

*What's a typical Bible study in Ethiopia? Where does it take place? In churches? In homes? In other kinds of buildings? Outside? Inside? Who comes? Do parents come? Do children come? Do the children stay—with the parents? So, what's the nitty-gritty? Just describe it.*

In terms of the setting, mostly our Bible study when we are talking about Ethiopia, that includes several churches—especially talking about Meserete Christos Church. Our Bible studies take place home to home, in church members' houses. Again, I would like to make it very specific, especially in the capital city and in the towns. The rural area Bible study is different from cities and small villages or towns.

*Your home is in the capital?*

Yes, in the capital. In some towns it seems almost ?? home to home, especially when I'm referring to Bible study, I'm talking about small group Bible study and mostly this comes from our underground experience, small group experience and home-to-home underground experience.

*So this is something you did when the Communists were in power?*

Exactly.

*And you continued the pattern, even though other options would be available now?*

Yes, we have freedom, relatively, to meet in a church building. The building is not necessarily what we are thinking as it is here, and most of our church gatherings taking place would include children. It's a very simple meeting place. That is for Sunday worship. But we are still trying to organize all members into a home-to-home Bible study program and then a prayer program as well.

*Are prayer and Bible study the same thing or do they . . . ?*

We used to have the prayer meeting and Bible study separately to devote ourselves to long prayer and in Bible study to just focus on Bible study and a short prayer. But nowadays things are changing and people get busy, especially in cities, and it's hard to find a specific time for prayer and Bible study separately, so now we are trying to have it together, part of the time for prayer and part for Bible study, usually for about two hours altogether, maybe one hour for prayer, and one hour for Bible study.

*Which do you do first, or does it change?*

Usually prayer is first, and when people come, usually the person who comes first just starts praying, and we do not necessarily wait till everybody comes. We have praying and then we have Bible study.

*So that means people come quietly and reverently. There's not lots of chit-chat or small talk before you start?*

Yes, usually. Usually we start with prayer. Then after prayer we greet each other and chat a little bit and then Bible study. Then we stay together for some extra time of fellowship.

*So your social time comes between the prayer and the Bible study and then after the Bible study.*

Yes, the between is very short, just greeting; but we would like to focus, we would like to keep ourselves with the prayer experience, that's our ??

*You want to sustain that through the Bible study.*

Exactly. And we want to have that kind of prayerful spirit. That's the culture.

*I find it very interesting that you come in with a certain kind of reverence then, or quiet expectation.*

Oh, exactly. We have high expectations for Bible study. Our Bible study is a time to have fellowship with each other, and also it's a time to have fellowship with God. Our prayer is we have high reverence for God's presence there. We bring whatever our burden, our challenge, our questions, our difficulties, our struggles to God during our prayer session. Prayer is opening ourselves to God, inviting God and inviting the Holy Spirit's guidance, to see what God wants to speak to us and to listen to what God is speaking to us. So a high expectation is there.

*Now that you've combined the two more, does the prayerful attitude change how you study the Bible in the second part?*

No, usually I think we perceive, if I'm generalizing, we perceive our prayer as something we speak to God. Of course, during our prayer time the Holy Spirit can speak and give us some words and some kind of encouragement and enlightenment, and we can even share sometimes, despite our Bible study plan, we can share those things, those insights. We do expect, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14, when we are gathering there is an expectation of maybe songs ?? and maybe some kind of word of encouragement to the group, or for individuals. Not necessarily prophecy, but still, even if that happens, we are open for that too, and also when we study together, that is the way we expect God. We spoke to God through our prayer, and we expect God to speak through the word to us. So it's kind of listening more and ?? through the word. I don't know if that makes sense.

*So the listening happens more in the Bible study than in the prayer . . . ?*

Through the Bible study, when we are reading the Bible and we believe that God will speak through the word, which is more than something we sense through our prayer time. Or—it's not something ?? we try to please each other of course.

