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BELIEVE IT OR NOT: DISCOVERING THE ROLE OF MARKETPLACE
MINISTRY IN RECONCILING RACE AND RELIGION IN THE AFRICAN
AMERICAN CHURCH

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE HAZELIP SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT
LIPSCOMB UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
SHAWN BURGS

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

April 2023

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This Doctor of Ministry Project, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Hazelip School of Theology of Lipscomb University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry.

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MINISTRY IN RECONCILING RACE AND RELIGION IN THE AFRICAN
AMERICAN CHURCH

By:

Shawn R. Burgs

for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

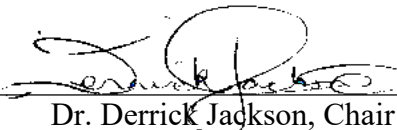


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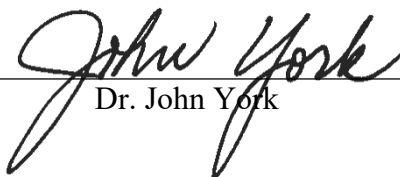
Doctor of Ministry Project Committee



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ABSTRACT

This Doctor of Ministry Project explores the experiences of African Americans as faith holders in the crux of race, religion, and marketplace and how the interconnectedness of these facets can lead to reconciliation. The purpose of exploring how African American believers experience race and religious reconciliation is a noble goal that seeks to address the challenges faced by many African American believers in navigating their faith and cultural engagement. By examining their experiences, insights, and perspectives, we can learn more about the unique challenges they face and the strategies they employ to overcome them. This information can help us develop ideas and actions that promote better cultural engagement and help African American believers connect more experientially with God.

Ripley's Believe It or Not is a popular franchise that features a collection of unusual, strange, and incredible stories from around the world. These stories can range from oddities of nature, to extraordinary human feats, to bizarre cultural practices, to historical curiosities. What makes these stories "unbelievable" is that they often defy our expectations of what is normal or possible. For example, a story might feature a person with extraordinary talent or skill, such as the ability to hold their breath underwater for an unusually long time. Another story might describe an unusual animal or plant with a unique adaptation or behavior. However, another story might recount a historical event or cultural practice that seems strange or shocking by contemporary standards.

While some of the stories presented in Ripley's Believe It or Not may be true, others may be based on legend, folklore, or exaggeration. Nevertheless, the appeal of the franchise lies in its ability to capture the imagination and inspire a sense of wonder and curiosity. By showcasing the unusual and unexpected, Ripley's Believe It or Not invites us to broaden our

perspectives and challenge our assumptions about what is possible or normal. The parallelism here is between the incredible, unusual stories Ripley is known for and the incredible stories that exist at the intersection of religion and race.

Within the pronunciation of this study, "Reconciling Race and Religion" is language that suggests a need to bring together or find common ground between two essential aspects of identity; race and religion. The word "reconciling" implies a process of resolving differences or conflicts, while the use of "race" and "religion" highlights the significance of these factors in shaping personal and collective identity. The subtitle "The Role of the Marketplace Ministry" narrows the focus to the intersectionality of race and religion in a specific context, namely the marketplace. This suggests that the study will explore how race and religion intersect and influence each other in economic or business settings, and how this may impact individual experiences and outcomes. This parallelism creates a sense of intrigue and curiosity, inviting readers to explore the complex and sometimes enigmatic connections between religion and race and marketplace. This project overviews the complex issues of race, religion, and cultural engagement within the African American believer, synthesizes the biblical foundations for reconciliation, and offers a framework for how marketplace ministry can bridge the gap between the church and marketplace.

Reconciling race and religion for African Americans is an opportunity to address the unique historical and systemic injustices that have impacted their experiences of race and religion in America. It creates space and opportunity to acknowledge and honor the complexity and diversity of African American religious traditions and to recognize the role that these traditions have played in promoting social justice and resistance to oppression while working towards building bridges and creating a more unified community. Through a series of

interviews, this project investigates the inner and external turmoil African American believers experience in church and culture. It uncovers the internal struggles that believers frequently face and validates how their cultural experiences in the marketplace can shape their spiritual path. Most significantly, it offers particular ways in which the marketplace can participate in reconciling issues of race and religion within the African American church context.

DEDICATION

To the African American church who through the hands of time have endured the unimaginable yet find strength immeasurable strength and resilience flowing through the veins of your spiritual heritage. Your complexity and intricacy inspire wonder and awe as you are truly evidence of God's beauty and majesty revealed in His creation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The labor of this project has truly been life transformational. I am thankful to God that He shaped my life in such a way that this experience has translated into a closer relationship with Him and others. This journey has been a significant one for me. I have learned so much about myself and my capabilities and have grown in ways that I never thought were possible.

To my family, Thank you. Dre, thank you for encouraging me to join this program. At the time, it seemed like the least possible thing to do. Without your encouragement and your absolute unwillingness to let me get lost in supporting everyone else's goals, this work may have never come to fruition. I offer you, in return, my heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering support and encouragement. Your constant inspiration and gentle yet insistent nudges helped me to see that pursuing this opportunity was not only possible but also necessary for my personal and professional growth. You are the husband I prayed for.

To my children, Christian, Carson, and Carli thank you for unselfishly sharing your time and cheering me on while I labor in this work. Along this journey, your love and support have contributed more than you can imagine. Each of you has offered gentle nuggets and a few outright pushes that have kept me going in the many moments I considered belaboring the assignment. I am thankful your spirits are so forgiving, resilient, and vibrant. Alexis, through thick and thin, you have always been the reminder that God's work in me inspires others. You especially remind me that He has shown you His love through the many messages He allows me to learn and live out in front of you.

To my academic advisory team – John York, words can't express the meaning you bring to this project. Thank you for inviting me into this space. Your tutelage, council, and sheer friendship make you more than a trusted advisor. You are truly my brother.

Dr. Derrick Jackson - Thank you for always believing in me, especially when I couldn't see the forest for the trees. Your words, "You've got this, Shawn," reverberate in my psyche often. Knowing that you have traversed similar terrain and continue to nurture the gifts of passion and purpose in me lend volumes to this experience. I walk away from every conversation, realizing that it was yet another formative moment that you facilitated, and for that, I am forever grateful.

Dr. David Fleeer – You encouraged me to lean into the feelings that have been most difficult to navigate. Thank you for asking the right questions, reminding me that it's ok to feel and to respond but also to consider and explore God's hand in and through it all. Thank you for reminding me to storytell and that dreams can come to life when the story is told.

Dr. Frank Guertin – Your words "sit with the gift" will forever remain with me. Thank you for your creative ingenuity, for seeing me, and for being more than a figurehead. Instead, your earnest coaching and sincere consideration have shown me that I can trust God's love to be offered through the least likely suspect in accordance with the brokenness of my narrative.

To my fellow co-laborers, this work was made especially possible because while in the trenches of this journey, you were there. I have not been alone; in fact, your presence has spurred thought, challenged my views, and pressed in on the most vulnerable places within me. What a gift you have been. Thank you.

I especially want to thank the participants of this study. Your stories, tears, trials, and triumphs made this work possible.

St. John MBC, you have served as the delivery room for this project, providing the support and space to birth this project inside the grandeur and beauty of the church.

To the Movement Church family, you've believed in me since day one. You have supported me, loved me, and labored alongside me. You are the safe space, where church is the way it should be, not the way it is. Thank you—your part in this work does not go unseen.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Importance and Rationale of This Study

The need to reconcile being Black and Christian arises from the tension between the cultural experiences of being Black and the teachings and traditions of Christianity. For many Black Christians, their cultural heritage and experiences are deeply intertwined with their religious beliefs, but they may also encounter aspects of Christianity that conflict with their cultural identity. Additionally, Black Christians may experience racism within their faith communities due to historical and ongoing patterns of racial discrimination and bias. For example, some predominantly white churches may have a history of excluding Black members or treating them as second-class citizens. Similarly, some Christian institutions, such as seminaries and Christian universities, may have a history of racial discrimination in their admissions policies or hiring practices.

The marketplace, in terms of economics and commerce, is important to the need to reconcile being Black and Christian because it is a sphere where issues of racial inequality and discrimination can be particularly pronounced. Economic disparities between Black and white communities in the United States are well-documented, and Black people have historically faced barriers to equal access and opportunity in the job market and in entrepreneurship. As Black Christians seek to reconcile their faith with their experiences of racism and discrimination, issues related to the marketplace cannot be ignored. The economic exploitation of people of color, including enslaved Africans, was an integral part of the growth and development of the United States. Racism and capitalism are so intertwined that one cannot be understood without the

other.¹ This observation highlights the fact that economic inequality and racism are closely connected and that addressing issues of racial inequality in the marketplace is crucial to achieving reconciliation between Black and Christian communities.

It is important to realize that Christian communities are not immune to racism that occurs within American society. It can manifest itself in many different ways, such as implicit bias and exclusion from leadership roles. Furthermore, the marketplace can also be a place where Christian values of justice, compassion, and solidarity can be put into practice. As theologian and activist Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II wrote, "We must build a moral economy that values people over profits, one that is rooted in the prophetic traditions of the Bible and the Constitution."² This can help to combat the divisions that have arisen between different African American religious groups, and can also help to address the ways in which race and religion intersect with other forms of oppression, such as classism, sexism, and homophobia.

This work presents an opportunity to promote healing and resilience in the face of ongoing discrimination and marginalization. By recognizing the importance of spirituality and religious traditions in the African American community, and by creating space for these traditions to be honored and celebrated, we can help to promote a sense of strength and empowerment among African American who identify as "Black and Christian." Overall, it is an essential step towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

¹ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 66.

² Barber, William J. II, *We Are Called to Be a Movement* (New York: Workman Publishing Company, 2020), 76.

Ministry Context

As this project is written, I sit at the junction between marketplace ministry and a traditional church setting. Marketplace Ministry is the context in which I have been serving for the past five years or more. It is a movement of people who dared to connect to Christ and culture in an unorthodox way, reimagining how the church could function within an emerging cultural context. Movement Church's decentralization was influenced by various factors, including dissatisfaction with the traditional forms of church, a desire to incorporate new forms of media and technology into worship and outreach, and a commitment to social justice and community service.

Movement Church's philosophy of ministry is nontraditional in its approach. We are seeking to live life a different way, to reorient our lives around the Gospel together fundamentally. We define the church as people drawn together into the mission of Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. What most people experience as a normative expression of gathering is faithful attendance to church services in a brick-and-mortar setting. Movement is unique in that its normative expression of gathering is local to various communities in multiple locations (including virtually), creating an ecosystem that is a network of individuals who share our core values and beliefs. Every Movement gathering (called MeetUp) will look a bit different based on the leaders and members. Still, they share the common trait of being a gospel community living on mission together. There is a weekly message that Movement Partners view together or on their own and then discuss in their perspective MeetUp groups.

One of the critical functional components of Movement Church is an emphasis on dialogue and conversation, both within the church community and with those outside of it. This

church movement endeavors to create a more inclusive and relevant form of Christianity that could connect with people in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

The spiritual history of my ministry, Movement Church, is richly grounded in that of the African American 'church' experience. Conversely, it is also one that has, since its genesis, pressed against the norms of religion and forced open the spiritual doors of our faith practice. As a laborer in leadership, I have experienced the tides of change and growth since the beginning.

While diversity has always been a fundamental and foundational principle, it is true that the majority of the church partners are (and always have been) people of color. At the precipice of the Covid 19 pandemic, racial inequalities in health and justice compete with headlines leaving many Movement partners feeling defenseless in a "double pandemic" of sorts. Our primarily African American congregation has experienced spiritual and personal conflict at the helm of race and reconciliation.

Additionally, I have been partnering in service with a traditional church in South Florida. My husband serves through pastoral administration, and I lend to the ministry in any needed way. This historical African American Christian church is nearly 125 years old and—like most black churches—emerged as a response to the oppressive conditions of slavery, providing a safe space for Black people to worship, socialize, and organize for their liberation. In the past, the church has played a significant role in the community. However, in recent years the population of congregants has decreased due to a myriad of unfortunate circumstances, including the untimely deaths of two pastors, a pandemic, and moral failure within the leadership. The church has also experienced the migration of members to a larger, more progressive white evangelical church.

Furthermore, the reasons for declining membership in Black churches are complex and multifaceted and include the following:

- Generational shifts.
- Changing attitudes towards organized religion.
- The impact of social and economic changes on African American communities.

Therefore, I find myself in a unique position, navigating the waters of two philosophies of ministries at the crossroads of my convictions.

Ministry Challenges and Opportunities

The ministry challenge is two-fold. On the one hand, African Americans experience extreme racial division and inequities in America, with white evangelicals at the center, fighting tenaciously to preserve the oppressive racial system. On the other, many African Americans wrestle, now more than ever, with a religion that places faith in a fair, just, reconciling God, yet, they fear they'll never experience such. Among other minorities, African Americans find themselves in conflict and ambiguity with race and religion. How, then, should the one who lives in the skin of imposition view their own lives through the lens of faith in a nation where race matters but religion (seemingly) doesn't?

Now, along with higher rates of hospitalization and death due to COVID-19 than their white peers, Black Americans are being hit harder by the pandemic's economic fallout, losing jobs, businesses, and opportunities for advancement.³ At the same time, Black churches also face internal challenges related to generational shifts, changing attitudes towards organized religion,

³ Matthew Laviertes, Oscar Wulfhorst, and Ellen Lopez, "'A Pandemic in a Pandemic': Coronavirus Deepens Racial Gaps in America," *Reuters* (August 20, 2020), accessed May 10, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-race-money-insight-idUSKBN25G1EW>.

and the impact of social and economic changes on African American communities. Many younger African Americans, for example, may be less interested in traditional forms of worship or may find the social conservatism of some Black churches to be at odds with their own values and beliefs.

The opportunities in this space are endless. While momentum has been a challenge, the shift from brick and mortar to marketplace ministry has helped to shape the way our congregants (and those we encounter) think about their faith and their relationship to culture. In addition to bridging the divide between sacred and secular spaces, this approach emphasizes the relevance and significance of faith in every aspect of life, particularly for marginalized people. This involves engaging in critical scholarship and research that interrogates power structures and uplifts the experiences of historically marginalized communities. Likewise, the current spiritual and racial climate created the opportunity to engage in a process of reconciliation that centers the experiences and voices of historically marginalized communities and creates inclusive spaces that honor diverse spiritual practices and traditions.

Personal Interest

As an African American Christian woman, my interest in the role of the marketplace in reconciling race and religion is a valuable and necessary consideration. The marketplace can be a powerful force in promoting unity and understanding between people of different races and religions. My own experiences with race and religion have landed me at a critical juncture of questioning God's hand in my life and how to marry my faith and my existential plight. In the past four years, I've come to understand questioning and seeking understanding are natural and valuable parts of the faith journey.

In times of doubt and questioning, it can be helpful to turn to trusted sources for guidance and support. This has included seeking out the wisdom of spiritual leaders or mentors, engaging in prayer and meditation, studying religious texts, and conducting research. Engaging in open and honest conversations with others about your doubts and concerns is vitally important, as this can help you gain new perspectives and insights. This research project has become a practice that promotes self-care and personal growth. I have learned that it is okay to experience doubts and uncertainties in my faith journey. What matters is that I continue to seek understanding and stay connected to the values and principles that will ultimately guide my decisions.

I have witnessed and experienced firsthand the complexities of navigating issues of race, religion, and reconciliation in today's marketplace of spiritual practices. The intersection of these issues presents unique challenges, particularly for people of color, who are often marginalized and excluded from mainstream spiritual conversations. One of the most significant challenges is the tendency for spiritual practices to be commodified and marketed as consumer products. This commodification often erases the rich cultural and historical roots of these practices, which are deeply intertwined with the experiences of marginalized communities. For instance, the practice of yoga is now widely marketed as a trendy fitness trend. Still, it originated from the Hindu tradition and has a rich history and cultural significance that goes beyond physical exercise.

This erasure of cultural context is particularly harmful to Black communities who have faced systemic racism, discrimination, and exclusion from mainstream institutions, including religious institutions. In response, many Black people have created their own spiritual practices and spaces that center their experiences and histories. However, these practices are often dismissed or ignored in mainstream conversations on spirituality.

Furthermore, the issue of race and religion is deeply intertwined with issues of power and privilege. Many white people and institutions have historically used religion as a tool of oppression and domination, which has resulted in deep-seated mistrust and trauma for Black people. This trauma is often exacerbated by the current trend of spiritual bypassing, which involves using spiritual practices to avoid addressing social and political issues. I see my role as creating and advocating for spaces that center the experiences and voices of marginalized communities. This involves engaging in critical scholarship and research that interrogates power structures and uplifts the experiences of historically marginalized communities.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this Project is to explore how African American believers experience race and religious reconciliation an effort to (1) help them connect more experientially with God and (2) cultivate an ideas and actions that will allow them to better navigate cultural engagement with a missional lens.

