



# CHRISTIANITY IN Context





## FOUNDATIONS

Religion  
Theology  
Bible  
History  
Ethics



## ACADEMIC RESPONSE

Black Theology  
Womanist Theology



## CONTEXT

Suffering

Trauma

Resistance

PRACTICES



Relationships  
Leadership  
Worship  
Prayer



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# INTRODUCTION



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Manhattan College, Riverdale, NY

Pastor of Inclusive Engagement  
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All Angels Church, New York, NY

Welcome to Christianity in Context, a multimedia Christian education curriculum created to introduce you to theological ideas, or ideas about God, developed by theologians over the course of Christian history. We are thrilled that you are here with us!

My name is the Rev. Dr. Courtney Bryant, but you can call me Courtney. I am an ordained reverend, a scholar of religion and ethics, a preacher, a professor and a Christian counselor. I'll be your guide for this journey as we explore aspects of Christianity and academic theological terms that sometimes intimidate people.

The lessons and the terms we will share will enhance your understanding of God, the Scriptures, Christian community and your own devotional life. They are designed with the African American believer, and believers of the African Diaspora living in the United States, in mind. Not only will we be learning new theological terms, but we will be asking tough questions about the relevance of the Christian faith to black people, how to do theology and the best ways to support one another though the variety of crises we experience as we try to survive in a world that seems to want to harm us physically and spiritually.



At this very moment we find ourselves battling a pandemic that is raging across many continents. It has changed the way we work, the way we socialize AND the way we learn. We have watched as our communities have been ravaged by COVID deaths and financial insecurity and the persistent harassment and violence of the police. Last year, during pandemic, the world watched as police officers murdered George Floyd in gruesome fashion. Violence against Black people by those charged to protect us is nothing new. The reality of George Floyd's death is simply the most pronounced example of the racism that runs rampant in the United States. These incidents, juxtaposed with the mercy shown to violent insurrectionists at the Capitol Building, on January 6th, 2021, remind Black folks of the caustic and unjust nature of the environment we live in, and the fact that justice, innocence, guilt and assistance are often determined by the color of a victim's/aggressor's skin. But where is God in all this, and what is the expectation of black Christians in these crazy times? What about the issues of oppression and alienation that exist within the black community itself? How might a better understanding of the study of God help?



Special circumstances require special preparation. Consequently, we want to arm you with additional information that will help you make theological sense of all that is going on in the world. We will do this by giving you theological language that may be unfamiliar, but will illuminate aspects of the Christian faith that you've probably had questions about for a while. During our time together we will consider theological questions. We will also delve into the interpretation of Scripture, the role of the Holy Spirit and how to live into Christian community in the various contexts of racial, economic and oppressive antagonisms that visit black communities and complicate Black Christianity.

## HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

Each lesson will consist of 4 steps: LEARN, REFLECT, PRACTICE, PRAYER. The LEARN step in each lesson will include a conversation with a religious scholar or practitioner. Some lessons will include an additional resource that draws on historical and contemporary actors, songs, art and more. Want to access these resources? Click the arrows to go deeper.



Each video will highlight a key theological word, which you can also find on the glossary page of this curriculum, like “theodicy” or “epiclesis.” Don’t worry, by the end of the lesson, the words won’t seem so scary. Each video is paired with a set of questions to get you thinking about the content in the video and ways to apply it to daily life. We’ve also included an optional activity to help you practice the wisdom imparted in the lesson. Because these lessons are a spiritual practice, we close out every lesson with a short prayer that we hope you will carry with you through the week.

Lessons are broken down into sections. These include:

1. FOUNDATIONS, where we will consider the various disciplines of the academic study of religion;
2. CONTEXT, where we will consider some of the defining elements of the experience of believers of the African Diaspora in the United States;
3. ACADEMIC RESPONSE, where we will investigate some of the ways being Black in America has shaped our approaches to the study of God and finally;
4. PRACTICES, which will cover some of the most important Christian practices in the lives of Black believers and how those practices may look different in a Black context.

Finally, and we are really excited about this, we have included an official playlist that you can access on Spotify. Trust me, every song on the list is a bop! Some of the songs are intended to accompany specific lessons, but when they come together, they make the perfect vibe for worshipping and praising as you get ready for work, go for a drive or clean the house. We hope you love it as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Now that you are appropriately oriented, let's get started!

