

THE BLACK CHURCH:

THIS IS
OUR STORY,
THIS IS
OUR SONG



bible study guide

Now faith is the substance of things
hoped for, the evidence of things not



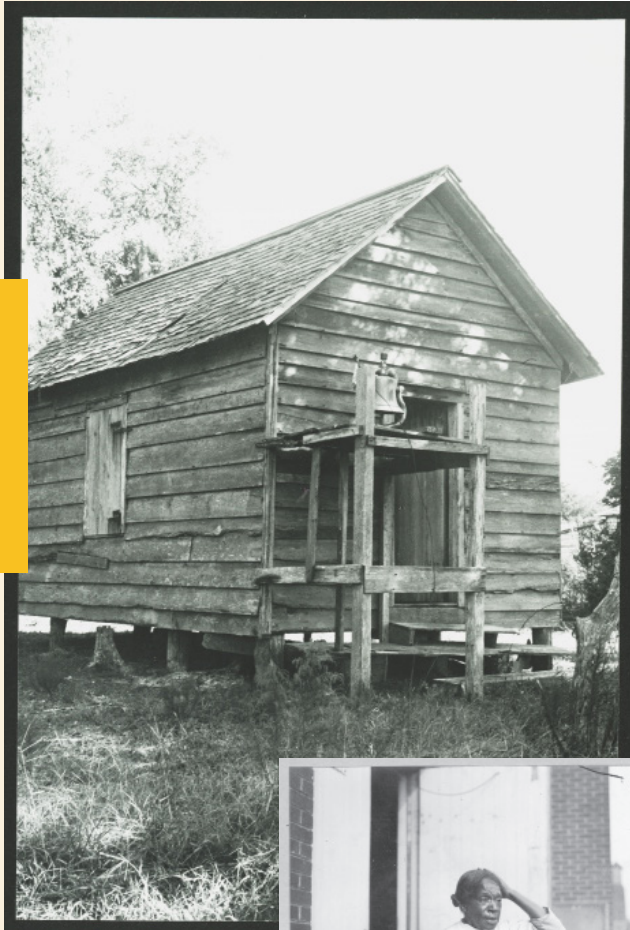
H O P E

bible

Welcome to the Black Church Bible Study! For those of you who are watching **THE BLACK CHURCH: THIS IS OUR STORY, THIS IS OUR SONG**, this guide, informed by the Word with contributions from Rev. Kip Banks Sr., will help you transform any gathering into a Bible Study inspired by the series and an exploration of the legacy of the Black Church.

WHAT'S IN THIS TOOLKIT? In this guide, you'll find a gratitude statement or prayer and discussion questions. Each section in the guide is centered around one of four recurring themes featured in the series, and includes an excerpt from scripture for further consideration and parallels in the series to explore—along with prompts to take you on a deep dive.

study



A MOMENT OF GRATITUDE:

As we reflect upon the past year, there is a measure of gratitude we have. In spite of all that has happened—COVID-19, social injustice, and economic uncertainty—the church still served. We're thankful for its place in sustaining us and providing guidance in an uncertain world. We also thank God that the Black Church rose to the occasion by pastoring in unconventional ways.

From the words of Rev. Kip Banks, Sr.: “[The Black Church] pastored, counseled the grieving, shepherded people to safe territory, found PPE masks and sanitizers, put together food pantries, moved services to Zoom and other online platforms, lectured people online, registered

new voters, led protest movements, took part in justice rallies, pressed the government to deliver goods and services, and partnered as sites for COVID-19 testing.” “[We] even elected a son of the Black Church, Raphael Warnock, to be one of the next senators from the great state of Georgia. The Black Church is still in the vanguard of efforts to save Black lives, to help sustain Black people through a very dark and challenging time.”



There are four themes in the documentary film, **THE BLACK CHURCH: THIS IS OUR STORY, THIS IS OUR SONG**, that we'll touch upon in this Bible study: Hope, Sanctuary, Community Engagement, and Perseverance. We explore how and when they show up in the series and their significance within the Word.



HOPE



SANCTUARY



**COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT**



PERSEVERANCE

HOPE



SCRIPTURE TO CONSIDER

David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines, and asked his brothers how they were. As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it.

(1 Samuel 17: 22-24 NIV^o)

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

(Hebrews 11:1 KJV^o)

PARALLELS TO EXPLORE

In episode one, Rev. Yolanda Pierce talks about this very subject: “African Americans adopted Christianity. But I also think they adapted Christianity,” she says. “They made it their own and created it so that it could provide for them something that was nurturing, something that provided catharsis, something that provided hope.”

In the Bible, the theme of hope runs parallel with the plight of African Americans in America. “Wherever African peoples find themselves in the diaspora,

they’re bringing with them ways of knowing, frames of reference, cognitive schemes to make sense of the world,” scholar Eddie S. Glaude Jr. says in episode one. Similar to Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt or David fighting Goliath, time and time again African Americans have had to stand up to monumental and systemic forces of oppression. From the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the institutionalized racism of the present day, the one thing that keeps African Americans going is hope. As such, the Black Church provided a gateway to sustain the rich cultural heritage of Africans in the New World.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ How does one keep hope alive?
- ◆ How has your faith given you hope?
- ◆ Are there other moments of the series that evoked a sense of hope for you?

