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## The Decline in Black Men's Church Attendance: The Role of Male Presence in Church and the Family

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE DECLINE IN BLACK MEN'S CHURCH ATTENDANCE: THE ROLE OF  
MALE PRESENCE IN CHURCH AND THE FAMILY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

GREGORY JAMES TATE

PORTLAND, OREGON

JANUARY 2023



**PORTLAND  
SEMINARY**

George Fox University



## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Gregory James Tate

has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 21, 2023 for the degree of  
Doctor of Ministry in Spirit-Filled Global Leadership in the African Diaspora.

Dissertation Committee:

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All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the new international version of the bible (NIV).

## DEDICATION

Dedicated to my wife, Maisha Tate, whose sacrifice was not in vain. I would not be able to accomplish this without her selflessness. Your encouragement, your prayers, and your undying love have gotten me through such a challenging period in my life. To my children: Christian, EJ, Michael, and Brooklyn, my promise is kept.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to give honor and all praise to my Savior Jesus Christ, without him, I would be a ship sailing without a sail. He truly was my strength in the midst of my weakness. His goodness sustained me in the worst period of my life, and I acknowledge just how awesome He truly is.

I would be remised if I did not acknowledge Bishop T.D. Jakes for his incredible faith and determination to open Jakes Divinity School and allow someone like me to even be considered worthy to be enrolled in such a prestigious institution.

Accompanied by this high gratitude, I would like to extend it to the incredible George Fox/ Portland Seminary faculty and staff. Dr. Clifford Berger is a bright gem in the kingdom and in academia whose brilliance I was able to use to illuminate my academic path. Dr. Loren Kerns made himself available for counsel, direction, and understanding. Jen MacNab, her persistence and unfailing desire to see me win is overwhelming. Thank you to all the George Fox/ Portland Seminary staff.

I want to also acknowledge some powerful women who have had a lifetime-lasting impact on my academic career and life. Dr. Ford, who has raised the bar of excellence in which I didn't know heights existed. I am greatly in awe of Dr. Valerie Crompton, whose wisdom, guidance, and leadership I hold in high regard. I greatly appreciate her sacrifice and scrutinous attention to detail, which puts her in a class all by herself. Lastly, Dr. Cynthia James, whose level of educational prowess is unmatched. Her ability to expand the word of God ignites me to pursue Him to greater heights.

To my in-laws, Rev. Elwood and Shirley McDowell, for your unwavering love and encouragement. You believed in me when I felt like giving up, and you loved on me so intently, like I was one of your very own. I am forever indebted to you.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. William Valmyr. Without you, I would never imagine myself in this position on the verge of this accomplishment that I thought was impossible to achieve in my life. Thank you for your dedication, patience, and invested time in me; I am forever grateful, sir; thank you.

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## GLOSSARY

**Black (people):** This term is used throughout the paper, and this writer is referring to the term Black people as it generally refers to a person with African ancestral origins. In some circumstances, usually in politics or power struggles, the term Black signifies all non-White minority populations. The term Black has a long service in social, political, and everyday life and its use to denote African ancestry is entrenched in epidemiological and public health language.<sup>1</sup>

**Black church:** When referring to this term, the writer is making a distinction of heavily attended/populated Black church services such as non-evangelical places of worship. Some examples include, but are not limited to, Pentecostal, Nondenominational, African Methodist Episcopal, Church of God in Christ, and Baptist. These churches all have various versions to them that are included in the meaning.

**HBCU:** Historical Black College/University

**Liberation Theology:** this a belief based on Luke 4:18 but is referred to within this paper as liberating the oppressed people in the spiritual, emotional, and mental sense. In a nonviolent manner, that allows the oppressed individual(s) to view God as a redeeming liberator.

**Spirit of God/ Holy Spirit:** Third person of the Trinity. The word “spirit” (Hebrew *ruah*, Greek *pneuma*) is the word used from ancient times to describe and

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<sup>1</sup> Dawn Comstock, Edward M. Castillo, Suzanne P. Lindsay, “Four-Year Review of the Use of Race and Ethnicity in Epidemiologic and Public Health Research,” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 159, no. 6 (March 15, 2004): 611–619.

explain the experience of divine power working in, upon, and around men, and understood by them as the power of God.<sup>2</sup>

**Trinity:** Theological term used to define God as an undivided unity expressed in the threefold nature of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As a distinctive Christian doctrine, the Trinity is considered as a divine mystery beyond human comprehension to be reflected upon only through scriptural revelation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> James D. G. Dunn, “Holy Spirit,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 986.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry M. Henry, “Trinity,” ed. Chad Brand, et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1,625.

## ABSTRACT

The Black Church in the United States has historically played a significant role in the community providing a sense of belonging and purpose. However, there has been a significant decline in the attendance of Black men in the church. Despite being the largest ethnic group to attend a place of worship, 70-80% of Black men do not attend church services, either in-person or online. This trend is concerning, especially since over 80% of those who do not attend consider themselves religious and believe in a higher power.

This paper explores the reasons for this trend and its effects. Chapter 1 delves into the problem of the high number of absent men in churches and the impact it holds. Chapter 2 provides a historical context, examining how Black historical data in the United States has contributed to this problem. Chapter 3 explores the biblical and religious aspects that perpetuate these behaviors and attitudes. Chapter 4 analyzes the data that highlights the effects of the issue and provides a breakdown that can be utilized to identify solutions.

The decline in Black male attendance is not a recent phenomenon. However, the pandemic further highlighted the lack of regular attendance and contributions from Black men in the church. Chapter 5 presents potential solutions to address this issue, including efforts that individuals and the church can take to promote inclusion and participation.

This dissertation provides a comprehensive understanding of the dilemma facing churches, particularly Black churches, with a significant number of men being absent. It examines historical and biblical data, as well as statistical information, to identify possible solutions. Ultimately, this paper contributes to a better understanding of the

reasons for the decline in Black male church attendance and provides potential solutions to promote participation and inclusion in the church.

## CHAPTER 1: DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

### **Introduction**

In today's church, men's absences are at a distressing percentage across the United States. According to Pew Research, the Black population is the largest ethnicity to attend a place of worship. The common effect of this attendance percentage also holds a large portion of men who do believe in God. To be more specific, we find that upwards of 80% of Black men in this country do not attend a church service, in-person or online.<sup>1</sup> Yet out of those who do not attend, upwards of 80% consider themselves religious and believe in a higher power.<sup>2</sup> These figures are compared to the height of Black church attendance. The national average of church attendance in the 1960s was the pinnacle of male attendance. More specifically, according to Pew Research, over a 60% decline in church attendance has occurred (of all ethnicities).

More and more, we can observe a substantial dilemma across the country, not only the spread and the existence of Covid-19, but the lack of Black males that regularly attend and contribute to the Black church. In this paper, this student will discuss in more detail the cause and effect of such matters and will identify the intricacies that compound to produce the results we as a society live and witness today.

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<sup>1</sup> David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2011), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/> (accessed January 9, 2023).