Research Question and Hypothesis

Through a survey of my own convictions regarding race, religion and marketplace, I honed in on the wrestling of what it means to be black and to be a Christian. It is important to recognize that individuals may have different experiences and perspectives based on their race and religious beliefs. For example, Black Christians may have a unique perspective on what it means to navigate both their religious beliefs and their experiences as members of the Black community. With this in view, I decided to interview African American individuals who identify as Christian and who engage in marketplace activities.

The primary research question my project seeks to answer is: In what ways does marketplace ministry provide opportunities for spiritual formation and missional participation, particularly for African Americans who hold religious and racial tensions. I hypothesize that the project study will demonstrate that spiritual practices of reconciliation are active and meaningful ways to experience God in daily life thereby transforming how we effectively exist in relationship to Him, ourselves and others.

Potential Benefits of This Study

The role of the marketplace in reconciling race and religion can have several benefits, including:

1. Promoting awareness and understanding: The marketplace can serve as a platform for promoting awareness and understanding of different spiritual practices and traditions. By making diverse spiritual practices and products available to consumers, the marketplace can expose people to new ideas and help break down stereotypes and prejudices.
2. Encouraging dialogue and collaboration: The marketplace can also facilitate dialogue and collaboration between people of different races and religions. As consumers interact with one another and with businesses that promote inclusivity and diversity, they may become more comfortable engaging in meaningful conversations about spirituality and identity.
3. Supporting marginalized communities: The marketplace can also be a powerful tool for supporting marginalized communities. By creating demand for products

and services that are created and sold by people of color, the marketplace can provide economic opportunities and help promote equity and justice.

4. **Fostering innovation:** The marketplace can also foster innovation in the spiritual arena. As consumers seek out new and innovative spiritual products and practices, businesses and entrepreneurs may be motivated to create new offerings that are more inclusive and reflective of diverse spiritual traditions.
5. **Creating opportunities for education and growth:** Finally, the marketplace can provide opportunities for education and growth. As businesses and organizations promote inclusivity and diversity, they may also offer resources and programming that can help consumers deepen their understanding of different spiritual practices and traditions and how they can find balance within themselves as they simultaneously exist as people of color and faith exist in the marketplace.

Definition of Terms

Marketplace. The marketplace can be seen as a space where people not only engage in economic transactions, but also build relationships and create social connections. It can be a place where people come together to share ideas, collaborate on projects, and support one another. In this sense, it's a place where people "do life" together, beyond just buying and selling goods or services. This type of community-oriented space can be found in physical locations such as community centers, co-working spaces, and public markets, as well as in online platforms that foster social interaction and collaboration among users. Since these spaces include more than commerce or economy and also encompasses community they are often referred to as a community marketplaces or places whereby people "do life." Community marketplaces can be centered around a variety of themes or

interests, such as local artisans, sustainability, or sharing economy. Examples of community marketplaces include Couchsurfing, Nextdoor, and Meetup (individuals meet people and do stuff).⁴

Ministry. In a religious context, a ministry often refers to the work or service of a religious leader or organization, typically aimed at spreading the teachings and principles of a particular faith, providing spiritual guidance and support to individuals or communities, and carrying out acts of charity and social justice. A ministry may involve preaching or teaching, administering sacraments or rites, counseling or pastoral care, and organizing or participating in charitable activities.

Reconciliation. As we live in a professed fallen state of humanity, the term reconciliation is most recognized as an element of salvation that is the result of Christ's death which restores a breached relationship between God and humans because of sin. Two kinds of alienation are remedied with the death of Christ. On the one hand, God's holy and justified alienation from man because of sin is removed (Rom 5:1-2; Eph 2:17-18; 3:12; Heb 10:19-22) and reconciliation also has a horizontal component because not only have believers been reconciled to God, but we have also been reconciled to each other. Those who were formerly enemies against each other are now brothers and sisters in Christ (Eph 2:11-22; 3:4-6).

Race. This is the most common word to encapsulate contemporary trends of decluttering and living with less. The word does not assume ties to faith traditions or spiritual roots. It is generally pursued for a mixture of personal and environmental reasons.

⁴ Meetup creates possibilities. Meetup is a platform for finding and building local communities. People use Meetup to meet new people, learn new things, find support, get out of their comfort zones, and pursue their passions, together. About. In: Meetup. <https://www.meetup.com/about/>. Accessed 7 Mar 2023.

Religion. I use the term to identify Christian spiritual ideas and practices which enable an authentically lived out experience of God. In general the term means a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices as defined by Merriam-Webster. For this project the institutional system is Christianity.

Missional. While there are many debatable ways to define this term, I will adapt perhaps a simplistic way of pronouncing mission. This term will refer to attitudes and actions of the people of God partnering with Him in His redemptive mission in the world. Acts 2:42 says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Racism. While there is much debate over what the term literally means, racism takes many forms. It includes prejudice, discrimination or hatred directed at someone because of their color, ethnicity or national origin. People often associate racism with acts of abuse or harassment. However, it doesn’t need to involve violent or intimidating behavior. Racism can be revealed through people’s actions as well as their attitudes. It can also be reflected in systems and institutions. But sometimes it may not be revealed at all. Not all racism is obvious. Racism is more than just words, beliefs and actions. It includes all the barriers that prevent people from enjoying dignity and equality because of their race.).

Culture. This is a widely used term for human behaviors within a society of individuals. Culture includes music, art, social-media and quite simply ways of doing life. For the sake of absolute clarity, I will adapt Merriam-Webster’s definition:

- a) the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group
- b) also : the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time

c) the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic

Limitations of This Study

It is important to note that any study or discussion of this topic may have limitations, such as bias. Bias can be a significant limitation of any study or discussion on the role of the marketplace in reconciling race and religion. Researchers or authors may have conscious or unconscious biases that can influence the way they approach the topic, choose their methodology, and interpret the data they collect. For example, a researcher who has a strong personal belief in the power of the marketplace to promote diversity and inclusion may unconsciously overlook evidence that challenges this perspective. On the other hand, a researcher who is skeptical of the role of the marketplace may focus only on negative aspects and ignore potential positive impacts.

Other limitations to consider are small sample size or limited scope. If the study is based on a small sample size, the findings may not be representative of the larger population. Though the study is specific, the topic of race, religion, and marketplace are broad in as such, the study may only address specific aspects of the topic or may not consider all relevant factors that can impact the relationship between race, religion, and the marketplace. Furthermore, the study only reflects historical and current cultural data and may not account for changes or developments that may occur in the future.

External factors can contribute to limitations of the study. While there will be mention of particular influences, the study may not account for external factors that can affect the relationship between race, religion, and the marketplace, such as changes in political or economic climate, natural disasters, or global pandemics. A final limitation to this project is that

the project is accentuated with personal musings and observations of the researcher, and the researcher takes a general approach to a complex and multifaceted subject.

Preview of Remaining Chapters

The rest of this project systematically addresses the research question. Chapter 2 shares the methodology for the study portion of this project, including more details on the research procedures and participants the research method. Chapter 3 offers insight on the research results through exploring the themes that emerged from the participants' reflections. Chapter 4 offers Biblical and Theological reference to the context of the study. Chapter 5 examines the role of marketplace as it relates to reconciliation and Chapter 6 concludes the project with an interpretation of the thematic analysis and some suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHOD

Participants and Participant Recruitment

African American Christians

To explore experiences and attitudes of race and religion, I will interview 8-10 individuals who meet the following criteria: (a) are of African American ethnicity, (b) identify as Christians with an active faith, (c) engage actively in society through work and recreation, and (d) believe they have experienced or witnessed racial disparity. Some examples of racial disparity of include but are not limited to: social injustice; racial profiling; limited employment and income opportunities; little or no health coverage; social engagement.

African American Christians often navigate multiple identities and experiences that intersect in complex ways. For example, they may face discrimination or bias both as African Americans and as Christians. It's important to be mindful of these intersectional experiences and how they may impact your participants' perspectives on race, religion, and the marketplace. These subjects have a rich history in the United States, including a long tradition of using faith and activism to combat racial injustice. Understanding this historical context will help to contextualize participants' experiences and perspectives. This study will provide space to further explore and critique such dynamics and offer insight into the theodicy of Black suffering while taking into account and spiritually combating the lasting effects of such realities..

It is especially important to consider how African American Christians' relationship to the marketplace may impact their experiences. For example, they may face discrimination in the workplace or have different experiences with consumerism or entrepreneurship.

Religion and spirituality play a significant role in the lives of many African American Christians. The research seeks to explore how their faith and spiritual beliefs impact their experiences with race and the marketplace. Despite facing systemic challenges and discrimination, many African American Christians have found ways to thrive in the marketplace meanwhile others have succumbed to merely existing within a silhouette of their true selves. Exploring these stories of resilience and empowerment may help to inspire and motivate other African American Christians who are navigating similar challenges.

Recruitment

I utilized several methods for recruiting participants for this study. I presented the topic at a Movement MeetUp, which gave an opportunity to share basic information about the study with attendees who may have been interested in participating. I also contacted individuals in my professional and personal network, in order to reach a wider audience. However, the primary means of recruitment was word of mouth. I found that participants seemed to be more likely to participate if they heard about the study from someone they knew and trusted. This in turn became a powerful way to recruit participants, which aided me in reaching a diverse group of individuals who were interested in the research topic.

Demographics

For this study, the group of participants is diverse in terms of age, with representation across several decades of life. The 10 participants interviewed span a wide range of ages: two are in their twenties, two are in their thirties, two is in their forties, two are in their fifties, and two are in their sixties. Denominationally, each hail from some variation of Baptist congregations. While the participants' ages, education and professions varied, their racial statuses were

homogenous with each participant identifying as Black or African American. Though recruiting efforts were not gender specific, it's interesting to note that each pair sharing in age demographic consisted of one male and one female both male and female participant. I would have preferred an increase in the number of participants in order to reflect a broader array of prospective and experiences however, their homogeneity in terms of race allowed for a more focused examination of a specific population and their experiences.

Table 1: Summary of Participants

#	Age Group	Gender	Denomination	Tenure as a Christian	Work and Recreation
6	20's	Male	Baptist	Since Childhood	Insurance Agent Musician
7	20's	Female	Baptist	Since Childhood	Nurse African American Sorority Member
1	30's	Male	Baptist	Since Childhood	Architect Recreational Enthusiast Mentorship
3	30's	Female	Baptist	Since Childhood	Executive Assistant Worship Leader Naturalist
8	40's	Male	Baptist	Since Childhood	Bivocational Pastor Entrepreneur Community Liaison
4	40's	Female	Baptist (current practice) Methodist	Since Childhood	Human Resources Educator African American Sorority Member
5	50's	Male	Baptist	Since Childhood	Bivocational Pastor Entrepreneur Baptist Convention Leadership African American Fraternity
9	50's	Female	Baptist	Since Childhood	Educator

2	60's	Male	Baptist	Since Childhood	Pastor Baptist Convention Religious Fraternity
10	60's	Female	Baptist Church of God in Christ Some nondenominational experience	Since Childhood	Retired Higher Ed Administrator African American Sorority Member Church Leadership

Control Measures/Experience

Participants were not subject to control measures as it relates to the experiences and personal story telling. This was especially important to the integrity of the data collected as it was more appropriate to forgo control measures in an effort to obtain a more naturalistic and realistic picture of the participants experiences. When designing a research study, careful consideration for the potential influence of participant characteristics and experiences determined whether control measures were appropriate for the specific research question and design. Potential implication of this decision is addressed in the limitations section of the project.

Impact

Overwhelmingly, all participants of the study had experienced some version of racial disparity or inequity. Racial disparities and inequities are prevalent in many societies and can have significant impacts on individuals' physical and mental well-being, their access to resources and opportunities, and their overall quality of life. Each participant identifies some facet of such prevalent issues. While their exposure to marketplace ministry was diverse, nearly all of them reported that the effects of their experiences had impacted their faith in some way. For some, it caused them to lean into their spiritual practices while for others, their faith came into question.

Interview Setting and Procedure

One of the most important components of structuring these interviews was to ensure that participants experienced the interview setting as a safe space; free of judgement, critique or council. Creating a safe space for interview participants is an important aspect of conducting

research, especially when discussing sensitive or personal topics such as experiences with racial disparity or inequity and religion. It was imperative that participants felt safe and comfortable in the interview setting as to foster an environment where they would be most likely to share their experiences openly and honestly.

To create a safe space for interview participants, I established clear guidelines for the interview process by emphasizing that participants could decline to answer any questions that they felt made them feel distressed or uncomfortable or that may cause harm. The interviews were conducted in a variety of settings including participants' homes, via Zoom, and in workspaces. As the researcher, I actively listened to participants' responses with engagement intentionally geared towards language interpretation for clarity of response or to progress forward in the interview process. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Using a semi-structured approach in conducting interviews proved to be a useful way to balance consistency and authenticity with the flexibility to explore new or unexpected renderings that may have surfaced during the interview. A semi-structured approach involves having a set of pre-determined questions or topics to guide the interview, while also allowing for the interviewer to explore areas that may require further exploration or clarification.⁵ This approach was to ensure that participants were asked the same set of core questions or topics, which increases the consistency of the data collected. At the same time, it allowed for some flexibility in the interview process to explore new or unexpected topics that may arise, which increased the depth and richness of the data. Using a semi-structured approach also helped with synthesizing the data collected, as it allowed for triangulation of data from different participants, which helped to

⁵ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), pp?

identify common themes and patterns. Additionally, it provides the opportunity for follow-up questions, which were used to help to clarify or expand on responses provided by participants.

The interview questions were as follows:

1. Please briefly describe your spiritual journey and your current relationship with God.
2. How or in what ways do you currently exercise your faith practice?
 - a. What spiritual practices do you engage regularly?
 - b. For how long have you observed these practices?
 - c. Are any of these practices (such as regularly gathering) exercised with people of other ethnic persuasions?
 - d. Do you find that these practices affect how you relate to or connect to others? If, yes, in what ways?
3. Please describe the ways in which you have experienced racial disparity/inequalities?
 - a. Please describe your experience as it relates to wealth.
 - b. Please, describe your experience as it relates to healthcare.
 - c. Please, describe your experience as it relates to education.
 - d. Please, describe your experience as it relates to community engagement.
4. In your experience, what ways do faith and culture connect?
 - a. Is it difficult or easy to connect with Christians who don't share your ethnicity?
 - b. What feelings (questions) do you ponder regarding race and religion?
5. Describe what the word reconciliation means to you?

These questions were designed intentionally in order to surface substantive and relevant data. Question 1 seeks to understand people's spiritual experiences and their relationship with God. By asking people to describe their spiritual journey and current relationship with God, researchers can gain insight into how people understand and experience spirituality. By reflecting on their spiritual journey and relationship with God, individuals may gain insight into their own beliefs and experiences as the question creates space for the sincerity and vulnerability.

Question 2 hones in on understanding how participants put their faith into practice. By learning about the individual's current faith practices, the researcher can gain insight into how people express their faith in daily life, how their practices may have changed over time, and what role their faith plays in their overall well-being.

Questions 3 was aimed at understanding how experiences of racial disparities or inequalities impact individuals' lives. By collecting information on participants' experiences, researchers can gain insight into the physical, psychological, and social effects of racism, as well as the ways in which individuals cope with or resist discriminatory practices. Furthermore, this questions aids in identifying patterns of discrimination across different contexts, such as wealth, healthcare, education, and/or community engagement. By asking participants to describe their experiences, I hoped to identify common themes and patterns that might shed light on larger structural issue.

Question 4 targeted understanding the ways in which religion and race intersect within culture. By collecting information on such experiences, insight could be gained into the role that religion plays in shaping cultural norms and practices, as well as the ways in which cultural context shapes religious beliefs and practices.

Question 5 was designed to gain insight into how the participants understand and perceive the concept of reconciliation. This would provide valuable information for understanding how individuals perceive the process of repairing relationships or addressing conflicts. assess their prior knowledge or familiarity with the concept. In theory, this information would be useful as the project aims to lend insight on the role of marketplace ministry to the space of reconciliation.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews had been completed, I organized the synthesized the transcribed data with interview notations taken from each interview. This allowed me to make connections between the data collected from each interview and identify similarities and differences across participants. As a result, I was able to identify recurring themes, patterns, or concepts across the

interviews. Once the data was organized and synthesized, I began to analyze it in relation to the research hypothesis and was able to generate insights. By organizing the data by theme, I can present insights and findings in a clear and concise manner that is easy for readers to understand.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH RESULTS

Introduction

As indicated in the title of this project, the emphasis of my study was to arrive at a clearer understanding of the role marketplace ministry might play in reconciling race and religion in the African American church.

