Men for Change, and community men's forums such as the Umphithi Men's Network (www.pacsa.org.za).

Some churches and NGOs have opened up healing spaces for couples. They are then able to talk about longstanding misunderstandings, anger and fears. Sometimes this can bring such healing that couples say they are friends for the first time ever.

Working together towards a new society

Join or start networks in your area that work together and share learning, and sometimes speak with a joint voice. Use the list of resources in Practical Tool 4 to help you find other organisations. Some national or regional organisations have branches in different countries and communities.

- Work with NGOs and other organisations to create joint safe spaces where men can meet and talk openly, and also act together as part of a growing movement of transformed men who do not tolerate violence, and grow in genuine friendship;
- Try and find, and make available, material (books, pamphlets, short movies, music, etc.) on transformative masculinities to increase awareness and open up conversations.
- Engage in outreach activities for boys and men, as well as women and girls, with messages of transformative masculinities and gender equality.

“As bishops, we have the power and authority to call ministers together and talk through these things”



Time to talk: Planning

- Talk with others about your ideas for how you can work in your own church to open up conversations about transformed masculinities.
- Prepare a short plan of your **next steps**: Who will you talk to? When? How?
- Refer to Tool 11, and Practical Tools 1 and 2 to help you.

Conclusion

In the end, each man needs to (re)make himself in response to how he understands Jesus' call to be a man. The Gold Standard for our lives has to be the values of the Gospel, summarised by Jesus in the commandment to love God, and love others as ourselves.

This might equally be a way to summarise the African value of mutual respect, *Ubuntu*.

Jan Jans (2015) puts it this way:

“If being a Christian is living according to the Gospel – the Good News--- which includes the promise of justice and peace, then... masculinities that lead to oppression and violence [are] surely contrary to this.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Jan Jans (forthcoming). *Masculinity: Why is this important to us as Christians?* Tilburg University, Netherlands.