## Story

Minister G from X ministries went with another minister to attend a major ministerial conference held in Dallas, Texas. One was a male, and the other was female, and the meeting had separate classes and pieces of training for both specific genders. Upon arriving at the conference, both ministers noticed the female attendance completely engulfed the male attendance. Though the forum made every effort to cater to both sexes, the female population took advantage of all the amenities the conference offered. Once inside the male portion of the meeting, the attendance was so low that the speakers invited all men to occupy the seats up front (which is an additional cost to be placed in that location). This was very surprising to minister G as the host of the conference was and is a world renown preacher of the gospel and a globally sought out leader. Sadly disappointed to see the demographic of men's attendance so abysmal, knowing the great length of time, effort and resources that this great leader had exhibited, minister G was moved to discover answers. When one service was over, minister G asked one of the hosting pastors about the attendance. Pastor D responded, "It has been a discrepancy for a long time, and they are experimenting with ways to improve the male numbers." He further explained that at their local church, they are approximately 50% men, one the highest percentages in the country, yet they still struggle with consistent male attendance. With this encounter with pastor D, minister G knew that this enigma had to be confronted and illuminated with solutions.



## Need

The demographics of nearly all established churches, especially smaller congregations, reveal that men are greatly in the minority in attendance in church if they go at all. Quoting David Murrow, “Whenever large numbers of Christians gather, men are never in the majority.”<sup>3</sup> George Barna determined a similar number of women and men in the general population, but sixty-one percent of regular church attenders are women (48.7 million) and only thirty-nine percent are men (35.3 million.)<sup>4</sup> Murrow explains, “Generally speaking, the smaller the church, the more likely it is that they are experiencing a gender gap (more than fifty-six percent female).”<sup>5</sup> The majority of churches in a number of denominations in North America are producing numbers of less than a 100 members, and the ones that have a significant male presence have a large disparity in generation differences. This is an overarching representation of all men in North America, but the statistics for Black males to be present also show the significance of their absence.

However, the problem reaches back further and presents a bigger dilemma within the Black community, in which black men are a fading presence in the homes. More than a third (38%) of households that Black people live in are headed by married couples as of 2019. Roughly three-in-ten Black people (32%) live in households whose household head

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<sup>3</sup> Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, 37.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Barnett, “What Are the Major Challenges that U.S. Congregations Face?” *U.S. Congregational Life Survey* Spring 2009, <http://www.uscongregations.org/blog/2014/02/17/what-are-the-major-challenges-that-u-s-congregations-face/>.

<sup>5</sup> Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, 37.

is female, and 6% live in male-headed households. Fewer than a quarter (24%) are part of non-family households as seen on the chart below.

### More than a third of Black people live in households headed by married couples

*U.S. Black population by household type, 2019*

*Family households\**



\*Defined as households with a householder and one or more persons living in the household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage or adoption. Households with a householder and an unmarried partner are only considered family households if there are other persons in the household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage or adoption.

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Populations rounded to the nearest 100,000. The household population excludes persons living in institutions, college dormitories and other group quarters. "U.S. Black population" refers to anyone who self-identifies as Black, inclusive of single-race Black, multiracial Black and Black Hispanic people.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the 2019 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

*Figure 1 — More than a third of Black people live in households headed by married couples<sup>6</sup>*

The statistical recording of this communal disparity highlights further the positioning on some of the reasoning the absence of Black males in church is in existence today. If they are not present at home, it concludes a very strong possibility that their presence in church is also greatly affected.

Another great void that these statistics are not presenting is the cause and effect on the Black family and the community at large. In the later portion of this paper, this student will discuss in Chapter 4 the large cavities in which this deficiency produces. Out of all parents in prison, 92% are fathers, and between 1991 and 2007, the number of

<sup>6</sup> Christine Tamir, Abby Budiman, Luis Noe-Bustamante, and Lauren Mora, "Facts about the U.S. Black Population," Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/facts-about-the-us-black-population/> (accessed February 4, 2023).

children with an incarcerated father grew 79%. Even after controlling for income, youths in father-absent households still had significantly higher odds of incarceration than those in mother-father families. Youths who never had a father in the household experienced the highest odds.<sup>7</sup> To the failing positioning it leaves the mother behind with, data showing fragile families was used to examine the prevalence and effects of mothers' relationship changes between birth and age 3 on their children's well-being. Additionally, children born to single mothers show higher levels of aggressive behavior than children born to married mothers. Living in a single-mother household is equivalent to experiencing despairing unequal partnership transitions.<sup>8</sup>

### **Problem**

With Black males' attendance rapidly declining, this creates many enigmas and problematic areas for the Black community. This writer discovered through research that the problem is just the nucleus of the more significant cavity within the Black family and the community. By Black men being absent, it establishes vulnerability to the family, and in turn, the family is now functioning to the best of its abilities in a poor state. At its optimal functionality, the man was present at church and the patriarch of the home in the 1960s. According to the CDC, over 60 million men, 55% of the country's male population, do not live in the same house that their children and children's mother live in. By their absence, they leave room for trauma to be present.

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<sup>7</sup> Cynthia C. Harper & Sara S. McLanahan, "Father Absence and Youth Incarceration," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* (2004): 369-397.

<sup>8</sup> C. Osborne and Sarah McLanahan, "Partnership Instability and Child Well-Being," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69 (2007): 1,065-1,083.

At one time in the Black church, male attendance was prevalent and was a vital beacon in the community. But as time has passed, various factors causing Black men to be absent from their homes, families, and churches have risen. The church is attempting to progress through upheaval, transitions, and challenging times; as a result, we can observe that male attendance is a significant contributing factor to the church being in the state that it is in.

A well-known psychologist, John Bowlby, gave his formulated theory that “offers a biosocial, lifespan account of how close relationships form, are maintained, and dissolve and how relationships influence, sometimes permanently the persons involved in them.”<sup>9</sup> Primarily, Bowlby found the relationship between child and parent influences the subsequent development of the child. As the early childhood attachment theory has evolved over the years, the scope of the theory now addresses issues that are emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physiological within adults as well.<sup>10</sup>

Kim Bartholomew, another well-known psychologist, developed four categories of attachment used within adult attachment theory: secure, preoccupied (anxious-ambivalent), fearful-avoidant, and dismissing-avoidant. Anxiety or ambivalence for these attachment categories “refers to the strong need for care and attention from attachment figures coupled with a deep, pervasive uncertainty about the capacity or willingness of attachment figures to respond to such needs.”<sup>11</sup> This not only leaves a void within the

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<sup>9</sup> William Steven Rholes and Jeffery A. Simpson, ed., *Adult Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Implications* (New York: Guilford Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Lasondra Barnes, “Father Wounds in Black Christian Women: Their Effects on Identity and Perception of God as Father,” (doctoral thesis, George Fox University, 2020), 369.

<sup>11</sup> Steven W. Rholes and Jeffery A. Simpson, eds, *Adult Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Implications* (New York: Guilford Press, 2004).

family unit but births a perpetuating trauma that has generational effect on the family and the families to come after it.