*When you pray, are there silences in the prayer time?*

It depends. Silence, also verbalize. Sometimes we pray just simultaneously without waiting for each other, and we all pray together with audible voice. Then, if we are loud, the leaders encourage us to get it down a little.

*How does he do that? Or she do that?*

There are several ways of doing that. They may interrupt with kind of giving some guidance, some prayer request or missional information, and they'll say, shall we do that, quietly, or something like that, without interrupting or discouraging the prayer atmosphere.

*How is the leader chosen for prayer time, and is it the same leader as the leader of the Bible study?*

Usually, yes.

*Is it the host?*

Not necessarily.

*And how is that person chosen? By the pastor?*

Each Bible study group recruits potential Bible study leaders from their own group according to the group members' activity, contribution, understanding, interaction, and insight. It's kind of preparing potential leaders, whether the leader is a woman or a man, and the leader is the one who intentionally recruits and then suggests other leaders by observing their gift and by observing their commitment. And their commitment is one very important thing.

*And you do have women leaders as well as men?*

Oh, yes.

*Half and half or . . .*

(chuckling) In fact we're not looking for the number.

*So you're not worried about . . .*

Exactly. I think most of our Bible studies, especially during the Communists was led by the women.

*Okay. So women did have a . . .*

Oh yes. (unclear) There were leaders during the persecution time. There was a time when things changed, especially when eldership was issued. At some point the church leaders decided not to have women as elders, but they can participate in all kinds of ministry, including the evangelist office. In our context, most full-time ministers are called evangelists. We are starting now just having pastors, but evangelists in fact are doing the pastors' job, but for some reason we call . . .

*. . . you call them evangelists, and women are doing that.*

Yes, but as I said, at some point the leaders decided not to have women elders. But we have evangelists, but not elders.

*What do the elders do?*

Elders are the lay leaders. They're the ones who do the leadership. I think our elders are more powerful leaders in terms of decision making, even more than pastors or evangelists.

*So the elders who are actually not paid are more powerful than the evangelists and the pastors who are paid. Is that right?*

Yes.

*Okay, very interesting. Are they older men?*

Mostly yes, but not necessarily, depending on their gifts. Elders are elected by their congregations. But nowadays things are changed. After debate, after discussion, after a long discerning process, now our decision is changed. Now women can participate in elders ministry. That was a big issue and now . . .

*And when did that happen?*

About four years ago.

*So it's a relatively new development?*

Yes and no, because they were part of the ministry, but at one point they were not. I don't know for how long that happened, maybe six, seven years . . .

*And now they're changing back again? How interesting. How big are the Bible studies generally? How many people?*

Usually between twelve and fifteen.

*And they're the people in a certain neighborhood?*

Exactly. Their location matters.

*And people walk to the meetings?*

Usually, yes, because it's arranged according to the area.

*Geographically. And how many groups do you have in a congregation?*

Depending on the church size, for example—I don't know. It depends on the church size.

*Now, is it evenings in people's homes?*

Usually, yes.

*And do you move from home to home or do you stay in one person's home for most of the meetings?*

One group usually stays in one home, unless something inconvenient is . . .

*Yes, unless you need to make a change for some reason or other. And do people come as couples?*

Yes.

*And what about the children?*

Unless they're very small, they stay at home, because we have extended family.

*So babysitting is not an issue.*

Not an issue.

*That must be nice. (Chuckling)*

You are right.

*So the children don't come.*

Yes. Children have their own kind of Sunday school.

*On Sunday. Or during the week?*

Not necessarily on Sunday. We have Sunday school for children on Sunday; usually that is a big gathering. But usually we do have, according to their age group, specific programming in their neighborhood during the week.

*Oh, okay. In the afternoon or in the evening?*

The evening, depending, in the evening after school, or Saturday or Sunday afternoon, depending on . . .

*So you kind of have adult small groups and age-specific groups for kids?*

Yeah.

*And do they study the Bible too?*

Oh yeah.

*Okay. Do you have a curriculum for them?*

Yes.

*How about for the adults?*

We do have curriculum for adults, too.