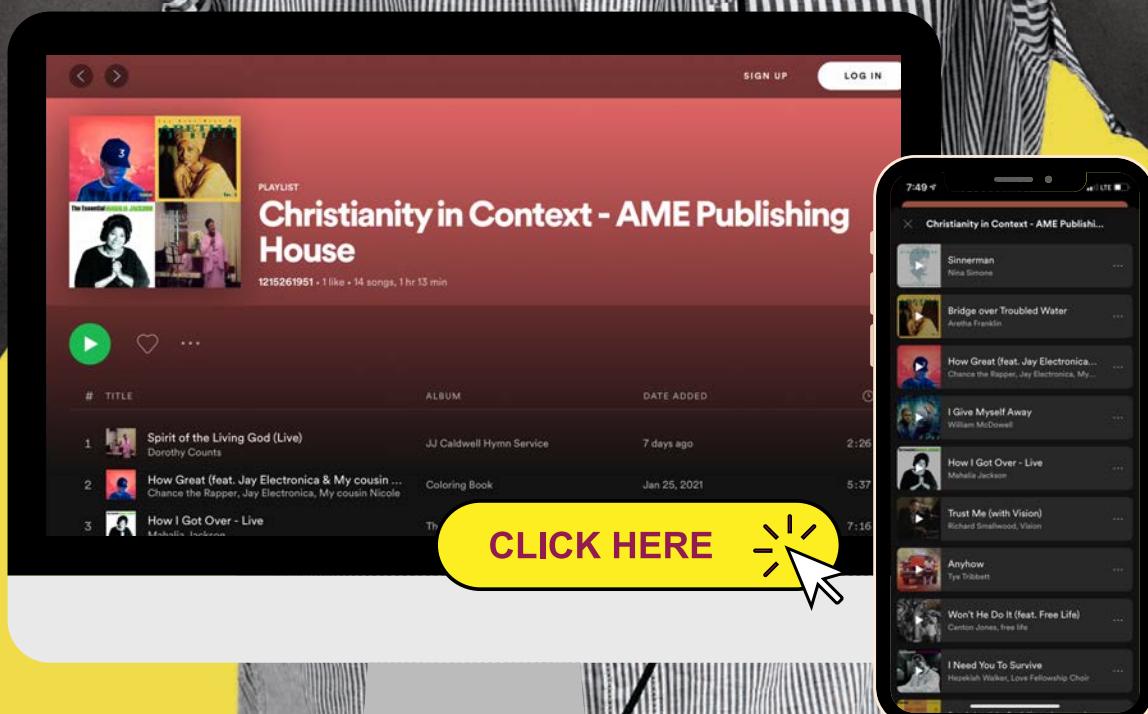
Courtney Bryant

# OFFICIAL PLAYLIST

Every song on the list is a bop! Some of the songs are intended to accompany specific lessons, but when they come together, they make the perfect vibe for worshipping and praising as you get ready for work, go for a drive or clean the house.