On many social and economic measures, Black men fare worse not only than white men, but white and Black women, as we show above. Part of the cause is that Black men are “uniquely stigmatized,” according to studies of implicit bias conducted by political scientists Ismail White and Corrine McConaughy: more than 40% of white respondents rank “many or almost all” Black men as “violent.” White men are less than half as likely to be described in this way, at about the same rates as for Black women, while white women are very unlikely to be labeled as violent. “The perceptions of others influence black men’s social interactions with co-workers and neighbors [and] structure a unique form of relative deprivation...In this regard, the intersectionality framework becomes useful for illuminating black men’s multiplicities and vulnerabilities.”<sup>12</sup>

These factors, and a great deal more, are being unearthed in the research that this student is conducting and finding many commonalities that serve as a platform for Black males across the country. As this student conducts more research, this student anticipates that many conflicting data will formulate a theme one can analyze further.

### **Opportunity**

Although the term, “fatherless,” is scarce in the New Testament, important observations can be made from the incarnate Christ—God’s love reaching for us, in flesh. We see that God sees with the eyes of relationship. God exists in relationship and

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<sup>12</sup>Richard V. Reeves, Sarah Nzau, and Ember Smith, “The Challenges Facing Black Men – and the Case for Action,” Brookings, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/11/19/the-challenges-facing-black-men-and-the-case-for-action/> (accessed February 4, 2023).

illustrates it through the doctrine of the *imago Deo*, Trinity, and the ecclesiastical relationships of His church in community. Furthermore, the desolation of the fatherless is seen as unnatural and not a part of God's creational intent. The definition of "fatherless" along with the meaning of "loneliness," implies a long-term relational ministry. Loneliness, along with bereavement, and comfortlessness, are at the core of the word "fatherless."<sup>13</sup> This is a clear depiction of how God views the presence of man. This can also be viewed as the most opportune moment for the church to be a significant presence for the absentee man.

The word "church" is generally used to translate the generic Greek word *ekklēsia*, which variously means "gathering," "assembly," or "congregation." However, the New Testament tends to use the word to refer to all those who are in the person and work of Christ as the fullest revelation of God and having entered into a new relationship with God and with one another.<sup>14</sup>

The church, both as a universal reality and in its local, concrete expression, is more specifically designated in Paul's writings as "the church of God" as found in 1 Corinthians 1:2: "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours." Another example is found in 1 Corinthians 10:32: "Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God."

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<sup>13</sup>David Dwight Croy, "God's Focus on the Fatherless: A Lens to Inform Spiritual Impact in the Local Church," (doctoral thesis, George Fox University, 2015), 104.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (DownersGrove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 26.

We also see a reference to “the church of Christ” in Romans 16:16: “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.”

In this way, a common, secular Greek term receives its distinctive Christian meaning, and sets the Christian assembly/gathering/community apart from all other secular or religious groups.

It is clear from the New Testament as a whole that the Christian community understood itself as the community called into being by God’s end-time act of revelation and divine presence in Jesus of Nazareth. In 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul tells the Christians in Corinth that they are those “upon whom the end of the ages has come.”<sup>15</sup> The purpose of the church forming was to form a “community.” Community has many different members and is functioning at its peak when all its members are present and functioning.

The leaders of the community have typically been men and the church was, at one time, the pinnacle of the community. This is especially true for the Black community, which will be discussed further withing this paper, during the 1960s in the midst of the civil rights era.

Now more than ever do we see necessity for the church to be the church. The apparent gulf of separation between the Black father and the church, and the Black father’s home life, is growing further apart. The church is the stabilizing ground that can bridge the gap between healing and hope for the brokenness in which Black men have been dormant.

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<sup>15</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), s.w. “Church.”

## Thesis

Church attendance as a whole has seen a dramatic decline in the recent decade, and as a result churches have been closing their doors by the masses. More specifically, the most church going demographic in America, the Black community, has suffered the same outcome, but to make matters worse, the male demographic is demonstratively absent from church services on a weekly basis.

Through many trials and hardships Black males have had to endure in America such as the historical horrors of slavery and the repercussions of the aftermath it unleashed when it was abolished. Yet we witness a strong rise in the church as the focal point in community in the civil rights era of the 1960s, providing the beacon of hope the fractured Black communities so desperately needed. In the forefront of this great hope was the leadership of strong black men.

But once this great movement died, it perpetuated division within the Black community and was the weapon used against it, thus driving gulfs between men and their homes, and men and church.

Through field research and surveying, it is this student's hypothesis that though Black men in a large percentage was strategically driven away from their families, and as a result their church, it can be restored again.

Through comprehending how the division originated and how it is at work today, this student believes this great deficit is the church's biggest platform to be what God originally created it to be: a place of redemptive family. By utilizing proper leadership skills exemplified by Jesus, one can galvanize any demographic by dealing with the root of the disconnect and not the topical fruit that is a result of the true problem.



## CHAPTER 2:

### THE PROMINENCE OF AFRICA

The continent of Africa has historically had, and currently holds, the seabed of biblical and world history, from its origins mentioned in the Bible in Genesis in the Garden of Eden to the many locations and pivotal people recorded within the Bible. Africa and its regions and countries are mentioned in the Bible over 1,400 times, depending on the selected translation. It has been significant for several centuries, and many Christian successes have derived from Africa. In spreading the gospel, many people were of African descent. Land mass and geographic location held great and early significance to the Christian faith. According to a map that was presented in this student's lecture, we can observe the land mass of Israel was placed adjacent to the Egyptian land mass, leading scholars to believe that African descent had a great deal of influence and was grafted onto and incorporated into Christianity and the many aspects that it possesses.<sup>1</sup>

According to Dr. Bantu in his lecture "Six Little Known Facts of the Early African Church," Africa was not only influential in the earliest stages of Christianity, it was the place of disbursement of the gospel into many of the world's regions as early as 100 AD.<sup>2</sup>

From research, we can observe Africa's many contributions to the faith .

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<sup>1</sup> African Technic Plate Map Israel and Lebanon, Google.

<sup>2</sup> Vince Bantu, "Six Little Known Facts About the Early African Church," *The Jude 3 Project* Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ey5nAJynJY0> (accessed July 28, 2020), 13:32.

The composition of hymns and regulations for church worship and organization of this region was readily adopted elsewhere. Many great leaders, teachers, bishops, apologists, and Church Fathers came from North Africa, including Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, Origin, Clement, and others—all of whom influenced the subsequent developments in the Church. The early Church in North Africa also featured extensively in Christian education. Both eastern (Alexandria) and western traditions subsequently played a determinative role in the development of both Eastern and Western Christian spirituality and theology.<sup>3</sup>

The historical accounts that have been recorded and untainted account for the many significant accomplishments and contributions offered by the faith of Christianity. Africa can be categorically viewed as a foundational piece in which the gospel, and in turn, Pentecostalism, has had the operating room to launch into the heights and spheres it has across the diaspora and worldwide.