The five interview questions posed to participants were designed to unearth these connections in their stories and experiences. Participants shared their stories in response to the questions regarding spiritual journey, current faith practices, racial disparities and inequities, faith and culture, and reconciliation. By asking open-ended questions that allowed participants to allocate their stories and perspectives, I was able to collect rich and nuanced data that can provide valuable insights into these complex topics. After answering the foundational questions (1 &2), participants were asked to reflect on the ways (if any) they have experienced racial disparity and or inequities. There were several key narratives that emerged from each individual's responses, regardless of their separate and personal experiences. It is clear that each participant has been impacted physiologically, psychologically, and spiritually by their experiences.

The responses can be organized into five primary themes: 1) I grew up in the church; 2) Prayer and Scripture; 3) Where do I begin?; 4) In every way; and 5) Pulling people from the margin into the marketplace. The participants offered vulnerable and transparent responses in each of these themes, insight that has been fleshed out in their real, embodied experience of

navigating life as an African American Christian. However, it is necessary to note that "The Black church is not a monolith. There is no one way to be Black and Christian."⁶

While the results of this work unveil themes and commonalities in the participants, there are so many more stories to share and experiences to be had, all of which hold unique and perhaps extraordinary meaning to the ones whose lives they are expressed through.

Themes

Question 1: Please briefly describe your spiritual journey and your current relationship with God.

Theme 1: *"I grew up in the church"*

Familial Influence

Growing up in the church can mean different things to different people, depending on their denomination and the specific practices and beliefs of their church. However, in general, it often means that a person was raised attending church regularly, participating in church activities, and learning about their faith through teachings and sermons. For many African Americans, the church has been a central part of their community and culture for generations. It has served as a place of refuge, strength, and hope in the face of racial oppression and injustice. For all but one of the participants, a recollection of parents and grandparents leading them to church was a commonplace theme within their story telling.

The influence of parents and grandparents on one's spiritual journey is a common theme among many people who grew up in the church. In many African American families, passing down religious traditions and beliefs from one generation to the next is an important aspect of family life. Parents and grandparents may be the first people to introduce children to the church

⁶ Juan Williams and Quinton Hosford Dixie, *This Far by Faith: Stories from the African-American Religious Experience* (New York: Harpercollins Publishers, 2003).

and its teachings. They may take their children to church services, encourage them to participate in youth groups or Sunday school, and model the values of faith, service, and compassion in their daily lives. For all but one of the participants who grew up in the church, their parents and grandparents were role models and mentors who helped shape their understanding of faith and spirituality. They looked up to them as examples of strong and committed Christians, and may have been inspired by their devotion and dedication to their beliefs.

In addition, the influence of grandparents is often considered inconsequential because it appears to be indirect, operating through the much stronger religious influence of parents. This ignores the fact that some grandparents—perhaps an increasing number—may be more directly involved in religious socialization than are parents. Grandparents can provide a stabilizing influence in their grandchildren's lives in situations of parental divorce, incapacity, addiction, or emotional distancing. In these contexts grandparents' influence may be highly salient for the development of children's religious values and beliefs. In other situations, grandparents may play a larger role in influencing children's religious orientation simply because they have more time to do so, or religious instruction is not a priority for parents, or parents are religiously indifferent.⁷

Church All the Time

As participants recounted their early exposure to the church, each of them were able to rehash vivid memories of constant churchgoing. The Black Church has played a pivotal role in the African American community, providing spiritual, social, and political support for generations. The unique style of worship that characterizes the Black Church has created a sense of community, empowerment, and shared experience that has endured throughout history. Participants named Sunday school, weekly services, prayer meetings, and Bible studies which are central to the Black Church experience. These regular events create a sense of routine and structure, providing opportunities for spiritual growth and connection.

⁷ Vern L Bengtson, Norella M Putney, and Susan Cannon Harris, *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed down across Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 101.

Likewise, the Black Church is also known for its lively and enthusiastic special services, such as Watch Night services on New Year's Eve, revival meetings, and special holiday services. These events most often involve music, preaching, and fellowship that can last for hours, creating a sense of celebration and unity among attendees. The memories of constant churchgoing expressed by those who have grown up in the Black Church are a testament to the significance of this institution in their lives.

Reviewing sermons and Sunday school curricula cannot tell us everything that is shaping the spiritual lives of young African American Christians. However, these educational resources, in conjunction with our interviews with youth, provide an important starting point for further exploration of the spiritual lives of Black youth and for the ways that African American churches are currently influencing (positively or negatively) their lived realities. In truth, the majority of African American Christian youth are exhibiting the faith that is being modeled and presented to them. Their faith most closely reflects the faith of the adults around them. In light of this, our exploration of the curricula of Black Churches reminds us that African American youth are not simply experiencing a spirituality that does not adequately address every arena of their lives, but they are being taught that their faith should only address their personal or spiritual lives.⁸

“I grew up in the church” didn’t translate to a spirituality that balances or integrates both personal, individual development with communal and societal action.⁹ Rather, communal and societal themes emerged later in the interview in response to the questions which specifically name racial disparities and inequities.

Question 2: How or in what ways do you currently exercise your faith practice?

Theme 2: “*Prayer and Scripture*”

Prayer and scripture reading are two of the most common spiritual practices among people of faith. Participants shared their experiences with these practices, highlighting their

⁸ Almeda M Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans*, 62.

⁹ Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*, 101.

significance in their spiritual journey. According to the book "Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God" by Timothy Keller, prayer is a means of experiencing a personal relationship with God. Keller expounds that prayer can be a way of connecting with God, understanding his will, and receiving comfort and guidance.¹⁰ For many African Americans, prayer is a means of connecting with God, seeking spiritual strength and resilience, and finding hope and peace in difficult times. Particularly, prayer was a deep connector.

Prayer

In the research study, participants shared their experiences with prayer, emphasizing its significance in their spiritual journeys. One participant stated that "prayer is the foundation of my relationship with God. It is through prayer that I can connect with God and seek His guidance and direction." Another participant shared that "prayer is a source of strength and hope for me. When I am feeling overwhelmed or burdened, I go to God in prayer." Each participant spoke of prayer as if it were a default or automatic practice. Prayer is an integral part of Christian faith and is considered a crucial aspect of communication with God.

In the Black Christian community, prayer has historically been seen as a source of strength and solace in the face of adversity, particularly during times of systemic oppression and injustice. For many, prayer is seen as a way to connect with a higher power and seek guidance, protection, and support. Participant 10 used it interchangeably with hearing from the Holy Spirit. Having been raised with both Pentecostal and Baptist roots, this interviewee felt a strong sense of God's power and presence and prayer was her vehicle to intimacy with God. In her book "Fervent: A Woman's Battle Plan to Serious, Specific and Strategic Prayer," author Priscilla

¹⁰ Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 84.

Shirer writes - despite what we may or may not understand about prayer, God has deliberately chosen this particular vehicle as the one that drives His activity in people's lives. It's what He allows us to use to cooperate and partner with Him in the fulfilling of His will.¹¹

In particular, participant 10 felt that it was a medium of hearing from God and experiencing His presence. In telling her story, she shared a moment in her life where she felt that she was in a holding pattern with God. She had experienced a great deal of discontentment with the black church which landed her for a period of time at a church that was predominately white. This church was grand, organized, resourceful, spiritual and loving. It was easy and uncomplicated church. After the death of her husband to colon cancer, she expressed having heard an audible messages from God as if every noise around her faded to the background and was muffled as the words from God spoke a clear message from God; "Your sabbatical is over." These words came to her and propelled her into the active state of participation. She left the predominantly white church that she was in and joined the church where she has now been for many years. She returned to the black church.

She believes so emphatically in the power of prayer that it was the first thing she attempted to do in community at her new church through spearheading a prayer vigil. In his book "Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God," theologian Timothy Keller explores the purpose and power of prayer, emphasizing the importance of both individual and corporate prayer in building a vibrant Christian community.¹² Her intent was to rally the people of her church into a communal prayer event aimed at praying for the needs of the church and the community. Her hope was to create a space that cultivated the spiritual practice of prayer. It was

¹¹ Priscilla Shirer, *Fervent : A Woman's Battle Plan for Serious, Specific, and Strategic Prayer* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 17.

¹² Keller, *Prayer*, 49.

public, collective, shared, intentional and enlightening. Furthermore, it served a dual purpose: 1) Connecting to God and 2) Connecting to each other.

The belief that prayer can effect change is rooted in a deep sense of trust and reliance on God, especially in the face of adversity and injustice.¹³ It is an invocation to God in the hopes that years of suffering will be redeemed and their people be reconciled to God revealing the beauty in tragedies of their past and present oppression. In his book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, theologian James H. Cone explores the relationship between the crucifixion of Jesus and the history of lynching in the United States. He notes that the black church has often turned to prayer as a way to resist the violence and dehumanization of lynching, and that prayer has been a powerful tool in the struggle for freedom and liberation.¹⁴ Thus, prayer has been used as a tool of resistance and empowerment within the black church. Believers call upon God for deliverance from oppression and to seek justice and equality for themselves people. This theme resounds in Participant 10's expressions even as she sights moral failure and disingenuous nature of clergy and leaders within the church. It is important to note here that the while the undertone of suffering in the black church is often fuel to fervent prayer, it is not the only pressing motivation that prompts prayer. Likewise, the belief patterns that emerge from scripture ignite a penchant towards well-being and right living.

Scripture

Interviewees also referenced reading scripture as a spiritual practice. Their reading regimen ranged from “not reading as much as I should” to “I try to read scripture daily.” No

¹³ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 411.

¹⁴ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 55.

matter the regularity of engagement, participants saw scripture reading as a fundamental and necessary spiritual practice. Reading scripture remains an essential part of Black spirituality. Many Black churches place a strong emphasis on Bible study, and reading and interpreting scripture is seen as a communal practice. Through sermons, Bible studies, and other forms of religious education, Black people continue to connect with the stories and messages of the Bible, finding strength and hope in its words. Participant 4 grew up in deeply engaged in this vein of learning as spiritual practice. In this case, she touted a sense of pride in knowing. Understanding the Bible and its implications for her life was the way she most closely connected to God. Her mother was an educator by profession and practiced her gift in the church as a Sunday School teacher. This meant that Participant 4 involuntarily gained an appreciation for the scripture as its importance was embedded into her spiritual journey as a default of her upbringing and her innate passion for erudition.

For many Black people, reading scripture is not only a spiritual practice but also an act of survival. Throughout history, Black people have been denied access to education and literacy, and as a result, reading and interpreting scripture became a way to assert their humanity and connect with their higher power. The Bible has played a significant role in the Black community since the days of slavery.

The things evidently borrowed from the surrounding world undergo characteristic change when they enter the mouth of the slave. Especially is this true of Bible phrases. “Weep, O captive daughter of Zion,” is quaintly turned into “Zion, weep-a-low,” and the wheels of Ezekiel are turned every way in the mystic dreaming of the slave, till he says: “There’s a little wheel a-turnin’ in-a-my heart.”¹⁵

Africans were often forbidden from reading or practicing their traditional religions, but some slave masters allowed them to attend Christian services. However, the messages preached in

¹⁵ Norman Harris, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Pocket Books, 2005), 452.

these services were often used to justify slavery and reinforce the idea that Black people were inferior to white people. Interestingly enough, Participant 10 noted that upon her leaving the white church, she felt that there would always be an “embedded bias towards black people; that they think they are better than we are and that they deserve to be where they are (above and distant from us).”

Despite this, Black people found hope and liberation in the Bible. The results of this study echoes this sentiment as each participant expressed an adamant appreciation for scripture. Historically, slaves identified with the stories of the Israelites and their struggle for freedom and saw themselves as part of a larger story of oppression and liberation. The Bible became a source of strength and comfort, and reading and interpreting scripture became a way to connect with their ancestors and a higher power. In the post-slavery era, Black people continued to rely on the Bible for spiritual guidance and strength. Participant 1 named that the Bible helps to navigate God’s intention for his behavior in every circumstance. Participants regularly gathered with other believers (also identifying gathering as a spiritual practice) to exercise prayer and reading scripture together as a form of communal worship.

Each participant associated with church congregations that were predominately black and brown people. While they were not particularly opposed to worshipping with other ethnic persuasions, their churches were more likely to have a Hispanic presence and highly unlikely to have Anglo representation at all. There are a variety of reasons why many Black Christians may not worship in diverse churches. Here are a few potential explanations:

1. Cultural Differences: Many Black Christians may feel more comfortable in churches that reflect their cultural heritage and traditions. These churches may incorporate elements of Black culture into their worship

services, such as gospel music or call-and-response preaching. They may also provide a sense of community and belonging that can be difficult to find in more diverse churches.

2. **Historical Trauma:** The Black church has a long history of being a source of strength and resilience for Black communities, particularly during times of oppression and discrimination. Some Black Christians may view the church as a space that is uniquely theirs, and may be hesitant to worship in spaces that they perceive as being dominated by White culture.
3. **Proximity and Access:** In some cases, Black Christians may not have access to diverse churches in their local area. This may be due to systemic factors such as residential segregation, which can make it difficult for people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds to interact and form relationships.
4. **Perceived Lack of Authenticity:** Some Black Christians may feel that diverse churches do not fully understand or appreciate their experiences and perspectives. They may view these churches as being too focused on surface-level diversity, rather than addressing the systemic issues that contribute to racial inequality.

It's worth noting that not all Black Christians feel the same way about worshiping in diverse churches, and that there is significant diversity within the Black Christian community. Some Black Christians may actively seek out diverse worship experiences, while others may prefer to worship in more homogenous spaces. Ultimately, the decision to worship in a particular church is a deeply personal one, influenced by a range of individual and societal factors. The

participants in this study do not offer any indicators towards intentionally selecting their church based on racial demographics.

Question 3: Please describe the ways in which you have experienced racial disparity/inequalities.

Theme 3: Where do I begin?

As one may imagine this question generated a wide variety of responses. Participants in the study reported experiencing racial disparities and inequities in four areas: wealth, education, healthcare, and community engagement. Results will be shared by category. It is necessary to consider that the four categories of wealth, healthcare, education, and community engagement are interconnected. They are all important components of a person's overall well-being, and disparities in one area can have ripple effects in other areas as well.

For example, systemic racism and discrimination can limit access to quality healthcare for people of color, which can in turn impact their ability to work and accumulate wealth. Lack of access to quality education can also limit job opportunities and earning potential, further exacerbating wealth disparities. These disparities can also affect community engagement, as people who are struggling financially may have less time and resources to devote to civic activities and may be more socially isolated.

By recognizing the interconnectedness of these four areas, it becomes clear that addressing racial disparities and inequities requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the ways in which different aspects of life are intertwined. This can involve policy changes that address structural inequalities, as well as individual and community-level efforts to promote equity and justice.

Wealth

Nine of the ten participants were able to give examples of employment discrimination or racial discrimination in the workplace. This type of discrimination occurs when an employer makes hiring, firing, or other employment decisions based on a person's race or ethnicity rather than their qualifications or job performance. Employment discrimination based on race is illegal in the United States under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The law prohibits employers from discriminating against employees or job applicants based on race, color, national origin, religion, or sex. Nevertheless, participants felt an overwhelming sense of inequity in the job market and at work. Participant 5 came from an established upbringing. While he was able to see wealth disparities and inequities within his church and community, he was an anomaly. He was educated and employed within a network of Black owned and operated businesses, colleges and institutions. For Participant 5, this equated to a strong Christianity foundation in his home and community. Now a leader in his community, Participant 5 observed an overarching wealth gap amongst African Americans in every facet of his life.

The employment discrimination recounted by participant took on many forms, including hiring processes that favor white applicants, unequal pay or opportunities for promotion, and harassment in a hostile work environment based on race. Black Christians often describe significant disparities and inequities in wealth between Black and white Americans. These disparities are a result of historical and ongoing systemic racism, including practices such as redlining, which prevented Black Americans from purchasing homes and accumulating wealth.

One of the most significant disparities described by participants was the homeownership gap. According to the Pew Research Center, the homeownership rate for Black Americans is

around 43%, compared to around 74% for white Americans.¹⁶ Homeownership is one of the primary ways that families build wealth, so this gap has significant long-term implications for the financial security of Black families. Additionally, participants often described disparities in access to education, job opportunities, and fair wages as contributing to wealth disparities. Black Americans are more likely to attend underfunded schools and face discrimination in the job market, resulting in lower wages and fewer opportunities for advancement.