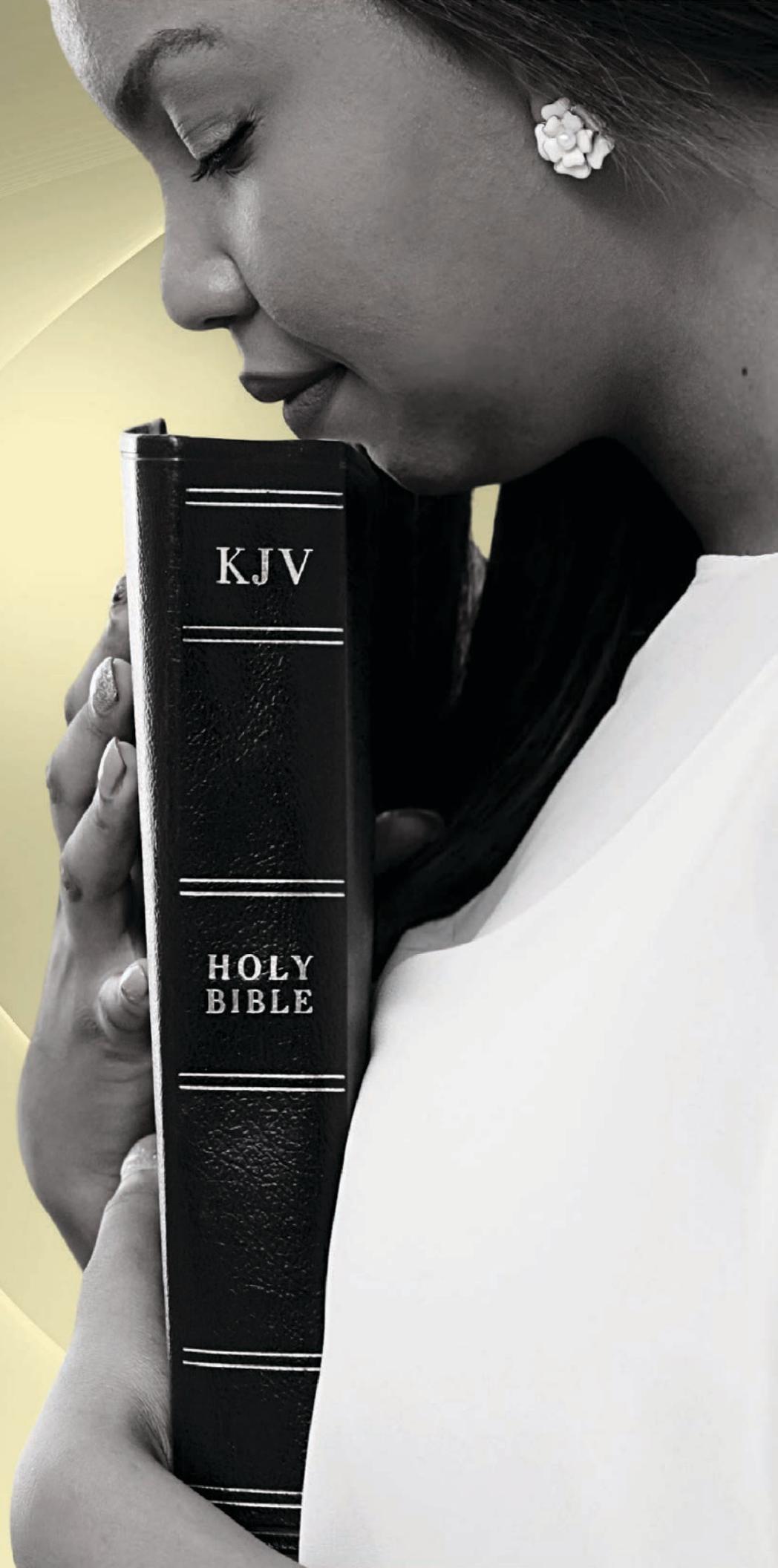


listen on  Spotify



The image displays a composite of two screens. On the left, a desktop browser window shows the Spotify interface for a playlist titled "Christianity in Context - AME Publishing House". The playlist has 14 songs and was added 1 hour and 13 minutes ago. The first three songs listed are "Spirit of the Living God (Live)" by Dorothy Counts, "How Great (feat. Jay Electronica & My cousin ...)" by Chance the Rapper, Jay Electronica, and My cousin Nicole, and "How I Got Over - Live" by Mahalia Jackson. On the right, a mobile phone screen shows a portion of the same playlist, listing songs like "Sinnerman" by Nina Simone, "Bridge over Troubled Water" by Asphy Franklin, "How Great (feat. Jay Electronica...)" by Chance the Rapper, Jay Electronica, My ..., "I Give Myself Away" by William McDowell, "How I Got Over - Live" by Mahalia Jackson, "Trust Me (with Vision)" by Richard Smallwood, Vision, "Anyhow" by Erykah Badu, "Won't He Do It (feat. Free Life)" by Carlton Jones, free life, and "I Need You To Survive" by Hezekiah Walker, Love Fellowship Choir. A yellow button at the bottom center with the text "CLICK HERE" and a pointing hand icon is overlaid on the bottom of the composite image.

# FOUNDATIONS





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## REFLECT

- What is the religion of Jesus to you?
- If religion is a unified system of beliefs, what are the core beliefs of Christianity, particularly Christianity as it is practiced in the Black community?
- How do we restore and maintain the vision given to us by Jesus? How do The Bible, community, Spirit and tradition help us do that?
- How does the lack of shared beliefs or the individuality of being “spiritual” detract or enhance one’s relationship with God?

## PRACTICE:

- Make a detailed list of the weekly “Christian things” in which you involve yourself.
- How many of those activities would you consider religious?
- How many would you consider spiritual?
- What’s the difference from your perspective?
- Are there any places where the two intersect? In the coming week, try to find that sweet spot more often. Commit to one (1) practice that will help you get there.

## “PRAYER

God, we ask that You would reveal Your shared vision to us over and over again. Ground us in the truth of Your love and call to righteousness. Help us to be one in our pursuit of Your will in our own lives and in our communities. Help us to focus our activities on being a comforting healing presence and a source of good news in our communities, such that association with Your Church would not be despised. In the name of Jesus; Amen.

[CLICK HERE](#)

# REFLECT

- Is the term **theology** familiar to you?
- Prior to this lesson, what did you believe theology to be and what were your feelings about it?
- Why do you think there is a suspicion of theological education in more traditional churches?
- What are some aspects of life that you think about theologically (with an awareness of God)? How does this impact your life?
- Do you believe that Christian theology is distinct? How so or why not?
- How have you experienced the *spermatikos logos* in your personal or devotional life? In other words how has the seed of the word within you caused you to reach toward God?