*Okay. What's it like?*

I think it includes several basic teachings of the Bible, and sometimes we study a book, Galatians, whatever book and sometimes we focus on a theme like prayer or purity ?? or something like that.

*And do you have a curriculum for each of those? How does the leader get ready?*

We have a special group for the leaders, where all leaders from the whole church come together. If it's a big church, we have two or three and they come together and study together, and then there's Bible study for the leaders and Bible study for the members.

*How often do the leaders meet?*

Once in a week.

*So if you're leading a Bible study in Ethiopia in the towns or the capital, then you're committing yourself to two—a leaders' Bible study and then with the group.*

Yes.

*Very interesting. That's a big commitment.*

You are right. (Chuckle)

*And what do the leaders do when they get together? Do they go through the lesson?*

Yes, they study together. And we have a different kind of approach. We have inductive Bible study.

*Okay, what's that?*

Inductive Bible study is the group plans together and arranges study questions for a specific passage. For example, as I mentioned, if it is a book study, they study a book together and try to prepare study questions.

*That's the leaders' group does that?*

Yes.

*So they get together and formulate questions . . .*

We have a special group who devotes themselves to create those Bible study materials, that is usually the role of the education committee. We have different committees that do different things. We have an education committee, we have a prayer committee. Those teams or groups devote themselves to organize whatever is their area. So the educational committee is preparing teaching materials and as I said, if an inductive Bible study is planned, they encourage all members to read for themselves and to find and to dig and to learn something from the text and share with each other, rather than lecturing.

*So people prepare before they come?*

Yeah, they study and read ahead and they come together. And then we have different study questions, and then we respond to those study questions which are for our text. So we are trying to learn what exactly that passage says to us.

*Do you have an example of study questions for a certain passage? Would you have that in a notebook or something?*

No, I don't have it here. (Chuckles)

*So that would be back in Ethiopia?*

Yes.

*It would be real interesting to see.*

Yeah, right. It's in ?? so I would have to translate.

*(laughter) So it would be super interesting for me to see. Well, you could translate, Kelbessa. How many questions for a session?*

If we study Matthew 5, for example, if we're planning to study the Sermon on the Mount, we divide those three chapters into paragraphs. For example, the Beatitudes we take just as one lesson, and we prepare maybe ten questions. And a few questions focus on the context and the content of the story, and some questions focus on the interpretation, and some questions focus on application. So mostly we are doing those things, whether from the Gospels, or Epistles, or Old Testament books. So we are covering those three things.

*Those three areas. Now, do you have them separated, like this is content, this is interpretation, this is application?*

Exactly. Like if you are reading some story, we are trying to see who is involved in the story and the way that the story takes place, and how, why, when, where, those questions.

*So you're reading the text carefully—who are the people involved, what are they saying, what are they not saying . . . So careful reading.*

Exactly. Over and over and over and the same thing for one hour they are reading several times, slowly and repeatedly. So that is the design. And those questions encourage us to do the same thing when we are reading the Bible devotionally for ourselves.

*So you're really teaching them method or an approach to it.*

Exactly.

*In an hour, how much time do you spend on each of the three areas? I suppose it depends on what kind of text it is.*

Exactly. And sometimes people are very interested in the content and sometimes the interpretation and sometimes the application part might be very important, because it says something for us now that relates to our life and whether it's encouraging us, whether it leads us to change our mind in some issues. You know, it is very important.

*Are some studies controversial? Do you have disagreements?*

Yes.

*Can you give me an example? And then I'd like to know what you do about that.*

I don't remember.

*Women in ministry, were some of those texts controversial?*

No.

*Right away you said some texts were controversial, Kelbessa, so . . .*

Well, we have concerns because it is there, but I don't remember specifics, Mary.

*Would theology sometimes be controversial? Does the question ever come up about Jesus' divinity and humanity?*

That is not controversial, because we came from a strong Orthodox church influence, . . . so a high view of . . .