Four of the participants noted the accumulation of generational wealth a factor in these disparities. Many white families have been able to pass down wealth through inheritance, while systemic racism has prevented Black families from doing the same. Black Christians are acutely aware of these disparities and are working towards systemic change to address them. Many churches and faith-based organizations are involved in efforts to promote economic justice and address systemic racism, including advocating for policies that promote fair housing, education, and employment opportunities for Black Americans.

Education

Participants described significant disparities and inequities in education. In particular, Participant 1 explained that often black youth (particularly black males) don't find themselves in professions such as architecture. As an architect, he named several reasons why there are so few Black males in his field. One significant factor is systemic racism and structural barriers that have historically limited access to education and professional opportunities for Black Americans. Architecture is a highly specialized and competitive field that requires extensive education and training. However, Black Americans have historically faced barriers to accessing quality

¹⁶ Katherine Schaeffer, "Key Facts about Housing Affordability in the U.S.," *Pew Research Center*, last modified Autumn 3AD, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/03/23/key-facts-about-housing-affordability-in-the-u-s/>.

education and training, including limited access to funding and resources, discriminatory policies, and social and economic disadvantages. As a result, many Black Americans have been unable to pursue careers in architecture.

Furthermore, he explained that the architecture profession has traditionally been dominated by white men, which has contributed to a lack of diversity and representation. The profession has its own unique set of challenges that can disproportionately affect Black male architects. For example, many architecture firms prioritize working long hours, which can be difficult for Black men who may also have family and community responsibilities. Additionally, the profession can be highly hierarchical, which can make it difficult for Black men to advance to leadership positions. In his experience, the lack of role models and mentors for Black males in architecture can discourage them from pursuing careers in the field. In this case, he is currently mentoring young black males in hopes of shifting the tide. Overall, there are a variety of systemic factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of Black male architects.

Participant 10 (retired College Administrator) described the ways in which racism manifests in educational policies and practices. For example, disciplinary policies are often applied more harshly to Black students, leading to higher suspension and expulsion rates. This contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline, in which Black students are more likely to be funneled into the criminal justice system rather than given opportunities to succeed academically. Overall, participants were acutely aware of these disparities.

Healthcare

Of the 10 participants, 5 are women. These women each shared experiences disparities and inequities in healthcare. Participant 3 expressed feelings of anxiousness when scheduling doctors' appointments. In her life's experience, she has been riddled with negative experiences in

healthcare. Most recently, she experienced being sent home with Covid because the doctor refused to test her. She was sent home with an antibiotic and an inhaler and told to return to the urgent care facility if her symptoms worsened. At the onset of the pandemic, there were so many unknowns. She expressed feeling rushed through the visit with her symptoms dismissed. Statistics now confirm that African Americans have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and death. This can be attributed to many factors, including higher rates of underlying health conditions, lack of access to healthcare, and frontline jobs that put them at greater risk of exposure.¹⁷

Participant 4 shared her story. After a minor procedure, she returned to her doctor to have staples/stitches removed. Unfortunately, the wound became increasingly irritated and upon inspecting the wound, Participant 4 considered that there may be a lingering stitch right below the surface of her skin. Upon returning to the doctor's office, the staff quickly examined the wound and determined that there was nothing there to remove. More time passed and the incision became infected. Participant 4 determined that she would remove the stubborn stitch herself. She was successful in tweezing two small stitches from the wound. She returned to the doctor to complain, but the damage had already been done. She too felt dismissed and that her pain alert was not taken seriously.

These are just a sample of the many stories that were told in the interviews. On a larger scale, Participant 10 supports a local organization that aims at bringing awareness to the health disparities in black women with breast cancer. She is passionate about the effort and shared a few statistics with me during her interview. According to the American Cancer Society, in 2021,

¹⁷ CDC, "Communities, Schools, Workplaces, & Events," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, last modified April 30, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/racial-ethnic-disparities/disparities-deaths.html>, 3.

it is estimated that there will be about 283,000 new cases of invasive breast cancer diagnosed in women in the United States. Of these new cases, about 231,840 will be diagnosed in women who identify as white, 37,320 will be diagnosed in women who identify as black, 24,380 will be diagnosed in women who identify as Hispanic/Latina, 17,520 will be diagnosed in women who identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1,200 will be diagnosed in women who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native. Black women in the United States are more likely to die from breast cancer than white women, despite having a lower incidence of the disease.¹⁸ There are several reasons for this disparity, including:

1. Late diagnosis: African women are more likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer at a later stage, when the disease is more advanced and difficult to treat. This may be due to factors such as limited access to healthcare, lack of health insurance, and lower rates of mammography screening.
2. Differences in treatment: Even when diagnosed at the same stage, black women are less likely to receive timely and appropriate treatment for breast cancer. This may be due to factors such as bias and discrimination in the healthcare system, limited access to high-quality cancer care, and disparities in insurance coverage.
3. Biological factors: African American women are more likely to be diagnosed with aggressive forms of breast cancer, such as triple-negative breast cancer, which can be more difficult to treat. This may be due to genetic factors and differences in tumor biology.

¹⁸ CDC, "CDC - Breast Cancer Statistics," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, last modified 2019. <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/statistics/index.htm>, 1.

4. Socioeconomic factors: African American women are more likely to experience poverty, food insecurity, and other social determinants of health that can negatively impact cancer outcomes. These factors may also contribute to disparities in healthcare access and quality.
5. Access to healthcare: African Americans are more likely to live in areas with limited access to healthcare facilities, which can make it difficult for them to receive timely and adequate medical care. This is particularly true for those living in rural areas, where there are fewer hospitals and clinics.
6. Medical bias and discrimination: African Americans have historically faced bias and discrimination in healthcare settings, which can lead to misdiagnosis, inadequate treatment, and overall poorer health outcomes. This can result in mistrust of the healthcare system and reluctance to seek medical care when needed.
7. Lack of health insurance: Black Christians are more likely to be uninsured or underinsured than other groups, which can limit their access to medical care. This can result in delayed treatment and more severe health conditions.
8. Higher rates of chronic illnesses: Black Christians have higher rates of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, which can be attributed to a combination of genetic and environmental factors. These illnesses can be difficult and expensive to manage, particularly for those without adequate access to healthcare.

Black men in the United States do face disparities and inequities in healthcare, although the nature of these disparities may differ somewhat from those experienced by black women. Black men are less likely to seek preventive care and routine screenings, such as prostate cancer screenings, due to factors such as lack of insurance or mistrust of the healthcare system. This can lead to later diagnosis and treatment of health conditions.¹⁹

Community Engagement

Of the ten participants, five were male. While each participant shared expressions of disparities and/or inequities in community engagement, the five men shared experiences that were especially particular to policing and racialized fear which refers to the ways in which racial stereotypes and biases can lead people to perceive members of certain racial groups as more threatening or dangerous than others, even when there is no evidence to support this perception. African Americans in the United States have long described disparities and inequities in their communities, particularly in policing.

Participant 1 retold an all too familiar story of driving home and being stopped by police in his own neighborhood, citing suspicion because he and his car did not appear to belong in the neighborhood. On the day of his interview, Participant 5 experienced a white woman mistake him for a waiter in the restaurant he'd had breakfast in, even though he was dressed nothing like the staff. All of the men described instances of events motivated by racialized fear such as clutching of the purse, special and social avoidance/isolation, and racial profiling by police.

Disparities can refer to differences in the way that police treat different groups of people based on their race or ethnicity. For example, studies have found that Black individuals are more

¹⁹ American Cancer Society, *Cancer Facts & Figures for African Americans 2019-2021* (Atlanta: American Cancer Society, 2019), 22.

likely to be stopped, searched, and arrested by police than white individuals, even when controlling for factors such as crime rates and demographics. These disparities can lead to over-policing and a lack of trust between police and Black communities. Likewise, inequities can refer to unfair or unjust practices within the policing system. For example, some argue that the criminal justice system is biased against Black individuals, leading to harsher sentences, more frequent use of force, and a lack of accountability for police misconduct. This has contributed to the participants' expressed feelings of a of injustice and mistrust in the criminal justice system.

Every participant conveyed a lack of trust in institutions and a sense of powerlessness. These types of experiences makes it difficult for Black communities to engage fully in civic life. Black individuals are disproportionately affected by police brutality and face harsher sentencing in the criminal justice system. As Participant 6 relived being stopped on a Tennessee highway, he said he could only imagine his parents being called after something terrible had happened. The psychological effects of viewing George Floyd die at the hands of police were lingering and had taken a toll on him. George Floyd was an African-American man who was killed during an arrest in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25, 2020. The incident received widespread attention and sparked protests and civil unrest across the United States and around the world. The incident was captured on video by bystanders and circulated widely on social media, leading to protests and demonstrations in cities across the United States and around the world.

The effects on young Black males of watching George Floyd be murdered can be traumatic and long-lasting. Witnessing violence against someone who looks like them, especially at the hands of law enforcement, can cause feelings of fear, anger, sadness, and despair. For young Black males, who are already at a higher risk of experiencing violence and discrimination, watching the murder of George Floyd can intensify their sense of vulnerability and increase their

fear of law enforcement. It can also create a sense of hopelessness and mistrust in the criminal justice system, which can have negative effects on their mental health and well-being.²⁰ Research has shown that exposure to violence, whether in person or through media, can lead to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health issues. In the case of George Floyd's murder, the widespread dissemination of the video on social media and news outlets means that young Black males may have been repeatedly exposed to the traumatic event, leading to ongoing distress and anxiety.

Overall, participants identified a range of disparities and inequities in their communities that reflect systemic and structural issues related to racism, inequality, and discrimination. Their stories reflect trauma and pain. Participants were able to share racism and discrimination in every space of their everyday lives. Participant 4 expressed an overarching perspective that summarizes the responses received adequately in saying, “it is very difficult to constantly be pushed to the edge of your community rather than being central to it because of race; it makes you feel like an outsider.”

Question 4: In your experience, what ways do faith and culture connect?

Theme 4: *In every way...*

The connection between faith and culture is an essential aspect of the religious experience for black Christians. In the black community, faith and culture are deeply intertwined, with religious beliefs informing the ways in which they interact with others as well as how they digest the happenings around them. This connection is rooted in the history of black people in America,

²⁰ Reginald Young-Drake et al., “A Growing Dilemma: How Police Brutality Affects Mental Health in Black Communities,” *A Growing Dilemma—How Police Brutality Affects Mental Health in the Black Communities* | Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center, accessed April 20, 2023, 4. <https://thurgoodmarshallcenter.howard.edu/issues/ongoing-actions/growing-dilemma-how-police-brutality-affects-mental-health-black-communities>.

where religion has been a source of strength and resilience in the face of adversity. For example, Participant 4 named faith as the “only hope” that helps her to engage with others and is a connection that she needs. Participants were asked to expound on the topic through two subsidiary questions:

1. Is it difficult or easy to connect with Christians who don't share your ethnicity?

Participants 1 and 3 made mention of difficulties with connecting with Christians who do not share their ethnicity. Both participants mentioned the difficulty was based upon non-black believers viewing Jesus as white. It is important to recognize that for these participants, the rejection of the portrayal of Jesus as a white man is not a rejection of Jesus himself or the teachings of Christianity. Rather, it is a rejection of the historical and cultural context that has led to the portrayal of Jesus as a white man and the lack of representation of people of color in the Christian faith. Participant 1 viewed the portrayal of Jesus as a white man as a symbol of the historical and ongoing marginalization and oppression of people of color. Participant 3 explained that it also contributes to feelings of exclusion and a lack of belonging within the Christian community. In addition, the historical and cultural context of the portrayal of Jesus as a white man can also perpetuate racist attitudes and beliefs. Both participants recognized this as a barrier to their connectivity.

Participant 7 noted a situational difficulty in engaging with Christians who are of other ethnicities (particularly white) based on the environments in which she's encountered such diversity. Her experiences with such connectivity are from two extreme corners of her world. On one hand, she is a member of a predominately black church where interaction with people of other ethnic persuasions is rare. Connectivity with other ethnicities within the space of her church community has not been difficult. She has encountered people of other ethnicities who

truly want to engage and are intentional in appreciating the historical narrative of the black church and entering the space through a posture of Christian brotherhood. On the other hand, for years, she attended a predominately white private school where many of the students and their families identified as Christians. There, her experiences were mixed but the difficulty of connecting with white students was prevalent as they often determined to self-select and connect with people who shared their ethnicity which could often lead feelings of ostracism and exclusion.

Overall, participants expressed varied levels of ease or difficulty connecting with Christians who are not black. There are several factors that can contribute to these differences in experiences however this group participant especially named race related historical and cultural factors racism, discrimination, and social inequalities that contribute to their ability to connect to other ethnicities within the Christian faith. In additions, some participants noted that they feel more comfortable worshipping in spaces that reflect their own cultural or ethnic background, which has limited their exposure to Christians from other backgrounds.

2. What feelings (questions) do you ponder regarding race and religion?

For the participants, faith and culture are connected in the way that their faith helps them to understand and interpret their experiences. Their faith provides a framework for making sense of the world and for coping with their struggles. In reflection, they shared ponderings or questions regarding race and religion. Of the responses, there was a common theme of self-reflection. Participants spoke specifically about their individual responses to the cultural climate. Participant 1's initial reflection pondered if white people would follow Jesus if our historical imagery of him were as a Black man. He immediately followed up with a question of self-reflection. He pondered why he was allowing the inability of white people to follow a black Jesus to be a

barrier to his connection to them. Participant 3 harbors a deep resentment towards white people. In her mind, she muses, "How long am I going to feel like this? How long will they make the same mistakes?"

Participant 5 introduced an alternative way of thinking in response to the inquiry. He spoke of race and religion inextricably tied to one another. Being black wasn't an option and (because of his upbringing) neither was being Christian. He grew up being affirmed as both. For him, there was never a delineation and therefore he has not actually pondered race and religion separately. Participant 5 identified that he likes the fact as he is Black Christian Man. It is his identity and he wants to be known as such and wants to be received as such. An important follow-up response is that the participant feels that people who know him, know him quite simply as a Black Christian man. Alternatively those who do not know him and do not share the same ethnicity simply see him as "a Black." He questioned if those who see him as black also see him as man.

In supposition, the connection between faith and culture is a central aspect of the religious experience for black Christians. Through their faith, the participants are able to connect with their cultural heritage, make sense of their experiences, and find individual identity. Each participant expressed a clear connection to the disparities and inequities of being black including ideas of dehumanization. Their ponderings (questions) were synced more to their race rather than religion.

Question 5: Describe what the word reconciliation means to you?

Theme 5: Pulling people from the margins into the marketplace.

African American Christians have a unique perspective on reconciliation, given their history of oppression, discrimination, and systemic racism in the United States. The results of

this study affirm that for African American Christians, reconciliation is rooted in their faith and understanding of the Gospel, which (among many things) teaches repentance, restoration, and justice. The participants offered a host of one word responses toward the meaning of reconciliation. Thematically, the words most used was to include to repentance, restore, acknowledgement, and understanding. Additionally, participant expressed ideas of restoring relationship in unity through faith in God.

Repent and Restore

Participants unanimously named that reconciliation involves repairing the harm that has been caused by systemic racism and discrimination. One participant vividly described reconciliation as an act of balancing the imbalanced; citing that “there can be no reconciliation until everyone has access to everything that everybody has access to.” A real beloved community is equitable in every area of life.” This sentiment of reconciliation is echoed through restorative justice practices. These practices focus on repairing harm caused by criminal behavior and restoring relationships between offenders, victims, and communities. Restorative justice involves bringing together all parties involved, acknowledging the offence, identifying the needs of the victims, and developing a plan for repairing the harm and preventing future harm. For African American Christians, restorative justice can be a powerful tool for promoting healing and reconciliation in communities that have been impacted by systemic racism and discrimination.

Acknowledge and Understand = Healing and Repair

In addition, other participants described reconciliation as acknowledgement and understanding the depth and sacrifice of the work that will be needed to forge healing and repair. Participant 4 recalled visiting Amsterdam. She told the story of Ann Frank, a young Jewish girl

who lived in Amsterdam during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands in World War II. She and her family went into hiding in a secret annex behind her father's business to avoid being deported to a concentration camp. During their time in hiding, Anne kept a diary that later became the famous book, "The Diary of Anne Frank." Tragically, Anne and her family were discovered and sent to concentration camps, where Anne died at the age of 15.