GO DEEPER

# PRACTICE

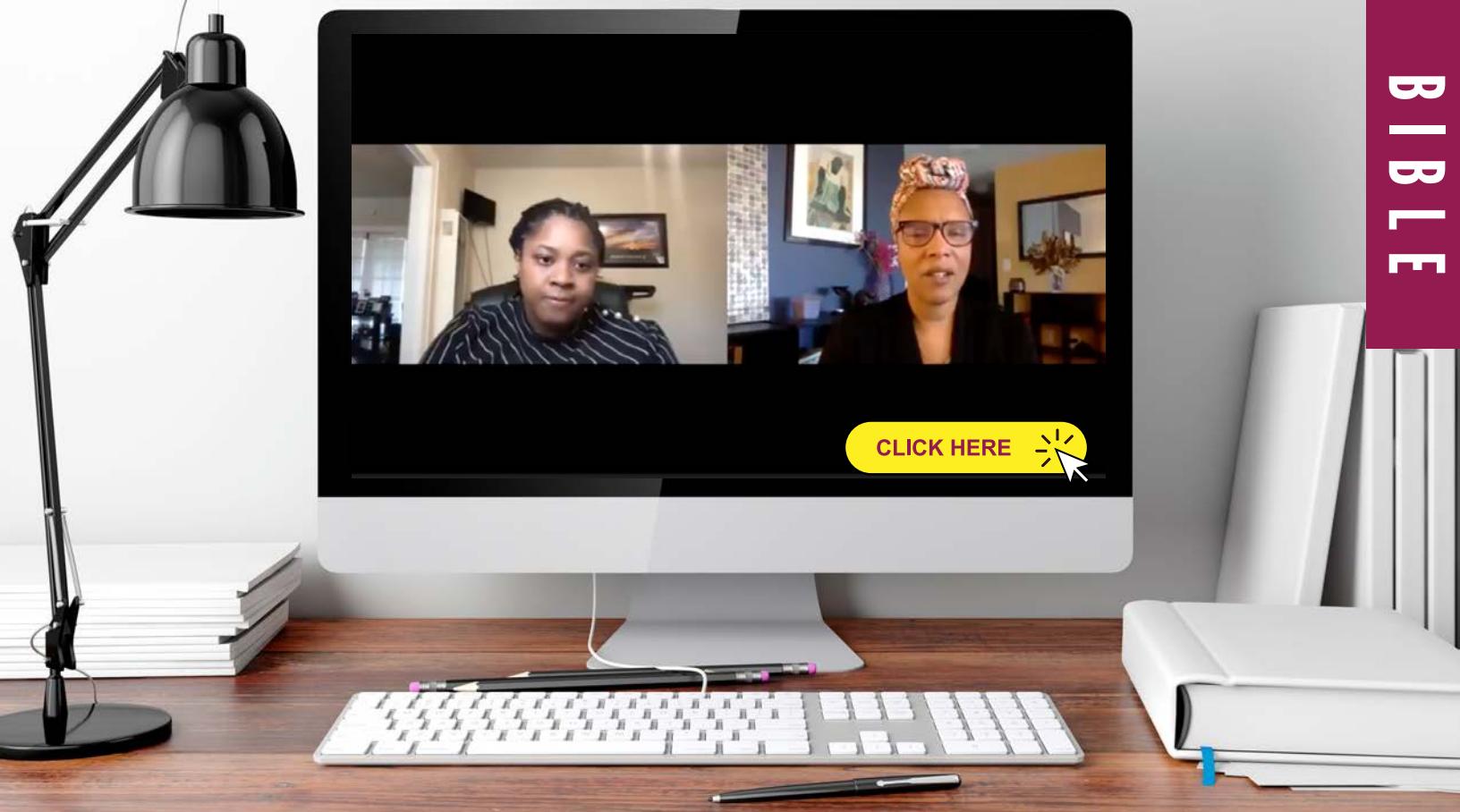
Identify the most important aspect of your life and how you connect it to what you know about God. Make a list of the ideas about God that inform this aspect of your life. How might this cause you to be more intentional in your living?

Find a friend today and discuss the three (3) most important things you believe about God and what this means for you as a Christian individually, what this means for the Black church, and what it means for the church worldwide and the global community.

# PRAYER



God, You who are and always have been, ignite Your word in me, that I may ever reach toward You, so I may know more of You and Your ways. In the name of Jesus; Amen.



# REFLECT

- What are some ways that Black popular culture has reflected biblical stories or themes? How do you think this contributes to the culture? Does it make it more credible? Do you find these inclusions offensive? Why or why not?
- How does the Persian historical and cultural context of the Bible get lost in the interpretations of Black Christians? How might that contribute to a misinterpretation of Scripture and a misapplication of Scripture in our lives?
- What happens when Black communities read difficult biblical texts from the perspective of hesed – the Hebrew word that means God's steadfast loyalty, love and care?

## PRACTICE:

Consider a Bible story that you understood one way when you were young, that shifted in meaning as you became older and understood the real circumstances of the story (i.e. issues of consent in the story of David and Bathsheba). How has this changed how you understand the intention of The Bible at large and the theological significance of the story specifically.

## PRAYER

**Lord, illuminate Your Word by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Allow us to discern from the cultural and historical context, and the message You have for our lives, a message of love, loyalty, and divine care. In the name of Jesus; Amen.**

[CLICK HERE](#)

- T** • Who gets to build institutions and movements in the history of the Black church?
- E** • Who are they? What are their identities?
- F** • How are they respectable? Can you think of stories that are silenced because they are not considered respectable enough?
- L** • What gaps did this lesson fill in about Black church history? How can remembering Black church history assist the Black community in moral and social progress?
- E** • How can the history of activism, resistance, inclusion and communal aid in the Black church help us to construct a blueprint for greater freedom in the Black community?

## PRAYER

God, we thank You for the legacy that is the Black Church and its rich history of activism, communal aid, inclusion and resistance to all that would try to degrade Your image in us. Help us to be good stewards of this history, uncovering and unearthing the treasured stories that don't get to see the light of day, because the actors and leaders who shaped these moments were deemed inferior or corrupt by society. Remind us to revisit these stories so that we might be responsible with the resources and wisdom they provide during seasons of fear, disease and oppression. In the name of Jesus; Amen.



# REFLECT

According to womanist ethicist Emilie Townes, categories of evil are created by cultural memory, the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and others. These concocted stories, masquerading as memories of truthful events, color the way we interpret experience and the ways we reason as individuals and as Christian communities.

These stories become what Townes calls “the fantastic hegemonic imagination,” a shared social imagination that drives injustice, transforming real people into caricatures through false narratives about their lives and identities. These caricatures, or stereotypes, blur the lines between reality and a story merely repeated so many times it seems true.