SANCTUARY



SCRIPTURE TO CONSIDER

Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honor dwelleth.

(*Psalm 26: 8* KJV)

PARALLELS TO EXPLORE

The series unpacks the importance of sanctuary and community. In the early days, church service was overseen by White slave owners who worried about slaves learning to read, organize, and potentially revolt. In episode one, the brick-and-mortar sanctuaries are explored with figures like Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, who broke away from White institutions to establish their own churches. In fact, Allen helped organize the first independent Black denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Black churches, from their inception, were not only places of worship but safe spaces from racialized oppression.

Episode three delves into the myriad of church denominations, but also the desire for more “urbane and sophisticated” institutions of worship in the urban North during the Great Migration. Differing perspectives on how church services should be conducted ultimately led to the foundation of storefront

churches, or small churches that served for more expressitory praise and worship services. “You start to see storefront churches dotting the cities of Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, and New York,” Fredara Hadley says. “And those spaces become one in which African Americans, particularly ones who are working-class African Americans, feel as though they can express themselves musically and religiously most freely.”

The overarching idea is that church, in its raw form and function, is not one-size-fits-all. The series reveals how this notion evolved as a sign of resilience, by persevering to make space and offer sanctuary in every circumstance.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ♦ What are some examples from scripture that show space being made for sanctuary?
- ♦ How can we be a sanctuary for others?
- ♦ What are some things that offer you sanctuary?



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

SCRIPTURE TO CONSIDER

Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:17 KJV)

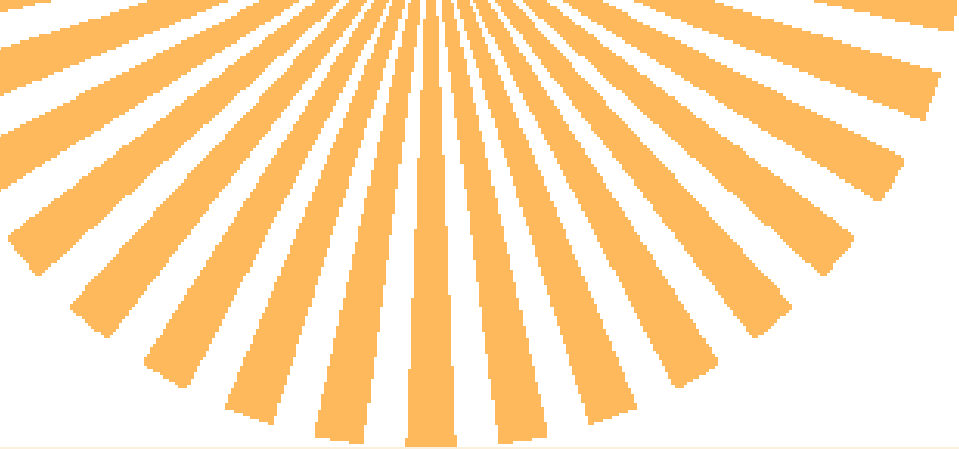
PARALLELS TO EXPLORE

Episodes three and four of the series delve into the significance of the Black Church in the fight for racial equality. Activists like Prathia Hall, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Dorothy Height, and Martin Luther King Jr. all got their start in the church by galvanizing congregations to demand the end of segregationist practices. “Moving into the 1960s, some Black religious leaders would take up the prophetic mantle of the church to stand in the face of that suffering, whether through direct political action in the streets or in the halls of Congress,” Henry Louis Gates, Jr. says.

The church’s original abolitionist roots are what grounded it to become a natural launching pad for the Civil Rights Movement. Black Churches engage communities simply by having communal discussions about what’s happening outside the sanctuary doors. The Black experience in America is largely filled with commonalities; commonalities that people in the church experience as well. By being a safe space, the Black Church approached social change head on—and it still does today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ♦ What is the function of faith institutions in shaping the culture?
- ♦ How can we be a sanctuary for others?
- ♦ What are some things that offer you sanctuary?



PERSEVERANCE



SCRIPTURE TO CONSIDER

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

(James 1: 2-3 KJV^o)

PARALLELS TO EXPLORE

Episode Two explores the concept of perseverance manifested by the Civil War, the end of slavery, and the Reconstruction period and its aftermath. President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, signed in 1865, was seen as more of a victory. For Black churchgoers, it was seen as prophecy being fulfilled. Slavery's ending was a culmination of centuries of prayers, faith, and long suffering. "This is a confirmation that their prayers have been answered, that God has heard," Reginald F. Hildebrand notes. "The story of the deliverance of the Israelites is being played out again."

The Reconstruction period tested that perseverance once again, as it was basically an extension of chattel

slavery in the form of sharecropping, white aggression, voter suppression, and a carceral system that would ensnare Black citizens for generations to come. The Black Church upheld the belief that African Americans can, have, and will make it out of any situation—and used stories from the Word to inform this belief.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ How does one have perseverance in the face of oppression?
- ◆ What scripture inspires you to persevere?
- ◆ At what point in your life have you felt the voice of God reminding you to persevere?