Using components from the school of thought of critical thinking, we observe the historical events that have transpired through the ability to utilize intellectual humility. Intellectual humility may be defined as having a consciousness of the limits of one's knowledge, including a sensitivity to circumstances in which one's native egocentrism is likely to function self-deceptively. This entails being aware of one's biases, prejudices, the limitations of one's viewpoint, and the extent of one's ignorance. It implies the lack

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<sup>3</sup> Samson A. Fatokun, "Christianity in Africa: A Historical Appraisal." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 26, no.2 (October 2005): 357-368.

of intellectual pretentiousness, boastfulness, or conceit, combined with insight into the logical foundations, or lack of such foundations, of one's beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

It is precisely here we see the seeds of discord spread on the negative outlook of African history, both biblical and worldly. If one is not strategically careful, one can fall victim to the unforgiving and dark perspective to which Africa has been accustomed for multiple years now. The opposite of intellectual humility is intellectual arrogance, a lack of consciousness of the limits of one's knowledge, with little or no insight into self-deception or the limitations of one's point of view. Intellectually arrogant people often fall prey to their own bias and prejudice and frequently claim to know more than they know.<sup>5</sup>

Looking past the information presented, let's call the presenter into question for a moment. The adage is "He who controls the pen controls the narrative," to put it modestly, let's scrutinize the pen holder. The controller of the pen, the owner of the media networks, and the director of information on a world scale have been people of white descent. From the authors of history books to the lessons taught within the classroom and to the information displayed daily for the masses to consume, all have a thread of commonality. That origins are not of African descent but are of the oppressor who enslaved the continent it's displaying information about.

But why? One must be fully engaged in being present and non-dismissive in the truth of the matter to comprehend the why component and the "lack of genuine interest in

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Character of Your Learning and Your Life* (England: Edinburgh Gate, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Paul and Elder, *Critical Thinking*.

interfaith dialogue.”<sup>6</sup> The movement of Pentecostalism empowers the marginalized classes and facilitates upward social mobility for several individuals through the instrumentality of the prosperity gospel. In this context, religious formulations of the future appear very attractive and strongly impact many Africans’ hopes. In many African countries, the voices most powerfully and successfully formulating visions of the future are religious and incredibly charismatic Pentecostal ones.<sup>7</sup> Herein lies how this belief system and faith movement delivers hope to the African people and empowers them to be who they are as a people. In doing so, a non-codependent identity is formed, one in which there is no occupancy for non-Africans to label or control them.

As the world’s most prosperous natural resources continent, Africa has suffered much pilfering, from resources to people, and identity. For Africa to have the audacity of an independent mindset is a threat to all who hold her hostage to their binding ideology of her.

Independence is when cogitation transcends mere thought and manifests into reality for the oppressed. It is a celebratory experience. But for the oppressor, it lies in the non-reciprocal effect and can oppress and control a fortiori. As we learned through our lectures through Dr. Pierce, we gained knowledge that the African people were not considered people at all. They were more regarded as cattle than humans, commodities rather than humans, a means to build wealth as opposed to people as part of humanity. In the Constitution of the United States, we can observe those of African descent and Black are not fully human but 3/5 of a person.

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<sup>6</sup>Adeshina Afolayan, et al., *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Afolayan, *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*, 66.

This location is where the ignorant indulge themselves in the bliss of bias and prejudice. Independence is a threat the oppressor holds dear, as personal gain is their objective. Now that their growth is under siege, one must do what they must to preserve the identical component that establishes their superiority.

It is people who understand the climate of not just the Pentecostal movement but the political realm correspondingly such as Dr. Mensa Otabil who poses a threat to intellectual arrogance. Otabil sees it as his task to trigger a fierce debate about “what we are moving with and what we are leaving behind” by calling for “cultural transformation” and trying to convince people that transforming their culture does not necessarily entail becoming “Western” and thus losing their “African identity.”<sup>8</sup> Otabil’s preaching presents an intriguing mix of born-again ideology, African consciousness, and a self-development discourse characteristic of management and consultancy literature; this significantly goes against the fold of their oppressors by preaching a liberating gospel that identifies the need for the marginalized to be self-educated.

Included in Otabil’s messages to his people is that he strongly differs from most African charismatic Pentecostal leaders who avoid political debate and tend to be easily co-opted by the government. Otabil openly criticizes the President, for example, for traveling around the world to beg donor countries for money, thus turning Ghana into a begging nation instead of dealing with internal structural problems.<sup>9</sup> His beliefs coincide with Miguel De La Torre, who powerfully proclaims three objectives for reading the Bible.

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<sup>8</sup> Afolayan, *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Afolayan, *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*, 74.

1. To read from the perspective of the oppressed (race, class, gender)
2. To investigate biblical protest narratives to reveal models of resistance and struggle against race, style, and gender domination
3. To utilize the various interpretations in which to overcome oppressive religious and political powers

It is crucial to uphold that Pentecostalism is not a Western but a “Third World phenomenon” despite its substantial presence in North America. But it is ominously essential to control the narrative that allows others to see the oppressor in the light of the Savior, rescuer, and the source for all good matters. Doing so goes against the presented “norm” that the western world and European counterparts have deemed as “savage” and needing rescuing from themselves.

Manipulation is a crooked path that the creator of the GPS has designed for its consumers to arrive at their appointed destination. This allows those who bathe in the waters of ignorance to be submerged in the narrative of their correlation. Waters that are presented to be vast and deep but are held with the hands of ignorance and oppression, can be enlightened by its poor reflection and fragmented piece of the entirety of truth as students observed in a revealing video presented in our lecture. The video showed that when the youngest of our society, children, are given a choice of a white doll and a black beauty, it is a unanimous selection of the white dolls. When asked why this was so, the children revealed that the white dolls were more “appealing in looks” and the Black dolls were innately uglier than the white dolls. Such characteristics of preferential treatment were taught and inherited by the environment, which assisted in their upbringing.

This behavior has forged an ironclad outlook on Africa and has magnified such a perspective to show the world and add compliance to their privileged view. Maintaining such a mindset does not allow one to be concerned with whether our perceptions or

meanings are accurate. It is to seek to get what we want, avoid the disapproval of others, and justify ourselves in our own minds. The tendency for humans to think in an egocentric fashion means that we need more insight into the nature of our own thinking and emotions. As a result, we tend to evade responsibility for our development. We do not seek to learn new ways of looking at things and discover new forms of truth that have existed and the new ones which have emerged. This disposition of thinking is stereotypical and simplistic; it is egocentrism that prevents one from recognizing this. Ultimately, the chains created for others become the barriers to their enslavement of thought.<sup>10</sup>

The power of thought can be and is a dangerous tool if wielded with improper intentions. Africa, through history, has been the prisoner of the world's influential idea of them being subservient to all. As a result, history has shown the malicious intent with which writers of history and others who possess power have stripped Africa of its resources and not just its natural resources but its most valuable resources, its people, and its history.

### **Black History in the American Context**

The prominence and downfall of Africa do not cease by the boundaries of its shorelines. But through the horrors of the involuntary baptism of the slave trade, the perils of being of African descent are interwoven within North American history. The hidden history of America's beginnings reveals drama that is often appalling and far from noble and tidy. Like actual childbirth, America's birth was messy, bloody, painful, and

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<sup>10</sup>Paul and Elder, *Critical Thinking*.

tragic. America often tortures development; it also recognizes the halting steps made toward the dawn of a new era in human history—an era predicated on that remarkable and radical concept that each of us is entitled to “life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>11</sup>

By halting human progress it creates a divide and a caste system in which those of African descent must suffer the consequences of being on the bottom. For most Americans, “caste system” seems foreign. This is because it implies more than an unjust social order; it also means a hierarchy of human values justified by the divine and protected by a living religion and, therefore, almost impossible to change. Caste, for Americans, evokes the hierarchy of India and the Hindu religion. Rarely do we think we live in a caste system in the United States. Even more rarely do we entertain the thought we live in a Christian-based caste system, particularly one focused on skin color and justified by biblical exegesis and modern science.<sup>12</sup>

According to Henry Louis Gates Jr and his documentary series, “The Black Atlantic, The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross (episode 1),” many historians have illuminated how the first Africans to reach North American soil were indeed not enslaved people, but freemen, who existed before the horrors of slavery came into the land. Significantly, people of this narrative have been repressed and made insolvent on purpose to control the history and all the people that story affects.