For example, for years Black men and women have been presented as lacking the moral fortitude to preserve their marriages and intimate bonds. Black men are blamed, branded as unemployable, criminal, inferior and Black women are blamed, characterized as emasculating shrews. These narratives distract from the lack of opportunities for Black men to learn and earn on the same level as their Black female counterparts, the impact of not being able to live into Western ideas of manhood by being the primary breadwinner, the fracturing of the family unit, as Black men have had to leave the home and travel to other cities in search of work, foisting the responsibility of leading and financing the family and household on the Black women alone.

For years, churches have emphasized the moral decay they believed was the cause of the problem, with little attention to the structures that produce these circumstances. In this way, the stories we have been telling ourselves substantiate, manipulate and edit history to construct caricatures and stereotypes that legitimize blaming those who lack for their own oppression. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral suggests that reason and experience are key resources for theological and ethical thinking. In other words, these tools help us better interpret God’s intention, as well as God’s directive in a given situation. However, the stereotypes or stories manufactured to make us think a certain way about certain people can distort or bias our perspectives.

- What are some communities that have been caricatured by the church?
- What are the stories that have been told and how have they colored how we see those communities?
- How should Christians see the world? How can they guard themselves from mistaking caricatures for truth?
- How might our awareness for the fantastic hegemonic imagination help us do Christian ethics, or make choices about our actions and behaviors when it comes to vulnerable, communities, or communities with which we have conflict or share distance?

# PRACTICE

Make a list of the caricatures imposed on you that impact your life. Maybe they are ideas about what the right kind of Christian is, maybe they are about you as a Black person in America. How has that impacted your relationship with God?

# PRAYER



God, give us eyes to see Your truth. Give sight to our ignorance and our lack of awareness. Allow us to see with Your eyes, so that we might be Your vision of hope and justice in the world. In the name of Jesus; Amen.

2

# ACADEMIC RESPONSE



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# REFLECT

- Does the kind of body Jesus showed up in the world matter? How does the location of theology change things?
- James Cone asserts that Jesus coming in the form of a Jewish man in Roman occupied Israel demonstrates that God is on the side of the oppressed. Consequently, Christians should also identify with/be on the side of the oppressed. Do you think this interpretation is correct? Does this emphasis on embodied context, that is, the context in which the body of Jesus lived and is interpreted, make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?
- What do you think about the concept of ontological Blackness: equating Blackness with those who are oppressed?
- Do white people need to take up solidarity with Black people and the oppressed to truly enact the gospel? Is this a reasonable expectation? Do you think it is necessary to be considered a real Christian? Why or why not?



# PRACTICE

Black Theology, especially Cone's emphasizes structural sin, rather than personal sin. In other words, it underscores the evils of oppression we all participate in, like classism, exploitation of workers, sexism, racism, ageism.

- Identify a structural evil, in your church context. Perhaps it's one previously named.
- Come up with 3 things your church can do to resist your identified structural evil, for the sake of cultivating greater beloved communities.
- Get your whole community in on it! Share these action items with your pastor and church ministries

# PRAYER



God, thank You for the particularity of the way You came into this world. Thank You that You are on the side of those who suffer. You know the ways our lives are mired and shaped by all kinds of antagonisms, stitched into the fabric of this culture, such that we cannot get a firm grasp of Your truth, Your justice and Your love. Grant us the ability to put the divisions of the world aside and discern the light of Your love. Help us to be that love to those who are rejected, oppressed and maligned. In the name of Jesus; Amen.



# REFLECT

- Do you think that in American society we are taught not to listen to what Black women say?
- How might a womanist approach to church and worship, or the amplifying of Black women in the institution benefit the Black church? What are the obstacles?
- Womanism challenges the normative ways of being in the world, it privileges the whole and wholeness, as opposed to the individualism and dualism of the West. How might the womanist emphasis on wholeness benefit the church, the community and even the individual?

## PRACTICE:

There are things you know because you read it in a book or hear it on the radio, and then there is the knowing that comes from the gut. Listen to Nina Simone's "Sinnerman."



GO DEEPER

- What do you feel in your gut? How does it correspond to what Nina Simone is singing?
- How does it speak to you theologically? In other words, what is God saying to you through the feelings evoked through the song?

## “PRAYER”

God, we give thanks for all that Black women have brought to the institution of the Black Church. We also confess that these gifts have not always been celebrated as they should, and in some ways we as the body of Christ have exploited these contributions. Today we ask that You would renew our minds, and not only our minds, but in the womanist way, the whole of our being. Help us God to take a new way of being, encourage us to listen to your voice which resides in our intuition that we may fully be able to recognize and enact the wisdom and innovation that Black women bring to the church and to our communities at large. Help us to see You in Black Women more fully so that the whole of who they are is treasured, as well as the whole of who we are. Allow us to be led by reason as well as Your Spirit which resides in us, and let the way we operate in the world—the way we know things and act as a result—be guided by our minds as well as our spiritual gut. In the name of Jesus; Amen.



3  
CONTEXT



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## REFLECT

According to the Libraries at the University of Missouri, Countee Cullen was one of the leading poets and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance. One of the things he explored was the relationships between faith and injustice. Like James Cone, Cullen compares the Black experience of suffering in the 1920s to the crucified Christ. While the economic situation of many Black people has changed, for many more it has not. Furthermore, money and class have not been enough to protect them from white supremacist violence, from state sanctioned murder to micro-aggressions. The Black experience is riddled with inequity, injustice, diminishment and degradation, even until the present moment. Yet faith in the saving power of a Christ who suffered and died continues to be a key chord in the theology of Black Christians.