In the case of Anne Frank and Amsterdam, reconciliation efforts are made apparent by the city to honor Anne's memory and the experiences of all those who suffered during the Nazi occupation. Amsterdam has established several memorials and museums, such as the Anne Frank House, to commemorate the Holocaust and to educate future generations about the importance of tolerance and respect for diversity. Reconciliation in the context of Anne Frank and Amsterdam involves acknowledging the past, confronting the injustices that occurred, and working towards a better future by promoting peace, understanding and compassion, recognition of their experiences, and contributions to society.

For these participants, reconciliation could begin with cementing a more inclusive narrative of American history that acknowledges the contributions of African Americans and the impact of systemic racism and discrimination. Ultimately, Participant 4 described the experiences of Black people in America as a stain on the fabric of America that could be repaired by American's modeling their deepest regret through retailing and remorse. Reconciliation is a deeply personal and spiritual process that can be just as diverse in its efforts and the people groups it serves.

Summary

In conclusion, the African American church has deep roots in the history of the United States and has served as a safe space for African Americans to express their faith and culture.

However, the church has not been immune to the conflict between race and religion, as believers have experienced the effects of racial disparities and inequities in their daily lives. Suffering is buried deeply in the psyche of black people and remains perpetually nourished by the disparities and inequities that they experience daily.

Participants expressed varied levels of ease or difficulty connecting with Christians who are not black. There are several factors that can contribute to these differences in experiences. However these group participants especially named race related historical and cultural factors such as racism, discrimination, and social inequalities that contribute to their (in)?ability to connect to other ethnicities within the Christian faith. In addition, some participants noted that they feel more comfortable worshipping in spaces that reflect their own cultural or ethnic background, which has limited their exposure to Christians from other backgrounds.

Despite this, the marketplace can serve as a powerful tool for reconciliation. When the church and marketplace intersect, they have the potential to become even more powerful tools for reconciliation. By working together, they can create a more holistic approach to promoting spiritual awareness, economic empowerment, fostering dialogue and understanding as well as advocating for social and political change. Likewise, when the church engages with the marketplace, it can bring about positive outcomes for both the church and the community it serves. Instead of insulating itself in cathedrals, the church can be a powerful force for change in the world. The following chapters explore said theory and with suggestions for resolution.

CHAPTER 4: BIBLICAL MOTIF

Introduction

It's no secret that the story of Jonah is among the most famous stories in history. It tells the tale of a man who was sent on a mission by God to preach to the people of Nineveh, but who initially refused and ended up being swallowed by a large fish. After three days, he was spit out onto dry land and finally carried out his mission, preaching to the people of Nineveh. The book of Jonah is situated during a period of Jewish history marked by the Babylonian exile and the eventual return to Jerusalem. During this time, the Jewish people were struggling to reconcile their identity as a chosen people with their experience of captivity and subjugation under foreign powers.

Jonah's story illustrates this struggle, as a prophet initially resists God's command to preach to the people of Nineveh, a foreign city considered an enemy by Israel. The Assyrians, of which Nineveh was the capital, were known for their cruelty and aggression towards the Israelites. As the people of Nineveh repent and are shown mercy by God, Jonah becomes angry and resentful, highlighting the tension between the Jewish identity as a chosen people and the call to be compassionate and merciful. The reader has an opportunity to see Jonah as a flawed and reluctant prophet who must learn to confront his own biases and prejudices.

But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." The LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city. So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. But God appointed a worm when

dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered. When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life." Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death." Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which I came up overnight and perished overnight. "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"²¹

Anguish

The text of Jonah 4:1-11 presents multiple perspectives of anguish. Jonah experiences anguish when he is forced to confront his own biases and prejudices. When God spares the people of Nineveh, Jonah becomes angry and frustrated, telling God that he knew all along that God would show mercy to the Assyrians. This response suggests that Jonah was deeply attached to his own worldview and struggled to accept that his enemies could be redeemed by God. Likewise, Jonah experiences anguish when God causes a plant to wither that had previously provided him with shade and comfort. This plant had given Jonah relief from the scorching heat and was a source of comfort for him. When it withers, Jonah becomes angry and tells God that he would rather die than live without the plant. This reaction suggests that Jonah had become overly attached to the plant and was unwilling to let it go, even if it meant obeying God's will. Jonah's anguish serves as a reminder of the complex emotions and struggles that can arise when we are faced with difficult situations or forced to confront our own biases and limitations.

Within this pericope, the people of Nineveh's anguish can be seen in their response to Jonah's message of impending destruction. The text describes their repentance and mourning, as

²¹ Jonah 4:1-11. New American Standard Bible, 1995 update.

they put on sackcloth and ashes and fast in the hope of appeasing God's wrath. This response was not only a physical demonstration of their anguish, but also a spiritual one, as they recognized the gravity of their sins and the potential consequences of their actions. Moreover, their plea for mercy shows their anguish. They begged God to spare their city and expressed their fear of punishment. This plea for mercy was a desperate cry from a people who recognized their own shortcomings and were willing to do whatever it took to avoid the consequences of their sins. Their plea for mercy was not in vain, as God saw their repentance and spared the city.

Another perspective of anguish is that of God himself. We can fathom that God experiences anguish in the book of Jonah through the use of anthropomorphic language and imagery.

Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics or behavior to a god, animal, or object.²² Throughout the book of Jonah, God is depicted using language that suggests that He is experiencing emotions similar to those of human beings, including anguish.

For example, in Jonah 4:2, Jonah accuses God of being "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity," which implies that Jonah believes that God has shown mercy to the people of Nineveh and that this mercy is causing him anguish. Similarly, in Jonah 4:10, God asks Jonah, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh?" This response suggests that God is capable of feeling concern and anguish, just as Jonah is feeling anguish over the loss of the plant.

While we cannot know the full extent of God's emotions, the use of anthropomorphic language in the book of Jonah suggests that God is capable of experiencing a range of emotions, including anguish, in response to the actions of His creation. This understanding highlights the

²² C. Soanes, and A. Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English dictionary* (11th ed.). New York:Oxford University Press, 2006.

deep connection between God and His creation and emphasizes the importance of seeking a deeper relationship with Him. God had created the people of Nineveh and cared for them, despite their sins. When Jonah expressed his disappointment and anger towards God's mercy, it grieved God deeply. In fact, in verse 11, God says, "Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?" This statement shows the depth of God's anguish and concern for the people of Nineveh, as well as his compassion for all of his creation.

The text of Jonah 4:1-11 exposes the anguish in several ways, including Jonah's disappointment, the fear and repentance of the people of Nineveh, and God's own sorrow over the situation. This variety of perspectives highlights the complex emotions and reactions that can arise in response to difficult situations, and serves as a reminder that everyone involved may be experiencing their own form of anguish. There are several relevant messages one can lift from this passage:

1. Jonah's anger towards the people of Nineveh is rooted in his own sense of entitlement and power. He had expected the people of Nineveh to be punished for their sins, but when God shows them mercy, Jonah is filled with despair and bitterness. This can be related to the anguish experienced by Black people in America, who have been subjected to centuries of systemic oppression, discrimination, and violence at the hands of those in power.
2. The anguish of the people of Nineveh serves as a reminder that the consequences of sin can be a heavy burden to bear, and that the fear of punishment can lead to genuine repentance and a desire for mercy. Their

response to Jonah's message demonstrates the power of acknowledging one's own shortcomings and seeking forgiveness, and the relief that can come from experiencing God's mercy and grace.

3. God's anguish in the passage serves as a reminder of the depth of His love and concern for His creation. Even when faced with disobedience, anger, and frustration, God remains patient and compassionate, always seeking to lead His people towards redemption and reconciliation.

Jonah 4:1-11 offers valuable insights into the theme of anguish as it relates to Black history in America. It is particularly relevant to the experiences and the struggles that the participants expressed. This passage teaches us about the dangers of letting our desires and expectations cloud our judgment and the importance of surrendering our will to God in times of distress. The anguish that African Americans experience is rooted in the history of slavery, discrimination, and systemic oppression. As a result of centuries of dehumanization and marginalization, the effects of this trauma are still felt in communities today. The writer Ta-Nehisi Coates describes the legacy of this trauma in his book *Between the World and Me*: "The truth is that the police reflect America in all of its will and fear, and whatever we might make of this country's criminal justice policy, it cannot be said that it was imposed by a repressive minority."²³ The anguish that we feel as a community is a result of this systemic injustice, and it is a reminder that we still have a long way to go in the fight for justice and equality.

In Jonah 4:1-11, Jonah's anguish is seen as he watches God spare the city of Nineveh from destruction. Jonah had hoped that God would destroy the city, and his disappointment and anger at God's mercy led him to flee and sit in despair. However, God uses this moment of

²³ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Random House, 2015), 29.

anguish to teach Jonah a valuable lesson about surrendering his will to God's plan. God tells Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" (Jonah 4:9). This question challenges Jonah's selfish desire for the destruction of Nineveh, and encourages him to trust in God's mercy and wisdom.

There is a message that can be gleaned for African American believers from Jonah's experience of anguish and surrender. Like Jonah, believers can recognize that personal desires and expectations can often cloud our judgment and prevent us from seeing God's plan for our lives. Instead, we must surrender our will to God and trust in his guidance and mercy. As the writer of Psalm 34:18 tells us, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." We can find comfort and hope in this promise, knowing that God sees our anguish and is with us in our pain. The theme of anguish in Jonah 4:1-11 is a reminder of the pain and trauma that African Americans have experienced throughout history. However, it also teaches us the importance of surrendering our will to God and trusting in his guidance and mercy. As we continue to fight for justice and equality, may we always remember the lessons of Jonah and the hope that we have in God's promises.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation refers to the act of repairing relationships that have been damaged or broken, whether between individuals or between humans and God. In the Bible, the book of Jonah provides an excellent example of the concept of reconciliation in action. In Jonah 4:1-11, we see the aftermath of Jonah's mission to Nineveh. When recalling the story, the people of Nineveh have repented of their sins, and God has relented from the destruction he had planned to bring upon the city. However, Jonah is angry and resentful towards God. He complains that he knew all along that God would forgive the people of Nineveh, and he feels that his mission has

been a failure. He even goes so far as to ask God to take his life. In response, God teaches Jonah a lesson about compassion and reconciliation. He causes a plant to grow up overnight, providing shade and comfort for Jonah. However, the next day, God causes a worm to eat the plant, and it withers and dies. Jonah is once again angry and resentful, but God rebukes him, saying that Jonah cared more about the plant than he did about the people of Nineveh. This passage highlights key themes related to reconciliation.

First, the importance of repentance is evident as the people of Nineveh were able to avoid destruction because they repented of their sins and turned toward God. This act of repentance allowed for the possibility of reconciliation between the people of Nineveh and God. Then, the importance of compassion and forgiveness in reconciliation is shown in God's actions. Despite Jonah's reluctance to deliver God's message, God still shows compassion towards the people of Nineveh and forgives them when they repent. This act of forgiveness allows for the possibility of reconciliation between God and the people of Nineveh. Finally, the importance of humility in reconciliation can be lifted from this passage. Jonah's anger and resentment towards God stem from his own pride and self-righteousness. He is unable to see the value in the repentance of the people of Nineveh because he believes that he knows better than God. However, God's rebuke forces Jonah to confront his own pride and recognize that he has much to learn about compassion and forgiveness. As God challenges Jonah's narrow and oppressive worldview by showing him the mercy and humanity of the people of Nineveh, reconciliation is a centric theme.

Similarly, in the history of Black people in America, there have been moments of reconciliation, such as the Civil Rights Movement, which brought about greater awareness and understanding of the injustices faced by Black people and the need for change. As the text provides a powerful example of the theme of reconciliation and reveals the importance of

repentance, compassion, forgiveness, and humility in the process of repairing relationships that have been damaged or broken. These themes continue to be relevant in our own lives, as we seek to reconcile with others and with God.

Instruction

The cultural context, Jonah 4:1-11 reflects the tensions and challenges of living in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. The passage offers instruction on the importance of empathy, compassion, and a willingness to challenge oppressive worldviews and systems of power. When God confronts Jonah and forces him to see the humanity of the people of Nineveh, Jonah begins to change his perspective. Furthermore, this passage sheds light on the theme of instruction, specifically on the idea that God's instruction is not only for individuals but also for communities. Jonah had initially refused to carry out God's instruction to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh, but when he finally did, the people repented, and God showed them mercy. Jonah's reaction to God's mercy towards Nineveh is crucial to the theme of instruction. As he sits outside the city waiting to see if God would destroy it, hoping to witness their downfall, God speaks to Jonah through the plant experience. God instructs Jonah on the importance of mercy and compassion, not just for individuals but also for entire communities. God's instruction highlights the need to extend love and forgiveness to all people, regardless of their past wrongdoings.

This passage also emphasizes the idea that God's instruction is not just for individuals but also for communities. The people of Nineveh were a community that repented and received God's mercy, demonstrating that God's instruction applies to entire societies. God's mercy towards the people of Nineveh shows that His instruction is not just for personal growth but also for the transformation of entire communities. Moreover, God's mercy towards the people of

Nineveh demonstrates the need for compassion and forgiveness towards all people, regardless of their past wrongdoings. This passage teaches that we should extend God's love and mercy to everyone, and that transformation is possible for entire societies when they heed God's instruction.

Historical Parallels

There are several historical similarities between Jonah 4:1-11 and the experiences of Black Christians in America. One of the most significant similarities is the theme of oppression and marginalization. When the people of Nineveh repent and turn towards God, Jonah becomes angry and resentful. This can be seen as reflecting the tension between the dominant Jewish culture and the surrounding nations, who were often viewed as inferior and unclean. In the history of Black people in America, there has been a long history of oppression and marginalization, as Black people were brought to America as slaves and subjected to centuries of systemic racism, discrimination, and violence. Like the people of Nineveh in the story of Jonah, Black people were often seen as inferior and unworthy of respect or consideration. The theme of oppression and marginalization is particularly relevant to Black Christians in America, as they have often faced discrimination and exclusion within predominantly white Christian communities. They have been marginalized and viewed as inferior by some white Christians, who have perpetuated a racist and exclusionary worldview within their churches and communities. This has been reflected in the history of American Christianity, which has been characterized by racial segregation and inequality.

Another historical parallel between Jonah 4:1-11 and the experiences of Black people in America is the theme of reconciliation. In the story of Jonah, God challenges the prophet's narrow and oppressive worldview by showing him the mercy and humanity of the people of

Nineveh. Likewise, in the history of Black people in America, there have been moments of reconciliation and progress towards greater understanding and justice, such as the Civil Rights Movement and ongoing efforts for racial equality. The theme of reconciliation is also particularly significant for Black Christians in America, as they have often had to navigate the tension between their Christian faith and the legacy of racial injustice and oppression. Many Black Christians have sought to reconcile their faith with their experiences of marginalization and have worked towards greater understanding and justice within their communities and society as a whole. The importance of empathy and a willingness to challenge oppressive worldviews and systems of power is also relevant to African American Christians, who have often been at the forefront of social justice movements and have challenged the status quo in their churches and communities.

Through a more focused analysis of the themes of anguish, reconciliation, and instruction explored in the story, the unique challenges and struggles faced by the African American population in America lift vividly above the text. (quote from reading while black) The historical similarities between Jonah 4:1-11 and the experiences of Black Christians in America provide a powerful framework for understanding the struggles and challenges faced by this particular group of people. By drawing on these similarities, we can gain deeper insights into the themes of oppression, reconciliation, and empathy explored in the story and work towards greater understanding, justice, and reconciliation for all.

CHAPTER 5: THE SPACE

Marketplace

Marketplaces have long been a hub for exchanging goods and services, but they also play an essential role in bringing together people of diverse backgrounds and cultures. Marketplaces have traditionally been associated with commerce, as they provide a space where buyers and sellers come together to exchange goods and services. However, the marketplace is more than just a commercial hub. It is a vibrant space that brings together people from different walks of life and serves as an epicenter of social, cultural, and political life.

In the context of this research, marketplaces are places where people come together to socialize and connect. In many cultures, marketplaces serve as community meeting places where people gather to catch up on the latest news and gossip. People from different backgrounds and cultures come together in marketplaces, creating a sense of community and belonging. By providing a space where people can interact and socialize, marketplaces contribute to the social fabric of communities. As cultural hubs where people can experience and celebrate their heritage, the space of marketplace extends beyond where vendors sell traditional foods, clothes, and other items that reflect the local culture. It is often filled with music, dance, and other cultural performances that celebrate the unique identity of the community. By providing a space for cultural expression, marketplaces contribute to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage.