. . . so our culture is influenced by Ethiopian culture/church ??, Trinitarian approach or view. So the divinity of Christ is not controversial.

*I'm trying to find something that's controversial. Relationship to the state—would that be controversial? Like would you all read Romans 13 with—would you have some variance there in terms of how you read Romans 13?*

At some point it was controversial because—ah, yes, that's a good point, Mary, thank you, (chuckle) because it encourages us to view them as God's agent or God's servant or whatever. For some it was really hard to view the Communists as God's agent because so many people were killed and it was the Communist government time and we had really bad experiences as a conscientious congregation/nation ???. And it is really hard to view, to accept, and to say, "Yes, they're doing God's will; yes, they have the sword which is given—they get all this power from God to kill some people." I mean, that was hard, and it was even hard to explain and to understand those things.

*Well, I think just because God ordained government doesn't mean that government is always being obedient to God.*

Exactly. However, despite this controversy we learned something. Yes, what they are doing is bad, but it's OK to find ways to say no to what government is doing, but it's not OK to hate the government officials. Some people lost their family members and it's easy to have some kind of bad attitude or . . .

*Sure.*

Yes, we are powerless to do something but it's not easy to love God's people. It was really practical. It was something there. It's not theory. It was something we were dealing with every day. So, it was really hard.

*Yeah. Right in your face. You cannot avoid it. Whereas we in this country can avoid things pretty easily. Do you ever disagree about what the Holy Spirit is saying through a particular text, or what God is saying? You talk about it as God speaking to you through the word? Or do you talk about it as the Holy Spirit speaking? Is it more God?*

Both. (chuckle)

*I just wondered if that was important there. So both. God, the Holy Spirit. Jesus?*

Yeah.

*Any member of the Trinity can speak through the word. OK, got it. Do people disagree about what that might be sometimes?*

I don't think we disagree if we creatively see God is speaking through, but I don't see a disagreement, rather I see a lack of understanding or a struggle to understand really what the text says and trying to find, to understand more.

*I just wondered if there were times when you have to make a decision about what the Holy Spirit is saying and how those things become resolved if there is any difference of opinion about what the Spirit is saying.*

If the person says that he or she gets a message from the Holy Spirit on a certain issue, and if those things contradict with what is written, then that is one way of evaluating or discerning whether that is from God or not. I think we believe the Holy Spirit does not



contradict the written word and that is how we discern. And of course, there are things which are not directly written and which are hard to discern, and we bring that to community, to our group, and we discuss together and we pray together and we support each other to have more discernment. We are not living just—of course individuals finally need to decide on certain issues for themselves, if it's an individual thing, but still we support each other as a group.

*So the written word and the community both assist in the discernment?*

Exactly. Both are part of the discernment process.

*When someone has an insight that seems particularly inspired, how is that received? Do you recognize the person? Do you say, "Oh, I hear the Holy Spirit speaking through you"? Do you verbalize that, or . . . ?*

Oh yes. If a person has something to share, to say, if they sense something, usually it's very common to share, and there is room for that and there is a clear expectation. It is very common.

*Are there particular phrases that people use—Amen or . . . How does a person signal that they want to say something that they feel the Holy Spirit has laid upon their heart? Is there a particular . . . ?*

Usually they talk to the leader . . .

*Okay. And the leader makes a time for that? So you talk to the leader ahead of time?*

Yes. And if something is happening, for example, during our study and they verbalize as a group, not necessarily to the leader, and they may say, "I have this word," "I have this understanding," "I have this insight," and "I sense this." So it's flexible.

*Everybody brings their Bible, I assume?*

Yes.

*Do people mark in their Bibles?*

Some. Not everybody.

*Do people take notes?*

If it is Bible study according to what I mentioned, for example, if it's the inductive study, usually we are not taking notes. But if somebody is teaching on one particular theme or passage or whatever . . .

*So it's maybe more like a lecture at that point?*

Exactly. So then people take notes.