How does the sacrifice of Christ enable Black people to endure racial oppression? Is racial oppression the ultimate concern for Black people? Should it be?

- Do you believe the depiction of a Black Christ makes meaning out of the suffering of Black Americans? What about Black people globally?
- What are some of the most difficult aspects of Black suffering to reconcile with the idea of a good God?
- What are some ways the church or individual Christians have helped you to make sense of the suffering in the world?
- What are some biblical, theological, or ecclesial (church) resources ie. hymns, rituals, customs that can assist us in calling to memory that no matter what, God is with us?



## PRACTICE

The history of the Israelites is a history of oppression and occupation by various empires that stunted their freedom and peace. Jewish culture is also a culture of remembrance. In fact in Deuteronomy 11:18-20, God tells the Israelites to create ways to remember their covenant with God and the ways that God has delivered them over and over again.

We all create vision boards in expectation of what God is going to do in our lives. These often are constructed at the beginning of a new year or a birthday so that the future blessings of God can be manifest. Very rarely do we make these kinds of provisions for our suffering.

For this activity, reflect on something your community, your church, or you struggle(s) with. Imagine God in the room. Visualize God's presence upholding you. What might your resurrection in this situation look like? Create a symbol of God's presence for times of struggle that reminds you of the truth that God is working on your behalf when it's hard to believe that God is good. Gather together words, images, or colors that capture the ways God has held you up in times of need. Assemble them in some creative way that allows you to meditate on the suffering of Christ, the feelings of betrayal and abandonment he must have felt as he hung on the cross and the resurrection he experienced when God finally moved. What might your resurrection look like? Construct a postcard, a poster, a keychain or a bracelet that is easily accessible to remind you that though you may suffer, God is with you... Always.



GO DEEPER

# GENERATIONAL TRAUMA



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## REFLECT

Racial oppression is more than just a little bit uncomfortable; It is downright traumatizing. Unfortunately, the trauma of violence, poverty, disease, and the other difficulties racism visits upon Black people is a defining element of our lives and our understanding of our faith.

Though trauma has visited us all in different ways, we are not left without help. Christian practices of prayer, and rituals help us to collaborate with the Holy Spirit in freeing ourselves from the trauma that haunts us.

- What are the issues that have plagued your family?
- What is the root of the trauma?
- How do they manifest themselves in the present?
- What do you believe is the Holy Spirit's role in healing these traumas?
- Do you believe healing is possible?

## PRACTICE:

Create a list of the traumas that affect your own family. Gather with one or two members of your family and share stories from various perspectives of how these traumas came to be. Write each one down and pray that these traumas do not have authority in your life. Place it on the altar and declare, "It is finished, in the name of Jesus! By his stripes, we are HEALED!"

## “PRAYER

God, we thank You for the way You have kept us despite our traumas. We thank You that You have allowed us to endure. However Your word says that who the Son sets free is free indeed. We know that Jesus has born our grief and carried our sorrows, so we count all generational trauma done by the power of the name and blood of Jesus the Christ! It is finished!



Despite the rich tradition of social justice and Black liberation in the Black church, many of today's Black Christians see the work of resistance as a secular endeavor. Resistance to oppression, however, is part of our lineage. Perhaps part of the disconnect is that we see resistance as social action, like marching, sit-in's and civil disobedience. Minister Candace offers an alternative, defining resistance as an action that attempts to create the kind of world we desire to live in.

# REFLECT

This requires that we operate contrary to the world and resist living lives that contribute to oppressions like: colorism, sexism, classism and homophobia and instead lean into being the light and love of God for our fellow brothers and sisters.

For Minister Candace, that kind of cooperative love or ethic of community care changes our relational dynamic, so that we operate similar to the way the 1st century church did, operating in koinonia. While koinonia is traditionally understood as a kind of social fellowship or communing with other believers, that communion and fellowship can also be understood as a kind of solidarity, in that when one person is in need, their Christian community comes to their aid because they have all things in common.

- What might our communities look like if Christians and churches considered all of their resources communal, in the same ways the 1st century church operated, so that all things were held in common?
- How might the practice of having all things in common change the oppressive conditions many Black people struggle though on a consistent basis?
- How have you traditionally understood resistance? How does it jive with the idea of resistance discussed in this lesson?
- What are some ways you can practice an ethic of community care as resistance?
- What are some ways you are already practicing an ethic of communal care? What is its impact on the lives of those for whom you care? How are you benefitting from an ethic of community?

# PRACTICE

Covenant with two friends to lean and depend on each other in times of lack. What are your hesitations to this kind of practice? Spend some time in prayer asking God to remove your hesitation and the specific obstacle, i.e. pride, greed, etc. that might hinder you from living more fully into an ethic of community/fellowship/solidarity with others.



GO DEEPER

# PRAYER

**Thank You Lord, for every gift that comes from your hand. Help me, now, to open my hands in resistance to a world that teaches me to hoard. May we all open our hands, so that our resources might be the resources of the community, so that all might have what they need. In Jesus' name, amen.**

PRACTICES





# REFLECT

**"There is no holiness but social holiness."**

John Wesley

Christian relationships are vital! We cannot make it through this Christian journey alone. Community and communion aid us in knowing that we are not alone, but that we are journeying together. Christian community and communion with other believers encourages us, teaches us, and comforts us. Church hurt, however, can stunt our growth, and in some cases even damage us. How do we make sure that we are contributing to our fellow Christians' desire to want to be in fellowship with other Christians, with the Church and with God?