Additionally, marketplaces can serve as political centers where people come together to discuss and engage with important issues. Marketplace have been the space of political rallies, protests, and other forms of activism throughout history. As public spaces, they can facilitate discussions and debates about important issues, giving people a voice and a platform for political

engagement. The market place unlike the church in the sense that it is not bound to a faith value although, it is often defined by the culture its people cultivate.

Finally, marketplaces are spaces of innovation and entrepreneurship. Small businesses and entrepreneurs often start in marketplaces, taking advantage of the low overhead costs and high foot traffic. Marketplaces provide a space for experimentation and creativity, allowing people to try out new ideas and products. By fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, marketplaces contribute to the economic growth and development of communities.

The marketplace is not just centers of commerce, but also epicenters of life. They are vibrant social, cultural, and political spaces that bring people together and contribute to the fabric of communities. Marketplaces are spaces of innovation and entrepreneurship, cultural expression, and political engagement. As such, it is important to recognize and appreciate the multifaceted role that marketplaces play in our communities and our lives.

Race

The cultural climate in the United States regarding race and African Americans has undergone significant changes in recent years. The killing of George Floyd and numerous Black Americans by police officers in 2020 sparked a nationwide protest against systemic racism and police brutality. The killings Black Americans by police officers has highlighted the longstanding issue of police brutality in America. According to a report by the Mapping Police Violence project, Black Americans are three times more likely to be killed by police than white Americans.²⁴ Activist argue that police brutality is not just a problem of individual officers, but a systemic issue that is rooted in the history of racism in America.

²⁴ Curtis Bunn, "Report: Black People Are Still Killed by Police at a Higher Rate than Other Groups," *NBC News*, last modified March 3, 2022. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/report-black-people-are-still-killed-police-higher-rate-groups-rcna17169>.

Technology—such as body cameras and social media—now plays a significant role in exposing instances of police brutality and holding law enforcement agencies accountable for their actions. Body cameras, which are worn by police officers while on duty, capture footage of interactions between police officers and the public. This footage can be used as evidence in investigations of police misconduct. In addition, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube provide a platform for people to share and spread footage of police misconduct. This footage can quickly go viral, drawing attention to instances of police brutality and sparking public outrage. Likewise, technology (through social media) has provided a platform for individuals and organizations to organize and coordinate protests and demonstrations against police brutality. This has helped to amplify the voices of those affected and has put pressure on law enforcement and government agencies to take action to address the issue.

This study further confirms how systemic racism is a mixed and multi-layered issue that affects every aspect of life, from economic and educational disparities to disparities in health outcomes and criminal justice. The current cultural context is one that is characterized by ongoing struggles for racial justice and equity. Despite progress made towards civil rights and equality for marginalized communities in the past, racial disparities and inequities persist in many aspects of American life. According to a report by the National Bureau of Economic Research, African Americans face significant disparities in access to education, employment, and healthcare.²⁵ For example, African Americans are more likely to attend low-performing schools and less likely to graduate from college than their white counterparts. They also experience

²⁵ Raj Chetty et al., *Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective*, *Nber.org* (Cambridge, MA: NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH, December 2019). https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w24441/w24441.pdf.

higher rates of unemployment and are more likely to live in poverty. These disparities have a significant impact on the overall well-being of African Americans and contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism.

In response to these persistent injustices, there have been widespread protests and movements calling for systemic change and racial justice. The Black Lives Matter movement, in particular, has gained significant momentum and has pushed for reforms in policing and criminal justice, as well as greater economic and educational opportunities for African Americans. The current cultural climate has prompted many industries to respond to the demands of consumers and activists who are advocating for greater social and environmental responsibility. The following are some examples of how various industries have responded to this challenge:

- **Corporate Social Responsibility:** Many companies have made public commitments to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging within their organizations, as well as to reduce their carbon footprints and promote sustainability. For example, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests, many companies issued statements condemning racism and pledging to do more to promote equity and justice within their organizations and in society at large.²⁶
- **Advertising:** Advertisers have responded to the cultural climate by featuring more diverse casts and storylines in their commercials, as well as by avoiding content that is perceived as insensitive or offensive to marginalized communities. For

²⁶ Centre for the New Economy and Society. “*Global Parity Alliance: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lighthouses 2023 INSIGHT REPORT.*” weforum.org. McKinsey & Company—World Economic Forum, January 2023. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Parity_Alliance_2023.pdf.

example, many companies have removed racially insensitive branding from their products, such as Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben's.²⁷

- Entertainment: The entertainment industry has responded to the cultural climate by producing more diverse and inclusive content, such as films and television shows featuring casts that represent a wider range of races, genders, and sexual orientations. For example, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has introduced more diverse superhero characters, such as Black Panther and Captain Marvel.²⁸
- Sports: Sports leagues and organizations have responded to the cultural climate by supporting social justice initiatives and promoting greater diversity and inclusion within their organizations. For example, the NFL has pledged to donate \$250 million over the next 10 years to support social justice initiatives, and the NBA has allowed players to wear social justice messages on their jerseys during games.²⁹
- Technology: Technology companies have responded to the cultural climate by taking steps to address biases and promote greater diversity and inclusion within their organizations and products. For example, some companies have

²⁷ Rowan Hamill, "Diversity in Media and Advertising - an inside Look," The Drum (Adswizz, November 7, 2022), <https://www.thedrum.com/profile/adswizz/news/rowan-hamill-an-inside-look-at-diversity-in-media-and-advertising>.

²⁸ Dr. Stacy L Smith, Marc Choueiti, and Katherine Pieper, *Inequity in 900 Popular Films: Examining the Portrayals of Gender, Race/Equity, LGBT, and Disability Form 2007-2016* (Annenberg, CA: USC, 2020), 6-10.

²⁹ Richard E Lapchick, "2019 Racial and Gender Report Card A Comprehensive Analysis of the Hiring Practices of Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, the Women's National Basketball Association, the National Football League, Major League Soccer and College Sport" (Orlando, FL: TIDES, 2020), 3-35.

implemented blind hiring practices to reduce the impact of unconscious biases in the hiring process.³⁰

Many industries have responded to the demands of the cultural climate by taking steps to promote greater social and environmental responsibility, as well as by promoting greater diversity, equity, and inclusion within their organizations and products. These efforts reflect a growing recognition of the importance of social and environmental responsibility in today's marketplace and the need for companies and organizations to take meaningful action to promote positive change.

Religion

There has been a complicated relationship between race and religion among African American Christians in the United States. From the days of slavery to the present day, African American Christians have grappled with the tension between the teachings of Jesus and the realities of racism and discrimination. Throughout history, Christianity has been used to justify slavery and segregation, and many African Americans have felt alienated from a religion that seemed to condone their oppression. However, African American Christians have also found strength and inspiration in Jesus Christ, who preached love, justice, and equality.

The struggle of African American Christians with race and religion is rooted in the legacy of slavery and the long history of racial inequality in the United States. In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, the Christian church was a major player in the segregation and discrimination of the Jim Crow era, with many churches refusing to allow African Americans to worship

³⁰ Megan Rose Dickey, "The Future of Diversity and Inclusion in Tech," *TechCrunch* (June 17, 2019). <https://techcrunch.com/2019/06/17/the-future-of-diversity-and-inclusion-in-tech/>.

alongside whites. In her book *Mississippi Praying*, Carolyn Renée Dupont describes the response of the majority white evangelical community to integration.

Fixated on the potential advent of black equality, white Christians joined the fight to preserve white power and privilege in all its forms. Having accepted both evangelicalism and white supremacy as unassailable truths for years, these Mississippians generally regarded as patently absurd the notion that God frowned on their racial arrangements; the sudden appearance of segregation in some syllabus of sins jolted their sensibilities. In their religious world, racial integration represented a heinous moral evil—and they fought it as if against the devil himself. White Mississippians’ fierce and tenacious defense of their segregated society relied heavily on religious ideas and frames of reference. Their segregationist polemics employed biblical apologetics, but religion figured in the defense of the racial hierarchy in other far more significant ways, including the overt sanctification of a political philosophy that underpinned segregation. And evangelicals went well beyond rhetoric. They marshaled the power of the state, warred against their own denominations, caucused and organized, and ejected black worshippers from their sanctuaries.³¹

Despite this legacy, African American Christians have found ways to reconcile their faith with their struggle for racial justice. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was led in large part by African American Christian leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., who saw their activism as a way of living out the teachings of Jesus. The Black Church has also played a vital role in African American communities, providing support, hope, and a sense of identity in the face of racism and discrimination. The struggle for African American Christians with race and religion continues in the present day has had a profound impact, as they continue to grapple with issues of identity, belonging, and justice within the context of their faith.

The results of this study remind readers that many continue to struggle with the role of the Church in perpetuating systemic racism and inequality, and some have turned away from Christianity altogether. Many African American Christians feel that the Church has not done enough to address issues of racial inequality and injustice. They point to the lack of diversity

³¹ Carolyn Renée Dupont, *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1975* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

within many churches, the tendency of some white Christians to deny or minimize the impact of racism, and the complicity of some churches in perpetuating systemic racism. As a result, some African American Christians have turned away from traditional forms of Christianity and are exploring alternative expressions of faith, such as liberation theology or African-centered spirituality. Others have remained within the Church but are pushing for greater representation and inclusion of African American perspectives and experiences. The following is a list of the challenges and tensions that can make the Black Church a difficult place for some to fully embrace.

CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS	
The legacy of complicity in racism	The long history of complicity in slavery and segregation has can made it difficult for some African Americans to fully embrace the Church, as they may feel that it has not done enough to address these past wrongs.
Differences in theology and practice	There can be significant differences in the way that African American Christians practice their faith, both within and outside of the Church. These differences can sometimes lead to tensions and disagreements over issues such as worship style, doctrine, and social issues.
Political differences	The Black Church has historically been a source of political activism and social justice, but there can be differences in opinion and strategy among African American Christians when it comes to political issues. This can lead to tensions and disagreements over issues

	such as voting, party affiliation, and the role of the Church in political activism.
Lack of diversity within the Church	While the Black Church has historically been a place of refuge for African Americans, it has also been criticized for its lack of diversity. Some African Americans feel that the Church can be insular and exclusionary, and may not fully embrace those who come from different backgrounds or have different experiences.
LGBTQ+ inclusion	The Black Church has historically been conservative on issues related to sexuality and gender, which can create tension for those who identify as LGBTQ+. Some African American Christians feel that the Church needs to do more to be inclusive of all members of the community, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Despite these challenges and tensions, the Black Church remains an important institution for many African Americans. It continues to provide a sense of community, identity, and support in the face of racism and discrimination, and many African American Christians see it as a vital part of their faith and history. Therefore, the need for reconciliation, for the African American Christian, does not rest in race alone. Rather, it must encompass religion as well.

Race and Religion a Dual Identity

IN the current American cultural context, African American Christians make up a significant proportion of the Christian population in the United States. They are represented in a wide range

of denominations, including Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, and others. According to a 2020 report by the Pew Research Center, about 79% of African Americans identify as Christian, with the majority being Protestant.³² This is higher than the proportion of White Americans who identify as Christian, which is around 70%. The report also found that African Americans are more likely than White Americans to attend church regularly and to say that religion is very important in their lives.

African American churches often play a central role in the community, serving as a source of social and spiritual support. At the same time, African American Christians continue to face unique challenges within American society. They have historically been marginalized and excluded from many institutions, and continue to experience racism and discrimination in various forms. Race and religion are two intertwined identities that have significant implications for individuals and communities. For Black Christians, these identities often result in a double minority status that shapes their experiences and perspectives in unique ways. Additionally, there are ongoing debates and disagreements within the African American Christian community around issues such as LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality.

Many Christian institutions and leaders have perpetuated racist beliefs and practices, and the legacy of this history continues to shape the experiences of Black Christians today. In recent years, there has also been a growing movement among Black Christians to reclaim their spiritual and cultural identities in ways that challenge dominant narratives about Christianity and race.³³

³² David Masci, “5 Facts about the Religious Lives of African Americans,” Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, August 18, 2020). <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/02/07/5-facts-about-the-religious-lives-of-african-americans/>.

³³ James H Cone and Cornel West, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 83-87.

This has included a focus on Afrocentric theology and worship, as well as a renewed emphasis on the social justice teachings of the Bible and Black Israelites.

Also known as Hebrew Israelites, Black Israelites are a diverse group of people who believe that they are descendants of the ancient Israelites and that their true identity has been hidden or erased by Western imperialism and white supremacy.³⁴ Black Israelites believe in a strict interpretation of the Bible and follow a set of laws and commandments similar to those followed by Orthodox Jews. Others incorporate Afrocentric and nationalist beliefs into their faith, seeing their identity as part of a larger struggle for Black liberation and empowerment. The movement has been growing in recent years, particularly among African Americans who are seeking a spiritual and cultural identity that resonates with their experiences of racism and marginalization. Black Israelite movement reflects a broader trend towards the reclamation of African and African American cultural and spiritual identities. As Black people continue to navigate the complex intersections of race, religion, and culture, movements like Black Israelitism offer new possibilities for resistance, community-building, and empowerment.

For many, the experiences of Black Christians in the United States are shaped by their dual identities as members of a racial minority and a religious minority. While these identities can present unique challenges, they also provide opportunities for resilience, resistance, and community-building. As the country continues to grapple with issues of race and religion, the experiences of Black Christians offer important insights into the intersectionality of identity and the ongoing struggle for justice and equality.

³⁴ Yvonne Patricia Chireau and Nathaniel Deutsch, *Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15-88.

CHAPTER 6: RECONCILIATION AND THE ROLE OF MARKETPLACE

What Black Christians have historically faced as a result of the intersection of race and religion is a unique form of trauma that. This trauma is deeply rooted in their history of enslavement, oppression, and discrimination experiences in the United States. For many Black Christians, their faith has been both a source of strength and a site of struggle. On one hand, the message of liberation and hope in the Bible has been a powerful source of comfort and inspiration in the face of oppression. On the other hand, the way that Christianity has been used to justify and perpetuate racist ideologies and practices has also caused significant pain and trauma. The trauma of race and religion manifests itself in many ways for Black Christians. For example, many may struggle with feelings of anger, resentment, or even betrayal towards the church and its leaders for their complicity in racist systems. Others struggle with the history of white Christian leaders who have used the Bible to justify slavery, colonization, and other forms of oppression.

One of the most visible ways that this struggle manifests is in the image of Jesus as a white man. The dominant representation of Jesus in Western art and media has been as a white man with European features, despite the fact that Jesus was a Middle Eastern Jew. This representation reinforces the idea that whiteness is the norm and the standard of beauty and goodness, while other racial and ethnic groups are inferior or less worthy. For many Black Christians, this representation of Jesus is deeply problematic. It can reinforce feelings of inferiority and internalized racism, as well as contribute to a sense of cultural erasure and disconnection from their own cultural and religious heritage. It can also make it difficult for believers to fully identify with Jesus and to see themselves as part of the Christian tradition.

Some may see the Bible as a source of liberation and empowerment, while others may see it as a tool of oppression and violence.

Additionally, the trauma of race and religion can also impact the mental health of Black Christians. Research has shown that experiences of racism and discrimination can contribute to depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges, and these experiences can be compounded when they occur within a religious context.³⁵ The intersection of race and religion can create unique challenges for African American Christians as they may experience discrimination and marginalization within their religious communities. This can lead to feelings of isolation, mistrust, and a sense of being "othered," which can have negative effects on mental health. Repeated experiences of prejudice and racism can cause significant emotional pain and psychological distress. In their book *Designed to Heal: What the Body Shows Us About Healing Wounds*, authors Jeanne A McLaren and Cymbeline Tancongo Culiati expound that trauma is not just a mental or emotional experience, but also a physiological one. When an individual experiences trauma, their body responds in a number of ways, including increased heart rate, muscle tension, and changes in brain function.³⁶ Over time, these physiological responses can become stuck or frozen, leading to a range of physical and emotional symptoms.

The spiritual impact of trauma can be significant for individuals who have experienced discrimination and prejudice. Trauma can challenge an individual's sense of identity, purpose, and connection to others and to a higher power. It can lead to feelings of despair, hopelessness, and disconnection from one's spiritual beliefs and practices. For some individuals, such trauma

³⁵ R. T. Carter, M. Lau, V. Johnson, and K Kirkinis, K. "Religiosity, Racism, and Psychological Distress: A Study of African American Women," *Journal of Black Psychology* 43.5 (2017): 447-463.