*What's the percentage roughly of lecture-type teaching to the more inductive approach? Which one is used more?*

At some time the inductive Bible study was more; then after, the lecture became more, because of some issues, for example, after the Communist time when the church started

meeting in a prayer house or . . . some new teaching started to take place in that situation. New teaching from this country, for example, the prosperity gospel ?? and the new churches started and new teachings started taking place and everybody was curious and everybody was interested about what was going on. So the leaders decided to address some basic foundational teachings to counter those teachings.

*So that was more lecture style?*

Exactly.

*And now, is that still the situation, or are they going more back to the inductive?*

Mostly that is going on now, and new churches are taking place now and usually from papers from the USA are coming and all kinds of movements are taking place. There is freedom. (chuckle)

*Is this good? (chuckle)*

I don't think. (??)

*Do you think the church was more faithful during the Communist time?*

The church is faithful now—and then—but there is more confusion now. There is more confusion, there is more new teaching, different opinions . . .

*So it's been a kind of mixed . . .*

I mean it's mixed and amiss. (chuckle) Yeah, it's really tough. For some that is appealing. Especially at the start it was very, very hard to discern what is going wrong. It's hard to know how to respond, whether addressing those issues or ignoring or . . . It was really hard. When people start, for example, as we mentioned, some of the controversies—this is a good example—some of the controversy was related with this teaching about the health and wealth issues and it became part of the Bible study discussion. It was very important to address those teachings and to give basic lectures. It was not something leaders just watch and say just let everybody discuss it. ?? It requires to a certain degree some authority/theological ?? understanding and some . . .

*. . . and some guidance. . .*

Exactly.

*Has attendance increased or fallen off when the Communists were no longer in power? Did that have an affect on attendance?*

No. Well—it's amazing the church grew faster during the Communist presence rather than now.

*It grew faster under the Communists than it is since the Communists?*

Exactly. Nobody knows what's going on there and it's just everywhere—the church meeting was just a small group underground. It was hard even for the believers to know how much we were growing. Leaders know, but it's not something everybody knows, because it's to protect ourselves from the Communists and not to give them information.

Then the church grew very, very fast. It was very, very ?? Still the church is growing, but it's not as fast.

*The rate of growth was not as high as it was at that point.*

Exactly.

*How long ago was that?*

About 17 years

*OK. What was the date? I guess I could do the math, couldn't I?*

I have to—we have different calendars. (chuckles)

*Oh, that's right. OK. Yeah, that's right. Seventeen years ago. '93?*

'93, '91, '92

*OK, somewhere around in the early nineties, in terms of our calendar.*

Yeah, it's starting to change but it's not sudden. Gradually things get better in some places.

*Yeah, right. Let me check my questions here. Why do people come to Bible study, Kelbessa?*

I think when they start, I think I mentioned that, for fellowship with each other.

*OK. But you said that's just a small part of it—at the end.*

Yes, fellowship with each other and fellowship with God, to meet with God.

*That's the primary thing. OK. We talked about this a little bit, but I'm interested in pushing it a little further. When you talked about the Sermon on the Mount, you said you divided it into paragraphs. Is that common? What if you study a big book, like Exodus? Would you still divide it into paragraphs and look at each one?*

Well, if we're doing inductive study we need/have ?? only a few questions to cover an hour. That's why we're dividing, according to, based on how long we can go. And if somebody is giving a lecture, that was the case. And we can cover two chapters, three chapters. We can summarize a bit so ??

*When you're using the lecture method, do you have discussion?*

Questions, yes. We ask questions. It is designed for question and answer or something like that.

*Uh-huh. Are there tests?*

We used to give tests.

*Did you really?*

Yes.

*But you're not doing that anymore?*

After each session we used to give tests. We used to give some kind of—for example, for the person who was in high school, we used to give some kind of gift, a token, a book or something like that.

*Why did you quit doing that?*

I don't know.