Rev C.J invites us to consider the benefits of epeclesis in our relationships. Epiclesis is the calling down of the Spirit during communion, for the sake of transforming the elements of bread and wine into the mystical body of Christ, such that when we partake of communion we partake of the Spirit of Christ. Rev. C.J asks how we as Christians might extend this practice beyond the communion service, so that we might call down the Spirit to transform us in our everyday lives.

- What might that look like in our relationships? The good ones and the bad ones?
- What happens when you don't allow your relationships and communication to be spirit led?
- We forget about how the spirit shows up in the mundane moments. How might us calling forth the spirit in our mundane encounters contribute to the edification of one another?



## PRACTICE:

- Call forth the power of the Holy Spirit the next time you are having a difficult conversation or interaction. For a more advanced practice, set an intention to be prepared before you even find yourself in a difficult situation.
- Commit to finding a prayer partner with whom you can pray once a month for the sake of intimate communion with another believer.
- Pray about infusing your relationships with the discipline, love, and compassion of the Holy Spirit.

## PRAYER:

Lord, send down Your spirit of love. Send down Your spirit of peace. Lord, send down Your spirit of compassion, so that we may be one as You are one with Christ Jesus. In the name of Jesus; Amen.



# REFLECT

**Jesus takes a kenotic posture, that is, he empties himself of his power for the sake of our salvation. The Christian posture of leadership is similar, in that we pour ourselves out for the sake of the church and God, the community, and the oppressed. However, slowing down so that we might be poured back into is just as important as leaders pouring themselves out for the work.**

- What is the connection between humility and slowing down for leaders?
- What happens when we slow down?
- What kinds of mechanisms need to be in place in our ministries in order for leaders to be able to slow down?
- How does the training and empowering of leaders around us help seasoned leaders to slow down and seek out God?
- After watching the selected resource, How does Ella Baker's leadership model that of Jesus?



GO DEEPER

# PRACTICE

Put someone else in charge! Take the evening off from all work and just rest, play and enjoy life. Be sure to invite God into some of those moments with times of meditation, prayer and communion.

# PRAYER

God, help me to be a better leader, by trusting You and trusting and training others enough to rest. May my rest inspire others to do likewise. In the name of Jesus; Amen.



# REFLECT

Anamnesis is looking backward so that you can move forward. In other words, the worship rituals in which we participate, help us to remember who God is and what Christ has done so that might have the power to endure.

- What kind of worshipper are you? Private/individual or collective/communal?
- How did the COVID Pandemic affect the way you worship?
- Is there a difference between casual, individual worship and formal, communal worship done in a church?
- Think of a time when you were particularly low. How did worship help to move you to a place of moving forward again?

## PRACTICE:

Worship allows us to carve out a particular moment, to set aside a time to solely focus on God. Take a few moments to plan out how you can carve out some moments with God individually and communally. Ask two or three friends to worship with you. What rituals would you include and why?

## PRAYER

**Here I am to worship  
Here I am to bow down,  
Here I am to say that you're my God.  
You're altogether lovely altogether worthy  
Altogether wonderful to me.**  
-Tim Hughes

**CLICK HERE** 

"Because the Christian who isn't  
praying is just guessing."

Bill Hybels

# REFLECT

Prayer is communion, intimacy and connection with God. Through prayer we have access to God and the power given to us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides, encourages, teaches, reminds, convicts in the ways Jesus would if he was standing right next to us. John 14:26 says, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

## PRACTICE

Take 5-10 minutes to pray 3 things on this list. Remember that prayer is not just about what you have to say to God, but what God has to say to you. Be sure to listen for at least 3 minutes of your prayer time to listen for what God has to say.

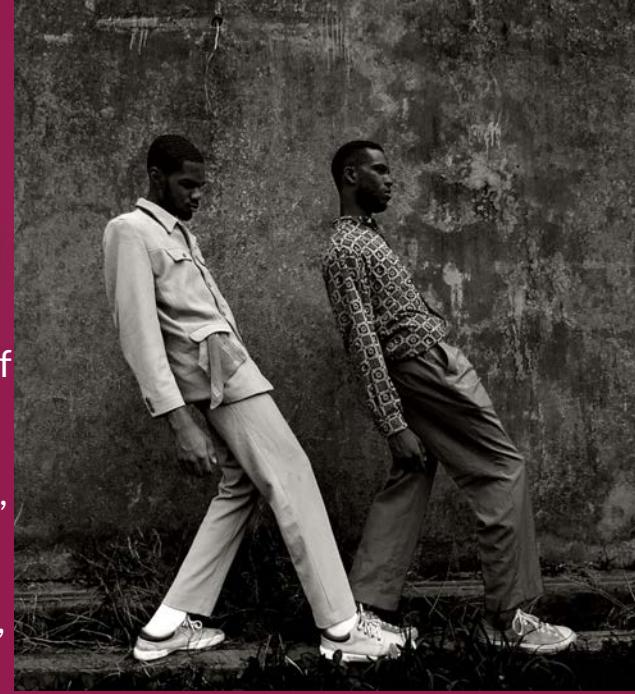
- Guidance in a certain situation
- Justice in the world and for those who pursue justice on behalf of the oppressed
- Victims of the Covid 19 Pandemic
- Developing a better prayer life
- Disconnection you feel from God
- Tell God the ways you need to feel encouraged.
- What have you been wondering or worrying about and what do you need to know to move forward?
- Your future
- For those who suffer