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<sup>11</sup> K. C. Davis, *America's Hidden History: Untold Tales of the First Pilgrims, Fighting Women, and Forgotten Founders Who Shaped a Nation* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020).



## The Great Divide

Slavery in this country was not only a manual labor component for capital gain, it was also a medium in which white North Americans used to control, abuse, and attempt to lord over an ethnic group brought to North America for labor purposes. In doing so, the number of enslaved Black people as laborers began to swell. The ratio of enslaved people to enslavers heavily favored the enslaved Black people, and as a result, many enslavers had a difficult time controlling their slave populations. Michelle Alexander explains it in this manner, “Any candid observer of American history must acknowledge that racism is highly adaptable. The rules and reasons the political systems employ to enforce the status relations of any kind, including racial hierarchy, evolve and change as they are challenged.”<sup>13</sup>

Divisive measures were put into play for enslavers to maintain superiority between the two ethnicities. In Willie Lynch’s letter to enslavers of this country, he implores his fellow enslavers to “divide man from a family, and a man from wife, to break him down psychologically and to show to the nigger woman that the male can be easily broken.” By doing this, we can see the division between the black families to be forcefully engrained within the community—this operation of assault in grandness during the historical period of slavery in this country.

The atrocities of this mindset were not contained to working days only, but this assault against black humanity was even to the extent of being present in their church and worship services. This assault tactic was utilized within the religion of the black

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<sup>13</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2020), 21.

community as Dr. Henry Lois Gates describes in his PBS documentary, “The Black Church,” that enslavers would purposely tell the Black preachers only to read the Scriptures that commanded submission of their masters. Again, creating a dynamic of division where even the God of creation has divided the Black human race as less than subordinates to the superiority of the White human race.

The Christian scandal is exacerbated when historically marginalized people uncritically rationalize their oppression as “the Christian way.” Or, even worse, when they stand idly by and accept oppression, saying, “Well, the Lord is in control.” That kind of biblical interpretation dates back to slavery. Ex-slave preacher Frederick Douglass said.<sup>14</sup>

It is this mentality that has permeated the Black community and has infiltrated to become the norm within the modern culture. This understanding has become known as the “slave religion,” a religion enslaved Black people were forced to adhere and submit to. “Slave religion was/is the most significant contributing factor in which the Black church was/is formed today.”<sup>15</sup>

The Black church itself was birthed from a need to have a worship service that would allow Blacks in this country to be legal (due to Jim Crow laws) and the freedom to express themselves in the fashion their very own culture exuberates. Because Blacks in this country have gone to exasperated lengths, the “Church is quickly becoming more of a symbol of conflict, oppression, and hypocrisy.”<sup>16</sup> Even though, scripturally, Jesus’ insistence that worship must be in the Spirit suggests that believers must recognize that

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 79.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Dale Coulter, “Historical Perspectives Part 2,” (lecture, Jakes Divinity School, Dallas, TX, February 8, 2021).

<sup>16</sup> Antipas L. Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion?: How the Bible Is Good News for People of Color* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2020), 19.

institutions of national identity that cause alienation hold no place within the worshipping community.<sup>17</sup> We distinctly can differentiate between man's religion and Christ's relationship with us when humans succumb to behavior in this manner.

The need to be and feel superior supersedes the commandment Jesus instructed us to do and live. The lack of love reflects the congregation's failure to live as part of the kingdom of God and fully identify as people of the Spirit. Instead, their adoption of the government's practices makes them appear as faithful citizens of the empire. The deficiency in love makes those in the congregation at Ephesus unrecognizable as faithful Christians, for others recognize Jesus' followers by their love for one another.<sup>18</sup> The shortage of love removes God from the equation, but God is love as 1 John 4:8 illustrates: "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." This allows the division to operate to its fullest extent. Sadly, as a result, segregation is not merely separation but, in the contemporary United States, is hierarchical.<sup>19</sup> Embedded within society, it has engulfed the culture to become a norm within the country. "Sadly, too many Christians living in the US relegate their faith to a nationalistic understanding, which may lead to the exclusion of people of a different nationality or ethnicity."<sup>20</sup> Without love as the central foundation, the belief of Christianity becomes tainted in a positioning of an "us versus them" mentality.

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<sup>17</sup> Rodolfo Galvan Estrada III, *A Pneumatology of Race in the Gospel of John: An Ethnocritical Study* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 172.

<sup>18</sup> Estrada III, *A Pneumatology of Race in the Gospel of John*, 147.

<sup>19</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Kenny J. Walden, *Practical Theology for Church Diversity: A Guide for Clergy and Congregations* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015).

Here we see the great divide at its pinnacle when its inner workings were strategically woven within the fabric of Black religious culture. In doing so, the seed of division and dissension was not only planted but cultivated by the harsh realities the Blacks had to endure during the early times of North America. White preachers of that period and some today use carefully selected passages to:

- Teach enslaved people that the lot they endured was part of that order
- Admonish biblical obedience to masters
- Convince enslaved people their desire for freedom was satanic
- Persuade them that patient diligence in work and punishment of laxity were within God's design.<sup>21</sup>

Even after the Emancipation Proclamation was passed and issued on January 1, 1863, irreparable division damage has been set in motion and cultivated for over two hundred years. This simply cannot just be turned off by the releasing of enslaved people. The separation of the black male and the ostracizing of his mere existence and the placement of his family has been perpetually a tool that remains weaponized to this day. To be blind to this reality of truth brings a narrative in which many white North Americans find themselves to be dwelling. J.H. Cone referred to it in this manner:

If we cannot recognize the truth, then it cannot liberate us from untruth. Only the oppressed can receive liberating visions in wretched places. Only those thinking that emerges in the struggle against injustice can see God's freedom breaking into unfree conditions, thus granting power to the powerless to fight here and now for the freedom they know to be theirs in Jesus' cross and resurrection.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Alexander Y. Estrela, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 38.