*Well, that sounds kind of interesting to me. Do the participants in the Bible study relate to each other between—like this is a neighborhood group, so isn't there some interaction every day between the Sunday meetings and the Bible study meetings? People are friends and they're in and out of each others' houses and they know what the problems are for the most part.*

Oh, yes. We are community oriented, so the church is almost like family.

*So the Bible study isn't the only place people socialize?*

No, it's more than that.

*Oh, here's another one that we talked about some. I was asking if you had a curriculum. Does somebody sit back ever and say, OK, over five years we've studied six Old Testament books and one New Testament book, and we need to study more New Testament books, or however it works out. Is there somebody who takes that sort of long view?*

Yes. As I said, especially if we do basic teaching like something, as I mentioned, with a book study, or something related to lecture and some basic teaching, that is done by central. That kind of teaching is centralized.

*OK, for the whole country, or . . .*

Whether for the whole region, and sometimes even for the whole country.

OK

. . . and we divided the whole country into different regions, and we have special key leaders in each region, and we have teaching programs or training programs in each region twice a year. So we have a curriculum and then we are giving those teachings and then the key leaders in each region have their own thing and then they are teaching in small groups in their own church.

*So it's pretty organized, isn't it, and intentional?*

Exactly.

*OK, very interesting. Are there requirements for leaders?*

Of course. As I said, depending on ?? which led them, and if they are teachers, they are required to take all courses, which are given by whatever, whether it's regional or central or whatever. They are required to take those courses and they are—it's important whether they can communicate well or not if they're going to teach. And their skills, their abilities . . .

*The leaders are evaluated on content?*

Exactly.

*And also teaching ability?*

And their spiritual life

*And their spiritual life.*

And their testimony from others, whether they are living . . .

*So you collect recommendations from other people?*

Yes, exactly.

*Are they ordained, then?*

Not necessarily.

*Or commissioned?*

Not commissioned, but they go through a different kind of process, from their own group, and then special training for them, short-term training, and then, you know, those processes are the way they are prepared for readmission/recognition ??

*OK, so there's public recognition that they're doing this.*

Yes. It's not hidden.

*Yeah, that they're starting this process, that they're doing the courses, people are gathering recommendations, and they're being . . . so they're credentialed in a sense, right, or certified, or . . .*

Yes.

*Okay, I think that's pretty much the questions that I had here. Is there anything you'd like to say, Kelbessa, that I haven't asked?*

I don't know whether we mentioned about the role of the Holy Spirit in ??

*I did. We talked about it some, but what else do you want to say about that? The Holy Spirit is important in your tradition so you invoke, you say, "Come, Holy Spirit"?*

Yes, we're really strongly—we have a conviction the Holy Spirit is the one who gives us enablement to understand the text and to live the text and to share the text and that is very, very important. It's not something we can do by ourselves. We really understand that the text, the scripture is, no matter how much we try to learn, it's something beyond and it's something that belongs to God and so we are inviting God's own inside, God's presence to really understand, to really get the point. And you know, as you shared the Emmaus story from Luke 24, when Jesus spoke to the disciples, they were sensing something deeper inside and as I said, their hearts were burning or something like that . . .

*Yes, "their hearts were burning within us, when he talked to us on the road" is how they phrase it.*

Yeah. I think that is impossible—I think it is hard to get there without the Holy Spirit's help.

*Or it may be impossible.*

Yeah, that is how we see it. Also, the role of the Holy Spirit is there not only by giving us understanding, but also by making the word alive, for example, while we are reading healing can take place, physical healing. That is I think the role of the Holy Spirit. We strongly believe that whatever works there in the Bible also works today. And we are not ?? something in the story and it's just only story and that's the end of it, so it worked there. And what happened—some of the miracles that happened in the book of Acts happened in our ministry. And that is certainly the role of the Holy Spirit. We saw when the blind get sight, I mean something supernatural, that was what frustrates the Communists. I mean, they really become frustrated. They try to discourage and they try to teach something, counterfeit teaching again, but something is taking place.