³⁶ Jennie A McLaurin and Cymbeline Tancongo Culiati, *Designed to Heal: What the Body Shows Us about Healing Wounds, Repairing Relationships, and Restoring Community* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2021).

leads to a sense of questioning or even rejection of their religious beliefs. They struggle to reconcile their beliefs in a just and loving God with the experiences of injustice and suffering they have faced. This can be particularly challenging for African American Christians who may have been taught to view their suffering as a test of faith or a path to spiritual growth. In an attempt to be committed to their faith, many find themselves grappling with feelings of anger, confusion, or disillusionment with their religious community or with God.

The sum total of this plethora of emotions as individuals experience trauma can be described as brokenness. Brokenness is exhibited by all people in any number of ways, yet particularly in the Black community, it often impacts individuals' ability to form and maintain healthy relationships. The experience of race-based traumatic stress is personal brokenness that most often results in a lack of trust in others, fear of intimacy, and difficulty in communicating emotions and needs. This can have a 360 degree effect of a people group at the core of systematic and system oppression. These challenges can be particularly acute for African Americans; a people group that has experienced systemic oppression and discrimination over time. Race-based traumatic stress can contribute to a sense of collective trauma and a shared experience of pain and suffering that is inevitably transmitted across generations. This creates a cycle of trauma and oppression that is difficult to break and can perpetuate systemic inequality and injustice.

Brokenness: A Prerequisite for Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a process of healing and restoration that involves the repair of broken relationships, the healing of wounds and the rebuilding of trust. While reconciliation is a goal that many strive for, it is often a trying process that requires a willingness to confront past hurts and acknowledge the brokenness that exists in our relationships and communities. Brokenness is

a prerequisite to reconciliation because it is only by recognizing and acknowledging our brokenness that we can begin to move towards healing and restoration. When we are willing to confront our brokenness, we can begin to see ourselves and others more clearly, and we can begin to recognize the ways in which our own actions and attitudes may have contributed to the brokenness in our relationships.

Furthermore, brokenness can create a sense of humility and vulnerability that is necessary for reconciliation to take place. When we are broken, we are often more open to the possibility of change and growth, and we may be more willing to listen to others and seek their perspectives. This openness and vulnerability can create an atmosphere of trust and empathy that is essential for the process of reconciliation to move forward. Brokenness can be a catalyst for repentance and forgiveness, which are essential components of reconciliation. When we are able to recognize the ways in which others have hurt us, we can extend forgiveness and work towards healing and reconciliation. Similarly, when we recognize the ways in which we have contributed to the brokenness in our relationships, we can repent of our actions and seek forgiveness from those we have hurt.

While brokenness can be a difficult and painful experience, it is also a necessary step in the process of reconciliation. It is only by confronting and acknowledging our brokenness that we can begin to move towards healing and restoration in our relationships and communities. When we are willing to embrace our brokenness with humility and vulnerability, we create the space for repentance, forgiveness, and ultimately, reconciliation to take place.

Humility—A Prerequisite for Reconciliation

Humility is often seen as a fundamental characteristic of individuals who are successful in promoting reconciliation in their personal and professional relationships. Humility is a

disposition or attitude of being open, receptive, and respectful towards others, and it is essential for creating an environment that is conducive to reconciliation. Humility is a prerequisite to reconciliation because it allows individuals to recognize their own limitations, biases, and weaknesses. When individuals are humble, they are more likely to listen to and consider the perspectives and experiences of others. This creates a sense of empathy and understanding, which is essential for fostering healing and restoration in relationships.

Throughout this history, African American Christians have played a pivotal role in promoting reconciliation and advocating for justice. Humility is one key element that has been essential in this work. It is particularly important for African American Christians who are working towards reconciliation because it allows individuals to acknowledge and confront the deep wounds and injustices of the past. By recognizing the impact of historical and systemic racism, African American Christians can demonstrate a willingness to listen, learn, and engage in the hard work of reconciliation. Humility is essential for African Americans who are working towards reconciliation because it allows individuals to approach relationships with an attitude of openness, empathy, and respect. By recognizing the impact of historical and systemic racism, African Americans can demonstrate a willingness to listen and engage in the hard work of reconciliation. This humility is necessary to create an environment of safety and trust that promotes healing and restoration in relationships.

Matthew 11:29 is a well-known passage of scripture where Jesus invites His disciples to learn from Him and take up His yoke, for He is gentle and humble in heart. This passage contains powerful truths about humility and its role in reconciliation.

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.³⁷

³⁷ NASB, 1995 (emphasis mine).

Matthew 11:29 is part of a larger narrative in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus is addressing the crowds and his disciples. In this particular passage, Jesus is talking about the yoke, which is a wooden beam that was used to harness two animals together to plow a field. This was a common sight in the agricultural society of first-century Palestine. In Jewish culture, the yoke was a metaphor for the law and the burden of obedience that came with it. The Pharisees, who were the religious leaders of the day, had created a system of rules and regulations that were burdensome for the people to follow. Jesus, on the other hand, offered a new way of understanding the yoke.

Jesus used the yoke as a metaphor for discipleship and partnership with him. He invited his followers to take on his yoke³⁸, which was one of love, grace, and service.³⁹ In doing so, he was inviting them to enter into a relationship with him that was characterized by humility and gentleness, rather than the burdensome legalism of the Pharisees. It is important to note that in the cultural context of first-century Palestine, humility was highly valued, especially in the Jewish culture. Humility was seen as a sign of wisdom and was highly praised in the Proverbs.⁴⁰ Jewish people were living under the Roman occupation, which was characterized by oppressive and abusive leadership. Therefore, Jesus' message of humility and gentleness would have resonated with the people and offered them hope in the midst of their suffering.

In many ways, the African American community is similar to the Jewish community under Roman occupation, in terms of suffering and oppression. Therefore, Jesus' message of hope and a new way of understanding God's relationship with humanity, through humility and gentleness, can provide comfort and guidance for African American Christians in their struggles.

³⁸ Richards, Lawrence O. *The Bible Reader's Companion*. Electronic ed. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991, 613.

³⁹ Nolland, John. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005), 476.

⁴⁰ Jenney, T. J. "Humility." In *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 617.

He invites his disciples to learn from Him, which implies a posture of humility, a willingness to admit that we don't have all the answers and that we need to be teachable. This is a crucial attitude when it comes to reconciliation because it means that we are open to hearing from others, even those with whom we find great offense.

For an oppressor, the message of humility and gentleness in Matthew 11:29 can be a challenging yet transformative message. It calls the oppressor to recognize their power and privilege, and to use it not for their own benefit but for the service of others. In the context of oppression, humility means recognizing that one's power and privilege have been gained at the expense of others. It means acknowledging the pain and suffering that has been caused by one's actions, and being willing to take responsibility for the harm that has been done. This is not an easy or comfortable process, but it is a necessary step towards true reconciliation and healing.

Gentleness, on the other hand, means using one's power and privilege in a way that is kind, compassionate, and respectful towards others. It means seeking to build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding, rather than on domination or control. This can be particularly challenging for people who are used to wielding their power in a way that benefits them at the expense of others. God humbles individuals (Pharaoh, Ex 10:3) and groups (Israelites, Dt 8:2, 16), showing that their relationship before God is more important than earthly prominence or affluence; kings who humble themselves before God are exalted (1 Kgs 21:29; 2 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 32:26; 33:12, 19), while those who do not are afflicted (2 Chr 33:23; 36:12).⁴¹

Ultimately, the message of humility and gentleness in Matthew 11:29 calls both the oppressed and the oppressor to a radical transformation of their attitudes and actions. It invites them to see each other as equals, as fellow human beings created in the image of God, and to

⁴¹ Juan M Floyd-Thomas, *Liberating Black Church History* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014).

work towards building a society that is characterized by justice, compassion, and love for all. Humility is essential for reconciliation because it allows us to see beyond ourselves and our own interests. It enables us to consider the needs and perspectives of others, even when they differ from our own. Moreover, the fact that Jesus describes Himself as gentle and humble in heart implies that these traits are not signs of weakness, but rather of strength. Humility is about choosing to put the needs of others before our own, and recognizing that true strength comes from a heart that is grounded in love.

Perhaps the most comforting words in this passage are that Jesus says He will give rest to those who take up His yoke and learn from Him. This rest is not just physical rest but also spiritual rest. When we humble ourselves and work towards reconciliation, we can experience a deep sense of peace and rest that comes from knowing that we are doing what God has called us to do. Matthew 11:29 teaches us that humility is an essential component of reconciliation as it can create a surprising sense of safety and trust in relationships. When individuals are humble, they are less likely to be defensive or judgmental towards others. This can create a sense of safety and trust, which is essential for individuals to feel comfortable sharing their experiences, emotions, and needs. When individuals feel heard and understood, they are more likely to be receptive to the perspectives of others and work towards reconciliation.

Furthermore, humility is also important in facilitating forgiveness and promoting healing. Individuals who are humble are more likely to acknowledge their own mistakes and take responsibility for their actions. This can create an environment of accountability and promote healing and restoration in relationships. In addition, humility can be a catalyst for personal growth and transformation. It allows persons to be more open to feedback and criticism, as well as to reflect on their actions and attitudes. This can lead to personal growth and transformation,

which can positively impact relationships and promote reconciliation. Ultimately, humility is a fundamental characteristic of individuals who are successful in promoting reconciliation in their relationships. This posture allows individuals to recognize their own limitations, biases, and weaknesses, and it creates an environment of empathy, safety, and trust.

Commitment—A Prerequisite for Reconciliation

There is no doubt that brokenness and humility are qualifying evidences, but the commitment of all parties is essential to reconciliation. It can be a long and challenging process that requires dedication and perseverance. Commitment is a willingness to work towards healing and repairing relationships, even when the process is difficult and painful. Without commitment, the process of reconciliation can easily break down, as parties involved may lose interest or become discouraged. Therefore, commitment is a prerequisite to reconciliation. As Paul writes to the Ephesians,

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.⁴²

Commitment is rooted in humility, gentleness, and patience. The scripture reminds us that humility as a key aspect of commitment in reconciliation. This requires us to be willing to listen to others and to learn from them, even when it is uncomfortable or challenging.

Patience is also critical to commitment in reconciliation. One of the main reasons why commitment is essential to reconciliation is that it takes time and it is not always linear or straightforward. Reconciliation cannot happen overnight. It is a process that involves rebuilding trust, establishing open communication, and working towards shared goals. Without

⁴² Ephesians 4:1-3 (NASB, 1995).

commitment, parties involved may give up too quickly or become impatient with the slow progress of reconciliation. There will be setbacks, misunderstandings, and moments of frustration. It means recognizing that healing takes time, and being willing to wait for it to happen. Furthermore, commitment is essential to reconciliation because it requires vulnerability. The appropriate audiences for such vulnerability should posit humility, gentleness and patience since reconciliation involves being open and honest about past wrongs and vulnerabilities, which can be especially challenging.

Ephesians 4:2 announces perhaps the powerful element of commitment in reconciliation which is bearing with one another in love. Love is the foundation of reconciliation, and it is what motivates us to seek healing and restoration in our relationships. Bearing with one another means being willing to endure the difficulties of the reconciliation process, even when it is painful or challenging. Therefore commitment is a prerequisite to reconciliation. It means putting the needs of the other person first, and being willing to make sacrifices for the sake of the relationship. Commitment ensures that parties are willing to stick with the process, do the hard work required, and be vulnerable and forgiving. Therefore, commitment is essential for successful reconciliation.

CHAPTER 7: THE ROLE OF MARKETPLACE

The role of marketplace ministry is to encourage Christians to view their daily lives as a way to serve God and to live out their faith in community. The truth is, believers primarily exist in one of three places; home, church, and marketplaces. Marketplace ministry plays an important role in addressing the spiritual and social needs of people within a particular community. It involves developing programs and initiatives that aim to improve the quality of life of individuals and families as they engage in their most common and familiar public spaces, typically through a faith-based approach. It is my assertion that God did not intend that his church and the marketplace be strategically separated by His people. Rather, He intended that His church engage all people so that she might win others to the truth and love of God.

The mission of the church is to spread the message of the Gospel and to bring people into a relationship with God and each other. This involves not only sharing the good news with those who have not yet heard it but also engaging with people from all walks of life, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or religious background. Engaging all people requires the church to be inclusive, welcoming, and responsive to the needs and concerns of those it seeks to reach. It means actively seeking out opportunities to connect with people where they are, building relationships with them, and meeting them where they are in location and on their faith journey.

At the heart of marketplace ministry is mission and unity in Christ. It is a commitment to love others as Christ loved us. This means showing up in our lives and in the lives of others with compassion, empathy, and understanding, and being willing to listen and learn from those who may have different perspectives or experiences than our own. It also means being humble, open-minded, and willing to adapt our approach as needed to meet the changing needs of our

communities. The goal of marketplace ministry is not just to win people over to a particular church or denomination, but to help them experience the transformative power of God's love and grace in their lives. By engaging all people, the church can play a vital role in building bridges of understanding, healing, and reconciliation in our world, and in fulfilling the great commission to make disciples of all nations.

Spiritual Companionship

In a society that is often divided along racial and religious lines, marketplaces can serve as a platform for reconciliation and unity. It can serve as a neutral ground where people of different races and religions can interact with each other. This diversity provides an opportunity for individuals to learn about and appreciate other people's beliefs, customs, and traditions. By interacting with people from different races and religions, individuals can break down the stereotypes and prejudices that they may have held about other groups. As a result, marketplaces can foster a greater sense of understanding and acceptance between people of different backgrounds. For African American Christians, it is a space where they can connect with and support one another, build community, and celebrate their culture and heritage. In many cases, it is also the site of political and cultural resistance, where African Americans have organized and mobilized to fight against systemic oppression and racism.

To this measure, the marketplace can be a particularly meaningful space, as it provides a unique opportunity to connect with others who share their faith and cultural identity. In these spaces, they can find a sense of belonging and solidarity, as well as access resources and support that can help them navigate the challenges and opportunities of daily life. The marketplace further serves as a bridge between different communities, fostering greater understanding and

acceptance between people of different backgrounds. By bringing people together in a shared space provides a unique opportunity for spiritual companionship.

Spiritual companionship is a practice that participates extraordinarily in the mission of God for both parties. One must commit to being present during the engagement of others and listening for the opportunities where God has so intricately woven of Himself into the narrative script of every person's story. In the context of marketplace ministry takes shape in simple form. It is a practice of walking alongside others on their spiritual journeys, offering support, encouragement, and accountability.⁴³ While spiritual direction is a more formal and structured relationship between a trained spiritual director and an individual seeking guidance, spiritual companionship is a more informal and relational approach to supporting others in their spiritual growth. Pickering notes that some current writers about spiritual direction have rightly drawn attention to the risk that directees might, at least initially, be more interested in developing their own spirituality without thinking much about the communal implications of growing closer to God. After all, there is much in contemporary society that pro- motes individualism, and spiritual growth is not immune to these influences.⁴⁴

As mission, spiritual companionship involves intentionally cultivating relationships with others in order to support their spiritual journeys. This can involve creating spaces for individuals to share their experiences, offering encouragement and accountability, and providing resources and guidance for spiritual practices. The goal of spiritual companionship is to create communities of support and care, where individuals feel seen, heard, and valued as they seek to deepen their relationship with God. Through the practice of spiritual companionship, individuals

⁴³ David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 131.

⁴⁴ Sue Pickering, *Spiritual Direction: A Practical Introduction* (London: Canterbury Press, 2014).

can grow in their faith, experience greater joy and fulfillment in life, and become more equipped to share the love of God with others. In this sense, spiritual companionship is missional and is about creating a culture of spiritual growth and transformation. Individuals are empowered to live out their faith and share it with others. It is a powerful way to participate in God's work of transformation in the world, and to help others experience the reconciling love and grace of God in their lives.

Social and Political Change Agent

The marketplace can serve as a catalyst for social and political change. Marketplaces have long been an important aspect of human civilization, serving as a hub of economic activity, trade, and exchange of goods and services. But beyond their economic significance, marketplaces also play a crucial role as cultural epicenters that shape social and political dynamics. They are often the primary venue for social interactions, community gatherings, and cultural events, people from different backgrounds and walks of life come together in marketplaces, creating a vibrant atmosphere that reflects the diversity of the society. Consequently, this diverse marketplace setting becomes a catalyst for social and political change, as people are exposed to new ideas and perspectives, and can engage in dialogue and debate.

Furthermore, the marketplaces also have the potential to shape the power dynamics of a society. In some cases, marketplaces can become a platform for marginalized groups to voice their concerns and demand change. For example, women in some societies have used marketplaces as a space to organize and advocate for their rights, challenging gender norms and patriarchal structures.⁴⁵ African American Christians can find sanctuary and support in

⁴⁵ Abigail Andrews, *Undocumented Politics: Place, Gender, and the Pathways of Mexican Migrants* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 127.

marketplaces, as they have historically been a site of community organizing and resistance against racial discrimination and economic exploitation. For example, during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, African American churches often served as important hubs for organizing protests and boycotts, which were often centered around marketplaces and other economic institutions.⁴⁶ By leveraging their economic power, these movements were able to effect change and secure greater rights and protections for African Americans.