<sup>22</sup>J. H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (2nd revision), (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

## The Black Church

The term church can be properly defined as *Church*. (1) Terminology. The Eng. ‘church’, Ger. *Kirche*, Dutch *kerk*, etc., come ultimately from the Gk. κυριακόν, ‘[thing] belonging to the Lord,’ which was applied originally to a church building. The Lat. *ecclesia* and its derivatives (Fr. *église*, Ital. *chiesa*, etc., including Welsh *eglwys*), although the use of the building come from the Gk. ἐκκλησία, which in secular Greek meant an assembly, primarily of citizens in a self-governing city (e.g., that of Ephesus in Acts 19:39: “If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly.”) In the Septuagint, ἐκκλησία was used of the ‘assembly’ or ‘congregation’ of the Israelites (Heb. קהל and esp. of those ‘within the covenant’ as opposed to ‘the stranger in your midst’, Deuteronomy 23:3 No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, not even in the tenth generation. , Nehemiah 13:1 On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God. In Acts 7:38, “He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us”, the word is used with this Old Testament reference.<sup>23</sup>

In the Gospels, the word ἐκκλησία occurs only twice on the Lord’s lips, in Matthew 16:18, “upon this rock [*petra*] I will build my Church” and at 18:17 when a brother will not heed private remonstrance, the matter is to be told to “the Church”. In

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<sup>23</sup>Gary Hardin, ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003, 523.

Acts, the word is first found, in its Christian sense, in 5:11, where “the whole Church is to be identified with ‘the Church in Jerusalem.’”<sup>24</sup>

For Blacks in North America, the church was a place of worship and the focal place of healing and restoration. The Black church began as a place of mediation for problems that had arisen within the community.<sup>25</sup> Going to church allowed Black people to worship God, a deity with which they identify, and often view God from the lens of a redeemer and vindicator. Dr. Dubois arranges it this way, “in origin and functions, the Negro church is a broader, deeper, and more comprehensive social organism than the churches of white Americans. The Negro church is not simply an organism for the propagation of religion; it is the center of the social, intellectual, and religious life of an organized group of individuals... it is, in fine, the central organ of the organized life of the American Negro for at times amusement, relaxation, instruction.”<sup>26</sup>

But as the Black church was established, the division again reared its head of debate and played a role in the split of churches, particularly within the great Pentecostal movement in the early 1900s. The Azusa Street Mission was established during intense racial prejudice throughout the United States. Because Los Angeles lay outside the South, Jim Crow laws did not slow or hinder the efforts of William Seymour. But it was an opportunity to show the greatness of God’s love to everybody through the most significant vehicle of all: love.

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<sup>24</sup> F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 346.

<sup>25</sup> H. A. Baer and M. Singer, *African American Religion: Varieties of Protest and Accommodation* (2nd ed.), (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Curtis Evans, “W. E. B. Du Bois: Interpreting Religion and the Problem of the Negro Church,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 2 (2007): 268-297.

Against his own mentor's wishes and harsh words, Seymour persevered. Durham mocked and ridiculed Seymour's work as propaganda and sought to diminish it; the Pentecostal community in Los Angeles was now introduced to division.<sup>27</sup> Sadly, the origins of William Durham were grafted into the division. Because of the world they were dwelling in, Jim Crow had become martial law in the land. He was separating whites from others, dividing human races against one another, and producing segregation in life, including the church. Outraged by the report that a Black man was at the helm of the movement but, even worse, that white men and women were following his lead, he was greatly alarmed. Reducing the body of Christ to a mere shell of what it's called to be, "the world has become a neighborhood but not a brotherhood."<sup>28</sup>

Vehemently William Seymour comprehended this and was indomitable in his approach to showing God's love and power to the community and the world. Operating in miracles, signs, and wonders as in the days of Acts, not only was the gospel spreading but the foolishness of segregation was being revealed to many. Knowing this, our relation to truth may be described by a multiangled prism with reality in the center. Depending on the angle one looks at it, the color differs. The center's substance remains, but the rise of view changes perception."<sup>29</sup>

Durham, through many laborious attempts, challenged the authority of William Seymour, but failed to prevail and left California empty handed. So, all was well, but the

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<sup>27</sup>Gastón Espinosa, *William J. Seymour and the Origins of Global Pentecostalism: A Biography and Documentary History* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>28</sup>Michael D. Emerson, *Divided By Faith Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 56.

<sup>29</sup> Emerson, *Divided by Faith*, 77.

seed of division had begun to sprout within the movement. As a result, the division became domestic and no longer a foreign threat. The snares of division began to rise within and splinter the movement causing others internally to branch off and start their own denominations. Over 150 sects of Pentecostalism were birthed from Azusa Street, that is, 150 avenues of division.<sup>30</sup>

Divisions on their own accord had splintered the movement and, in many ways, allowed other divisional dissension to be birthed. The division between men and women, baptizing controversy, operations of the spiritual gifts, and others, were now avenues of division that were being traveled on at this time.

Sadly, it was not plague nor any other excellent world calamity that brought this movement to its knees, but the operation of division that halted this movement that seemed too fall short of its very existence. Even after Seymour's death, the attempt to continue his work was short-lived; too many precious resources were removed, and *divisive behavior eroded the scaffolding of the Azusa Street movement. This ultimately* lead to the end of the action in 1915, with all the different sects and divisions that had transpired, the activity ceased to operate in its original birthing intent, and the once decisive move was now reduced to splintering across the country and the world.

### **Mass Exodus**

Due to the nature of the division within the Azusa Street Movement deriving from racial undertones, it is easy to position oneself in the school of thought of division as an

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<sup>30</sup> E. Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2011).



assault. Dividing the body of Christ and the Azusa Street movement serves as the stumbling block of offense and advancement. Out of self-preservation and yearning to have an untainted perspective of the gospel, Blacks have created a space of worship for themselves that allows them to express themselves culturally. “African Americans remain more likely than whites to attend church, according to the Pew Research Center.”<sup>31</sup> Understanding the gospel from a different perspective than most of their white counterparts, Blacks allow themselves to see Jesus as Savior. For people oppressed by many factions, Jesus as Savior enables them to receive hope and the empowerment of faith to tarry on through this life.

Yet Cox’s perspective resounds with this writer as he also believes Pentecostalism is a container for primal spirituality and is exceedingly adaptable. Cox shows how Pentecostalism welcomes liberation theology in Latin America, shamanism in Korea, and even tribal healing practices in Zimbabwe. Far from being an Achilles heel, Cox understands this tendency toward religious syncretism as Pentecostalism’s great strength.<sup>32</sup> Another perspective in which to view this train of thought is the smaller the pieces that were splintered, the further pieces can/will travel—making this moving that has been fractured more accessible and obtainable to those abroad to receive—dividing then being a strategic plan to expand the movement on a global scale. This writer would have to agree with Cox that the Azusa Street Movement, like Jazz, had/has the ability to adapt to its culture without losing its integrity.

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<sup>31</sup> Alexander, *Black Fire*, 25.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Barkley, “Fire from Heaven | Harvey Cox,” Stephen Barkley Blog, entry posted November 21, 2016, <https://stephenbarkley.com/2016/11/21/fire-heaven-harvey-cox/>.

With my outcome of this thought, this writer believes that Pentecostalism is also the birthplace of justice. Justice is an act of true worship based on love for God and one's neighbor.<sup>33</sup> This was shown by the inclusive movement that William Seymour birthed at Azusa Street, by having various ethnicities and having both men and women in leadership, acting in the true nature of worship. This is what it means to "worship in the Spirit and truth." Ethnic inclusiveness manifests itself in true worship.<sup>34</sup> For this to come to fruition, the fragmenting of the movement had to occur.