“ PRAYER —  
 Spirit of the Living God,  
 fall fresh on me.  
 Spirit of the Living God,  
 fall fresh on me.  
 Break me. melt me, mold  
 me, fill me.  
 Spirit of the Living God,  
 fall fresh on me.  
 -Daniel Iverson ”

# Final Thoughts

## Dance of Redemption

Christianity in a Black context is similar to a dance, a dance of redemption! The Dance of Redemption is a methodology taught frequently by the late womanist ethicist, Katie Canon, who learned it from her teacher, feminist ethicist Bev Harrison. The Dance chronicles the process of self discovery, agency and activism of communities trying to resist domination and live more fully into God's beloved community. Through consciousness raising, revisiting and unlearning harmful interpretations of religious stories, reconnecting with the Spirit and building solidarity, discipline and joy, the community constructs the pathway to liberation one step at a time.



Similarly, Christianity in Black diasporic communities in America serves as the steps we follow in our journey to discover who we are, how we show up in the world and how we participate in resistance to oppression. So often we find ourselves trying to escape the constraints and dangers with which racism litters our lives, while trying to pursue life more abundantly, in a perpetually anti-Black environment that encourages hatred, violence and discrimination against others. Christianity theologies born out of the context of Black men and women's communities resist worldly ways of living and offer life giving perspectives, enabling us to distinguish the distinction between God ordained trials and culturally produced systemic evil.

On some days, Black Christian theology helps us to make sense of the evils of injustice, violence, inequality, poverty, exploitation, and a rigged system, but there are some days when the best of theological ideas fail us. In those seasons, the practices of prayer, worship, loving relationship and participating in community give us the strength to persist in our faith as we simultaneously lament to the Lord, “How long?” In all of it, as these conversations have illuminated, the presence of the Spirit of God is in, around and through every aspect of our lives.

The Spirit is the energy that bonds us together, presses through a prayer when we are not in the mood, convicts us when we are emulating the world and gives us the power to do transformative ministry. It is the Spirit that fuels the dance of celebration and holds us in comfort when lament is the only kind of song our hearts can sing. Whether rocking us in God’s bosom, propelling us to action in the face of communal injury or spurring us to offer care and hospitality to one another in the form of embodied, financial and spiritual resources, the Spirit comforts, inspires, enables flesh to create with God. This creativity makes worlds. Christianity in a Black context is a shaping and a remaking of the world with the knowledge that God is with us and God is for us. God is in us and through God we have already overcome. Keep on dancing!



- Take about 5 mins to reflect on the ideas or learnings from these lessons.
- What lessons continue to resonate from this curriculum?
- What are the primary steps in your own Dance of Redemption?
- How will you carry these ideas with you in the future? What effect will they have on your devotional life? What effect will they have on the way you treat others? What effect will they have on the way you respond to evil in the world?
- **Write down one intention you would like to set in response to what you've learned through this curriculum.**

# **GLOSSARY**

**Religion:** Bruce Lincoln defines religion as: a discourse whose concerns transcend the human, temporal, and contingent and that claims for itself a similarly transcendent status; a set of practices whose goal is to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious discourse to which these practices are connected; a community whose members construct their identity with reference to a religious discourse and its attendant practices, and finally; an institution that regulates religious discourse, practices, and community, reproducing them over time and modifying them as necessary, while asserting their eternal validity and transcendent value.

**Spermatikos Logos:** The seed of the Word.

**Hermeneutics:** Methods of interpretation of the Bible.

**Respectability:** The state or quality of being proper, correct or socially acceptable for the sake of social and political agency.

**The Fantastic Hegemonic Imagination:** Womanist ethicist Emilie Townes' concept of a shared social imagination that drives injustice, transforming real people into caricatures through false narratives about their lives, identity.

**Wesley Quadrilateral:** A methodology for theological reflection that considers Scripture, tradition, reason and Christian experience.

**Theodicy:** The questioning of why a good God allows people to suffer.

**Generational Trauma:** A physical, psychological and spiritual dis-ease produced by both human inspired and natural traumatic events.

**Koinonia:** The practice of fellowship/community aided by the Holy Spirit.

**Ontological Blackness:** James Cone's theoretical concept of equating blackness with those who are oppressed and struggling to be free of that oppression.

**Solidarity:** To become one with the oppressed and to participate in bodily and political practices that end the suffering of the oppressed.

**Ontology and Epistemology:** The study of being and ways of knowing.

**Anamnesis:** The practice of knowing how to look ahead. Jesus says "Do this in remembrance of me" so that we know how to live as Christians because of his sacrificial way of life, remembered at the communion table.

**Epiclesis:** The act of invoking God for divine help.

**Kenosis:** Self emptying/relinquishing one's right to power over others.

**Pneumatology:** The study/logic of the Holy Spirit.

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