*And they don't know what to do about it . . .*

They cannot hide what is valuable ???. They try to test whether that is fact or true. They were sending their spies and they were really testing what would work. And it was true! And you know, it's hard to argue against it. The best way is just to shut up.

*(laughter) And let the acts speak for themselves.*

Yes, that is exactly—that is what I mean when I say the role of the Holy Spirit. It's not something we produce. God is working actively with God's word. God's word is not Paul's word or Peter's word or somebody else's. If it's Peter's word, Peter has died. So Paul is not there. ?? But something is ?? which means, you know, Christ is alive.

*So present experience proves the text, over and over and over.*

Exactly. And it gives us hope and it gives us courage to give ourselves despite what is taking place. Still now persecution is taking place, even in different regions, even now. But believers are still committing themselves to follow Christ despite what the situation is, despite the hardships. I think that is naturally impossible.

*That is not humanly . . . we are not capable of that as human beings.*

Exactly. Yes. It's not something—if this word is not God's word, why should I give myself, why endanger myself by committing myself to God?? But I see God's grace and God's encouraging, God's power to commit myself. The more I commit myself I see God is working the other's life and people get freedom from their bondage. In my context people live under demonic force and that is a serious thing in my context. They fear demons. They fear Satan and they fear spiritual force. The spiritual force in my context is not our imagination.

*Right. It's very real and present.*

Yeah, it's not something we create psychologically.

*Right. You don't make your demons. They're already there.*

Yeah. But when new believers start reading, just reading the book, sometimes demons reveal themselves. And people get free from that. And they find peace, and they find peace within themselves and they find consolation among their family ?? ; their life changes and freedom takes place in their life. So over and over and over we see how this text is alive, how God is working through these things and that is what I mean when I say the role of the Holy Spirit. It's not something we just read just for me to have information. It gives us transformation. This is the word which gives us formation in our Christian life to live as a disciple of Christ. I don't know whether I'm expressing what I want to say.

*Oh, very clearly, Kelbessa. Very clearly. I'm grateful. Yeah, it's a strong statement.*

That's why, in our teachings in the Bible class I try to verbalize my opinion when it seems to me from what I'm observing, when it seems the Bible is not taken seriously. This is not necessarily what is correct; this is what I'm observing; my observation might be wrong, but . . .

*Oh, it's not entirely wrong, for sure.*

You know, Mary, as I said, farmers are reading—they're not highly educated, some of them are from grade three, grade four, that is the only thing they have. They can barely read this Bible, but they are excited and they are sharing with others, and their sharing changes the community's life. They're sharing both the consolation among the tribes who kill each other and their sharing changes the family relationships, the husband and wife, the children and the family relationships. Some of them get freedom from addiction. So, you know, the more people take this thing seriously, they know the ?? If God is not as forceful as ??

*In your country you are reading the Bible in the context of God's activity among you as a community. That's the context and that's what affects how you read it and what you understand of it.*

Yes.

*And that is the work of the Spirit.*

I get frustrated when the Bible is viewed only as a subject of my research, as a subject of something I work on to test whether it is correct or not and when the text is silent and became my subject . . .

*. . . there's a distancing and . . .*

Exactly. And when I became retentive and ?? silent about the texts, and when the texts almost became silent, I just say, No! No! The text has got something to tell us! That's my deep cry.

*It is your deep cry and I appreciate your articulating it for us, Kelbessa. Thank you very much. This was a powerful hour, or however long it's been here. Oh yes, an hour. We will work to get this transcribed and make it into an article, probably with questions and answers, like we've been doing it here. We may put some together and organize it a bit, but we'll run it by you before we*

*print it so you can see whether you're comfortable with it and whether it reflects—and you can correct anything that we get wrong.*

Thank you, Mary.

*Thanks so much. I really appreciate your coming to talk to us this way.*

Thank you for your wonderful encouragement and . . .

*Well, you've meant a lot to me and you've meant a lot to how I think about reading the Bible, so I'm very appreciative. It was so good to have you in the class and I'm excited to have this for our ?? this year.*

Thank you, Mary.