The church has been one place for Black people, specifically males, to come and have a place to belong. Before this, there was little to no opportunity for Black men to be in leadership and serve their family and their community. Later in this dissertation, this subject will be deliberated more intently. Still, through this moment of Azusa in the future to the civil rights era, and continuing through present times, we see the disparity in which Black males have been forcibly removed from the home and church. A strategic system creates a dynamic to separate man from his Creator and his family.

### **Ubuntu**

In no manner or fashion is this writer in alignment with syncretism to be the catalyst dogma for Pentecostalism or Christianity as a whole, but the strength of Pentecostalism truly thrives in liberation theology. Comprehending Christianity as a whole as not just a mere religion, but it is an invitation to a relationship with God to liberate one from their sins and the consequences of them.

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<sup>33</sup> Alexander, *Black Fire*, 320.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander, *Black Fire*, 320.

In our travels as a cohort in this program, we had the distinct privilege and honor to travel abroad to South Africa for one of our residencies. Among our travels to this incredible country, we were positioned to learn about some incredible global leaders, men and women of great faith. One of the many leaders with whom we submerged ourselves is the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

From the many life lessons and Christian teachings he embodied, the one that emerged as consequential is the term and lifestyle of Ubuntu. By definition, Ubuntu is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community with justice and mutual caring. Ubuntu, a Nguni word from South Africa, the practice speaks to our interconnectedness, our common humanity, and the responsibility to each other that flows from our deeply felt connection. Ubuntu is the consciousness of our natural desire to affirm our fellow human beings and to work and act towards each other with the communal good in the forefront of our minds.<sup>35</sup>

Possessing this mindset allows not only the Black community and church to come together but other global ethnic groups to view and experience Christianity through the lens of their own beautiful culture. In his sermon entitled, “Prep Before Promise,” Bishop T.D. Jakes exclaimed, “When your missionaries are your god, your theology is off.” Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains it in this manner: that our faith was not something that corrected our Africanness. That is, our being African was not something that needed to be excused by God. It would have been very easy to believe that becoming Christians meant doing away with parts of our Christian identity because that is what the

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<sup>35</sup> Barbara Nussbaum, “African Culture and Ubuntu.” *Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (2003): 1-12.

missionaries taught. In order to be a good Christians, we had to turn our backs on a large part of our culture because, according to the church and the colonial governments, one could not be a good Christian and still hold African identity.<sup>36</sup>

Bishop T.D. Jakes further explains that to be considered Christian, singing had to be hymns translated from the English hymnal, and that Christian singing had to be derived from European modes of worship. Europeans would still have us believe that God created this whole continent of Africa and then turned around and forgot all about the people and created order here. It is only through what white people came and did, we can have a relationship with God at all. This is a lie! Bishop Jakes exclaimed that God did not make mistakes, that God made us African because God wanted us to be African, and God desired us to praise God as Africans.<sup>37</sup>

Ubuntu teaches us that the person to be most admired is the one who recognizes the full humanity of every person with whom they come in contact, and therefore mistreating and demeaning others is actually an assault on your own humanity. In the Xhosa culture and in most of the other Southern African cultures, someone who has Ubuntu is a person not only to be emulated and admired, but is also to be recognized as one who is fully human in the best meaning of that term. One cannot be fully human and refuse to acknowledge the humanity in others. So the person who does not have Ubuntu is actually to be pitied because they have cut themselves off from some aspect of their

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<sup>36</sup> Sarojini Nadar, Tinyiko Maluleke, Dietrich Werner, Vicentia Kgabe, and Rudolf Hinz, eds. *Ecumenical Encounters with Desmond Mpilo Tutu: Visions for Justice, Dignity and Peace*. 1st ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 162.

<sup>37</sup> Nadar, et. al., *Ecumenical Encounters with Desmond Mpilo Tutu*, 162.

own humanity. This is also the measure of a true Christian: one who recognizes the fully created image of God in each person we encounter, and to treat them accordingly.<sup>38</sup>

Christianity embodies the embrace of who God created us to be in His image. Thus, as a Black community, we view, worship, and acknowledge God as not only Father, but our great Redeemer and Liberator.

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<sup>38</sup> Nadar, et. al., *Ecumenical Encounters with Desmond Mpilo Tutu*, 162.

## CHAPTER 3:

## BIBLICAL HISTORY

Though the historical events of the mistreatment of Black males have been recorded in history books, despite current attempts to silence Critical Race Theory, the removal of Black men has been performed and recorded before the history books in the school's rotation began. The history books and study of slavery are mere topical registered accounts that Black men have been removed from their places of worship and homes.

This was true as we can read and observe in the Word of God: the Bible. We can see it on four separate occasions when the people of Israel have been exiled and removed from their dwelling land. This also includes their places of worship. The exiles, now lacking a place of prayer and desiring to retain their religious affiliation, more readily accepted that Yahweh was not bound to a city or sanctuary. In this context, exile came to be understood as a punishment inflicted on guilty people.<sup>1</sup>

Four exiles were mentioned, but two are often the most examined. The “Babylonian exile” can refer to several separate events. However, it usually refers to the deportation of most of Jerusalem to Babylon after the destruction of the Judahite capital (including the Jerusalem temple) in 587/6 BC, found in 2 Kings 25:2: “The city was kept under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.” Then in 2 Kings 25:8–12:

On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of

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<sup>1</sup> Marten Krigsman, ed. John D. Barry, et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), s.w. “Exile, Babylonian.”

the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. The whole Babylonian army under the commander of the imperial guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried into exile the people who remained in the city, along with the rest of the populace and those who had deserted to the king of Babylon. But the commander left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields.”

Although the poorest of the land were left to be vinedressers and plowmen, in 2 Kings 25:12, the rest of Jerusalem’s population seems to have been deported. However, the biblical text notes that the exile involved “Judah” in general, implying that many others outside of Jerusalem also were deported by Babylon. We read in 2 Kings 25:21, “There at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king had them executed. So Judah went into captivity, away from her land.”

The term “Babylonian exile” can also be applied to three additional deportations. First, it can refer to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar’s initial action against Jerusalem in 605 BC, after which Daniel and others were exiled. Daniel 1:1 states, “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.” Second, it can refer to the capture of Jerusalem in 597/6 BC, when Jehoiachin and his household and many inhabitants of the city were deposed and brought to Babylon. This deportation included “the mighty men of valor” and all the craftsmen and smiths as we find in Jeremiah 52:28: “This is the number of the people Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile: in the seventh year, 3,023 Jews.”

In 2 Kings 24:12, we read, “Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his attendants, his nobles and his officials all surrendered to him. In the eighth year of the reign of the king of Babylon, he took Jehoiachin prisoner.” In verse 14, the writer continues, “He

carried all Jerusalem into exile: all the officers and fighting men, and all the skilled workers and artisans—a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left.” In 597/6 BC, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Mattaniah (Jehoiachin’s uncle) king and changed his name to Zedekiah as we read in 2 Kings 24:17, “He made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin’s uncle, king in his place and changed his name to Zedekiah.” Third, the term “Babylonian exile” can be applied to the 582 BC deportation, mentioned in Jeremiah 52:30: “In his twenty-third year, 745 Jews taken into exile by Nebuzaradan the commander of the imperial guard. There were 4,600 people in all,” which took place after the destruction of the temple and is related to the assassination of Gedaliah.<sup>2</sup>

We find within the book of Daniel that in the first chapter, the men were taken away from their families to be trained in the oppressor’s way.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. “And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king’s service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table. They were to be trained for three years, and they were to enter the king’s service. Among those chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and Azariah, Abednego (Daniel 1:1-6)).