Today the marketplace serves as a platform for political expression and mobilization. As sites for protests, rallies, and other forms of collective action the African American Christian can nurture their internal turmoil and external conflicts in spaces where other believers can support their inquiry through ideas and actions that are rooted in the theme of reconciling all things and all people back to God. In some cases, marketplaces have even played a role in revolutions and political upheavals, as they provide a space for people to come together, share ideas, and organize. As Christians, we are called to be agents of love, justice, and peace in the world. When it comes to social and political reform, there are several ways that we can positively impact these events and help create a more just and peaceful society.

1. Stand for justice: Christians can stand with those who are marginalized and oppressed, and use their voice to advocate for justice and equality. We can speak out against systems and policies that perpetuate injustice, and work towards creating a more equitable society.
2. Embody peace: Jesus taught us to be peacemakers, and this is especially important in the context of public protest. We can seek to de-escalate

⁴⁶ Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

tensions and promote nonviolence, while also being mindful of our own safety and the safety of others.

3. Listen and learn: Protest events can be an opportunity to listen and learn from others, especially those who have different perspectives and experiences than our own. As Christians, we can seek to understand the underlying causes of the issues being protested, and work towards finding constructive solutions.
4. Pray: Christians can pray for those who are protesting, as well as for law enforcement and government officials who are responsible for maintaining order and upholding the law. We can pray for peace, justice, and reconciliation, and ask God to guide our efforts to create a more just society.
5. Take action: Protest events can be a call to action, and Christians can use this as an opportunity to get involved in advocacy and activism. This could involve contacting elected officials, volunteering with local organizations, or joining a grassroots movement that aligns with our values.

With the appropriate gospel centered momentum, the marketplace can be a space for a spirit aided revival!

When people experience revival, they often become more open to the process of reconciliation. A renewed sense of faith and purpose can inspire people to seek forgiveness, offer forgiveness, and work towards restoring broken relationships. As a result, revival can be a catalyst for reconciliation, as it helps to create a shared sense of purpose and a willingness to

work towards the common good. Conversely, when people experience reconciliation, they often feel a sense of healing and renewal that can lead to a desire for spiritual revival. The process of reconciliation can help to remove barriers that prevent people from experiencing God's love and grace, and can create a more fertile ground for revival to take place. Ultimately, both reconciliation and revival are important for creating a more just, peaceful, and harmonious world.

Economic Opportunity

In effect, marketplace ministry is a form of ministry that focuses on engaging with and transforming the marketplace as defined by this study for the glory of God. It involves seeing the marketplace as a mission field and recognizing that God has called us to bring His Kingdom values and principles into the economic systems and structures of society. The concept of economics is about the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. And while it may seem unrelated to our spiritual lives, the truth is that God cares deeply about our economic well-being. In 1 Peter 4:10-11, we see how God is preparing his people for economic reconciliation work. The passage reads:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In these verses, we see that God has given each of us gifts and abilities that we are to use to serve one another. This is an essential aspect of economic reconciliation work. We are called to use our talents and skills to help others, not just to make a profit for ourselves. This means that our economic activity should be guided by the principles of love and service, rather than self-

interest. Therefore, believers can spearhead marketplace ministry to promote economic reform by prioritizing ethical and sustainable business practices. This involves recognizing that the pursuit of profit should not come at the expense of people or the planet, and that businesses have a responsibility to consider the impact of their actions on society as a whole. By promoting ethical and sustainable business practices, marketplace ministry can help to create economic systems that are more just, equitable, and sustainable.

The passage also highlights the importance of speaking and serving in the strength that God supplies. This is a reminder that we cannot do this work on our own. We need God's strength and guidance to be effective in our economic reconciliation work. It is through him that we can make a real difference in the lives of others. Marketplace ministry can promote racial reconciliation by prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. This involves intentionally creating a culture that values and respects people of all races and backgrounds, and actively working to address systemic barriers that prevent people from marginalized communities from accessing economic opportunities. By creating a culture that reflects the diversity of God's Kingdom, marketplace ministry can help to break down racial barriers and promote greater understanding and reconciliation between different groups of people.

Furthermore, the passage reminds us that our ultimate goal is to glorify God in everything we do. This includes our economic activity. We are to use our gifts and abilities in a way that honors God and points others to him. Our economic activity should be a reflection of our faith and our commitment to serving others. Marketplace ministry can promote racial reconciliation and economic reform by using its resources and influence to address systemic issues of poverty and inequality. This can involve investing in community development initiatives, supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs, and advocating for policies and legislation that promote

economic justice and opportunity. By using its resources to address systemic issues of poverty and inequality, marketplace ministry can help to create a more just and equitable society that reflects the values of God's Kingdom.

Additionally, marketplace ministry can promote racial reconciliation and economic reform by leveraging its influence to advocate for change within the broader marketplace. This can involve collaborating with other businesses and organizations to create industry-wide standards for ethical and sustainable business practices, and using its platform to raise awareness about systemic issues of poverty, inequality, and racial injustice. When people from different races and religions are able to earn a livelihood, they become more invested in the success of their community. By leveraging its influence to advocate for change within the broader marketplace, marketplace ministry can help to create a more just and equitable economic system that reflects the values of God's Kingdom.

Conclusion and Final Muses

In conclusion, marketplace ministry can have a vital role in reconciling race and religion in the African American Church. One of the primary functions of marketplace ministry is to equip believers to serve God in the epicenters of their communities. This includes providing resources and support for individuals to use their skills, talents, and resources to make a positive impact on society. Through marketplace ministry, individuals of different races and religions can come together to serve their communities, building relationships based on mutual respect and common goals. This can help break down barriers that exist between different groups, and create opportunities for greater understanding and unity. The African American church goer must commit to existing beyond the place (the building) that they've known as church and instead determine within themselves to become the Church. The true essence of the church is the

community of believers who come together to worship, learn, and serve. While the physical building and Sunday service programs can provide a place and structure for this community to gather, they are not essential to the existence of the Church.

After spending nearly 6 years pioneering marketplace ministry efforts, the Lord has allowed my family and I to return to the traditional church setting to serve. The beauty of this all is seeing how both venues can serve each other. Once upon a time, I was burned out on all things associated with traditional church services. I felt the pressure of having to get it right. The more I sat in Sunday services, the more discontented I became. Over time, I found myself willing to step outside of all norms and venture out into the unknown. A completely decentralized space in ministry should have been my saving grace. While it provided some comforts and relief, I soon realized that I was no longer safe in my faith practices. I was now out in the open, naked and exposed; black and Christian hoping to connect to others in a spaces where I'd already been rejected on so many levels.

The feelings of isolation, grief, identity, fear and anger rushed to the surface of my existence and catapulted me into a twilight zone of my new reality. My lifelong identity as a Christian came tumbling down as I personally wrestled with the questions that are now the basis of this study. I eventually found myself longing for the "Black Church" experience--missing the feeling of walking into the church on Sunday, seeing the sun shining through the stained glass windows of the church and being lovingly greeted by all I encountered. I longed for the warm euphoric feeling of corporate worship and the anticipation and outright intrigue of hearing the message being preached. I must not forget the aftermath of church services: Sunday dinner with family, church members, and friends. All of these recollections, which took years to rewire, slowly filed back in as I felt more and more rejected and isolated in my workplace and in my

community. Sadness, then anger and depression set in like a noose around my neck choking every ounce of life from me. With each gasp for air became more and more difficult and felt it was being blocked or obstructed by something or someone. Just as prolonged choking can lead to oxygen deprivation and potential death, I felt as though whomever God had intended me to be was lost and slowing dying with every blocked opportunity.

Ultimately, my time in isolation, financial ruin and relational chaos lead me to my lowest spiritual place. All that was left was God and my free will to choose Him or not. This climactic moment in my life meant that I had decide if I believed in Him or not. Ripley's Believe it or not is an entertainment franchise that's all about believing the unbelievable. The franchise features strange and bizarre facts, stories, and exhibits that are often difficult to believe. Believing what is difficult to believe can be a challenging concept. It means accepting ideas, concepts, or facts that go against our preconceived notions, beliefs, expectations, and experiences. When we encounter something that is outside of our normal experience or understanding, it can be tempting to reject it outright because it doesn't fit into our worldview.

Yet embracing the idea of believing what is difficult to believe can be a powerful tool for personal growth and development. It can help us expand our minds and challenge our assumptions, leading us to new discoveries and insights. It can also foster a sense of curiosity and wonder about the world around us, encouraging us to seek out new experiences and explore new ideas. Ripley's Believe It or Not embodies this concept by showcasing strange and unbelievable facts and phenomena from around the world. By presenting these oddities in a context that encourages curiosity and wonder, the franchise challenges us to expand our understanding of what is possible and what we thought we knew about the world. It encourages

us to embrace the idea that the world is full of wonders and mysteries that are waiting to be discovered and explored.

In the a puddle of my sorrow with questions unanswered and my faith fading, I resolved to choose God. I can now reflect on how both the church and the marketplace served my spiritual condition well; even with it hurt. God met me in the marketplace through people who shared my journey, mourned with me, prayed with and for me and who showed me glimpses of his glory as that gifted me with their love and compassion. The church never left me. And though I could never admit to leaving it, in hindsight, a big part of me was absent. There is the beauty of God's grace and mercy at the intersection of church and marketplace.

On my personal and intimate journey of reconciliation with God, I experienced a range of emotions, challenges, and insights that have transformed my understanding of myself, my relationship with Him, and the world around me. At times, I felt overwhelmed by the weight of history and the ongoing impact of systemic racism and discrimination. Other times, I felt inspired by the resilience and creativity of communities who have been marginalized and oppressed. Throughout my journey, I have learned to listen deeply, engage in difficult conversations, and confront my own biases and assumptions. Ultimately, my experience of reconciling race and religion has deepened my commitment to justice, compassion, and solidarity with all people. I ponder the day when marketplace ministry effectively helps bridge the gap between different socioeconomic classes, as well as between different races and religions. By empowering individuals to use their resources and talents to serve their communities, marketplace ministry can help create a culture of generosity and service that transcends racial and religious divides.

The Christian journey is indeed centered around belief. At its core, Christianity is a faith-based religion that requires its followers to believe in the existence of God, the divinity of Jesus

Christ, and the truth of the Bible. Belief in these foundational principles is what motivates Christians to pursue a life of obedience, love, and service to God. However, it's important to note that the Christian journey is not just about intellectual belief. While belief is essential, it's also important for Christians to have a personal relationship with God and to live out their beliefs through their actions. This involves putting one's faith into practice by following the example of Jesus, serving others, and living a life that reflects the values and teachings of the Christian faith.

Ultimately, the Christian journey is a continual process of growth and transformation, where believers seek to deepen their relationship with God, strengthen their faith, and become more Christlike in their thoughts, words, and deeds. Just as Ripley's showcases bizarre and extraordinary phenomena that challenge our understanding of the world, faith in God can open up a world of awe and wonder beyond our natural senses. Both offer the possibility of encountering something beyond the ordinary, and both require an openness to accepting the extraordinary as real. Just as Ripley's can expand our perception of what is possible, faith in God can expand our perception of what is meaningful and purposeful in life. But first, we must all choose to believe it or not.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Email Template for Invitations to Participate in the Study

Greetings,

My name is Shawn Burgs and I am a first-generation doctoral student at Lipscomb University – Hazelip School of Theology and I need your help to complete my final project. I would greatly appreciate you taking the time to participate in sharing your experiences as an African American Christian within your cultural context. The interview can be done in person or via zoom and should be approximately 90 minutes.

The research being conducted explores the experiences of persons who are both African American and Christian. The study seeks to explore how participants simultaneously exist and engage with race and religion. Please respond to this correspondence with your interest in voluntarily participating in this research project and an interview date and time will be scheduled accordingly.

Thank you,

Shawn Burgs
DMIN Student
Lipscomb University

Appendix B: Information and Consent Form

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the role of marketplace ministry in reconciling race and religion in the African American church. This study is being conducted by Shawn Burgs, a graduate student in the College Name at Lipscomb University under the supervision of Dr. Derrick Jackson, a faculty member in the DMIN department. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you have expressed interest in the topic. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to (state what the study is designed to observe, measure, discover, or establish). Approximately 20 people will be invited to the survey with a desired result of 10-12 people expected to participate in this research.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview where you will be asked questions pertaining to your experiences with race and religion. This study will take approximately 90 minutes and will be conducted as an in-person or virtual interview.

Risks and Benefits:

The study has minimal risks. There are minimal risks that are beyond what subjects typically encounter in everyday life involved with participation in this study. Participants will be asked to engage in reflective questions about personal or sensitive experiences regarding race and religion. Participants will be informed that participation is completely voluntary and of their liberty to decline or discontinue participation at any time before or during. Participants will be provided with alternate resources to support further discussion.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. There is the potential inherent satisfaction of positively contributing to the ongoing conversion of Movement Church and self through racial reconciliation.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented.

I will keep the research results in a secured electronic file, and only I and my advisor will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by October 30,

2022. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to stop participating at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Movement Church or Lipscomb University in any way.

New Information:

If during course of this research study we/I learn about new findings that might influence your willingness to continue participating in the study, we/I will inform you of these findings.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Shawn Burgs, at 832-260-1302 . You may ask questions now or later and my faculty advisor, Dr. Derrick Jackson (djackso50@bellsouth.net & (615) 584-0190) will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. Justin Briggs. Chair of the Lipscomb University Institutional Review Board at jgbriggs@lipscomb.edu.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to participate in the study and I agree to be videotaped or audio recorded.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Parent, Legal Guardian, or Witness

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix C: RESEARCH STUDY MULTIMEDIA RELEASE

To be completed by the researcher		
Principal Investigator:	Shawn Burgs	
Research Study:	BELIEVE IT OR NOT: DISCOVERING THE ROLE OF MARKETPLACE MINISTRY IN RECONCILING RACE AND RELIGION IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH	
Type of Release (check all that apply):	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Video <input type="checkbox"/> Photo

To be completed by the research participant

Name of Participant: _____

In consideration for participating in the research study referenced above, I hereby grant to Lipscomb University (“Lipscomb”), and those acting pursuant to its authority, a non-exclusive, perpetual, worldwide, irrevocable license to record, use, reproduce, exhibit and distribute my presentation, likeness, voice, name and/or identity on a video, audio, photographic, digital, electronic, Internet or other medium without restrictions or limitations (the “Recordings”) for the following purposes and uses (*please initial and check all of the following that apply*):

Initials	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Recording Purpose
1. _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used for scientific publications.
2. _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used for scientific conferences or meetings.
3. _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used for educational purposes.
4. _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used for public presentations to non-scientific groups.
5. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used on television or the audio portion can be used on radio.
6. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be posted on a Lipscomb website.
7. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used for reports/presentations to any research funding agencies.

I hereby agree to defend, hold harmless, indemnify, release and forever discharge Lipscomb and its trustees, officers, agents, representatives and employees from and against any and all liability, claims, actions, causes of actions and damages (including reasonable attorneys’ fees) of any kind whatsoever in law and in equity, both past and present and whether known or unknown, arising out of or related to (a) the use of my name, likeness, identity, voice, photographic image, video graphic image and voice, and the Recordings, and (b) any personal, intellectual property (including copyright), proprietary or other rights that I may have in connection with any use of the Recordings. To the extent required, I hereby grant and assign to Lipscomb all copyright in the Recordings and any video, audio, photographic, digital, electronic or other medium utilized in connection therewith. I hereby acknowledge and agree that Lipscomb shall have exclusive ownership of the copyright and other proprietary and property rights in the Recordings. **I acknowledge and understand that my name will not be used in any publication.**

I have read and understood this Multimedia Release, am at least eighteen (18) years of age and fully competent, and execute the same as my own free will.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If the participant is under the age of eighteen (18), the undersigned parent/guardian of the participant agrees to the terms of this Multimedia Release on behalf of the above-named participant:

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D: RESEARCH STUDY MULTIMEDIA RELEASE

RESOURCES

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY

We recognize that many different stimuli can be possible triggers, and they are often strongly influenced by past and present experiences. Below is list of resources where you may find support.

Psychology Today

www.psychologytoday.com/us

 **betterhelp**

www.betterhelp.com

MHIA
Mental Health America

Call 1-800-985-5990

chat 988lifeline.org.

Text MHA to 741741