These men and others were strategically selected to be removed from their families and their places in their religious participation to serve King Nebuchadnezzar.

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<sup>2</sup> Krigsman, ed. *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, s.w. “Exile, Babylonian.”



From the words of Jesus in Mark 3:27, “But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed, he may plunder his house.” By binding the strong, the people of Israel were easily divided. The nation fell into ruins after removing the men in high positions. This exile lasted approximately 70 years—70 years of being displaced in a foreign land, exposed, and forced to worship a different deity. The governing men being separated from the people has been a repeated pattern in biblical history through the other exiles in which the nation of Israel has been led away and oppressed into exile.

The second is the Persian conquest of Babylon, which ended the exile, as Cyrus decreed the return of all captives to their homelands. Although the inscription on the Cyrus Cylinder does not mention the Judahites specifically, it can be inferred from the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative that they were included in his decree found in Ezra 1:1–4:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing: “This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: ““The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.”<sup>3</sup>

It was in 550 BC that Persia conquered Assyria and absorbed them into their empire. Here, we see the repeat of the former tactic come to fruition again. Assyria took the educated men, leading people from the Northern Kingdom and replaced them with

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<sup>3</sup> Kringsman, ed. *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, s.w. “Exile, Babylonian.”

populations from other countries they had conquered such as in 2 Kings 17:24: “The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Kuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites. They took over Samaria and lived in its towns.” They had to send some priests back to the area to teach the people the religious traditions of the God of the land in 2 Kings 17:27–28: “Then the king of Assyria gave this order: ‘Have one of the priests you took captive from Samaria go back to live there and teach the people what the god of the land requires.’ So one of the priests who had been exiled from Samaria came to live in Bethel and taught them how to worship the Lord.”

Such priests probably served a population of poor Jewish farmers dominated by foreign leaders. When Babylon took over the area, they established a provincial capital in Samaria. Leaders there joined with other local leaders to stop Zerubbabel and his people from rebuilding the temple as we read in Ezra 4:1–24.

Gradually, a mixed population emerged (Ezra 10). Still, a faithful remnant attempted to maintain the worship of Yahweh near Shechem, eventually producing the Samaritan community.<sup>4</sup> This shows the significance of the removal of men and how the structure of the place of prayer and the family unit disintegrates and the operation of conquering by division.

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<sup>4</sup> Gary Hardin, ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.w. “Exile.”

## Biblical Masculinity

There is a plethora of worldly definitions of what masculinity is. It has been taken to such great lengths that we today have such a diluted pool of schools of thoughts of what the appropriate definition of masculinity truly is. As many as there are, it is the attempt of this writer to illuminate the biblical definition of what true masculinity is. According to Genesis 1:27, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them.” Male and female he created them. The Scripture reads that we were made in His image.

According to Vines, the Hebrew words *tselem* (image) and *demuth* (likeness) mean—a “resemblance” and not “an exact duplicate.”<sup>5</sup> Clines states images of this period were not “representational portrayals,” since “many images ... were unhewn lumps of rock.”<sup>6</sup> Bird considers God’s image as representational as well.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the Old Testament God is described as having body parts—eyes to see, ears to hear, the ability to have a whole range of feelings, etcetera. Such descriptions are not to be taken literally but are “merely metaphors” of God.<sup>8</sup> Others agree,

The entire Old Testament insists upon the central truth that God is spirit and that no physical image can capture His essence. ... The Bible warns us against reducing the image of God to the level of physical matter; such an image too easily limits our concept

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<sup>5</sup> W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, ([computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System, Nashville: Nelson, 1997, c1996.

<sup>6</sup> David J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” (Tyndale Bulletin 19, 1968): 53-103.

<sup>7</sup> Phyllis A. Bird, “‘Male and Female He Created Them’: Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 2 (1981): 129-59.

<sup>8</sup> Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 70.

of His real nature. “To whom, then, will you compare God?” asks Isaiah. “What image will you compare Him to?”<sup>9</sup> Clearly, God’s intent in making us in His image was not about exact image or likeness. I believe being in His image has multiple meanings. Some understand it refers to the reign of mankind on earth;<sup>10</sup> reflects God’s lordship over creation; and it connotes being a servant.<sup>11</sup> This is depicting God’s love to those being served.<sup>12</sup>

Grafted in his image is the structural make up of man, but it was what was asked of him is what makes him man. Before the assignment in Genesis 1:28, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” God is conversing with man. The first manly action to accomplish is to be in communion with God. This is echoed throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament that men are communicating with man.

As a result of being in communion with God, the assignment he has for you becomes transparent. The first assignment that man was given is to have dominion, name, and take care of the earth, more specifically, the garden. Here is the origin of the deterioration of masculinity today, as many put dominion in front of everything else. This mindset and behavior produces the toxic masculinity that has been rampant for decades

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<sup>9</sup> Paul W. Brand, and Philip Yancey. *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 35.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Francis Sands, “The Imago Dei as Vocation,” (*Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 12010): 28-41.

<sup>11</sup> Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 90

<sup>12</sup> John Henry McKinney II, “Support Groups for Men: Encouraging Healthy Relationships with God and Others,” (doctoral thesis, George Fox University, 2014).

now. It is the disconnect of communication of God that has led males to live with a diminished masculinity.

This is perfectly displayed by Jesus himself in the gospels. Many times has the reader encountered passages of Jesus in communication to God the Father, but one in particular for this topic of research emerges profoundly. In Luke 17:20-26 Jesus says:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. 'Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare *it*, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

Here we can read that Jesus was not only in communication with God, but He desired to display that they are one. This is done by the work He is doing and will do and the direction in which He receives from the Father. Jesus establishes true masculinity by understanding and living a life that is not his own, but one that is communication and submitted to the Father.

### **The Origin of Separation: Sin**

To fully comprehend the absence and separation of men within the church/family dynamic, one must go to the source of its origins. For this, we must look at the entry point of sin that has entered the world through the invitation of man's behavior.

Sin (חַטָּאת, *ḥattā'th*, "a missing," עֲוֹן, '*āwōn*, "perversity," פְּשָׁע, *pesha'*, "transgression," רָע, *ra'*, "evil," etc; ἀμαρτάνω, *hamartánō*, "miss the mark," παράβασις,

*parábasis*, “transgression” with a suggestion of violence, ἀδικία, *adikía*, “injustice,” “unrighteousness”).<sup>13</sup> The term sin derives from an archery term to “miss the mark,” the definition is often understood as a transgression against God. *Sin* in Scripture is used to describe any act of transgression of God’s law such as in James 1:15, “Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

*Disposition* refers to the determination of the will. In Romans 7:8, “But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead.” Sin is used here to describe the evil disposition of man’s fallen will. This disposition is the voluntary product of rebellious and lawless self-determination. The state emphasizes that a fallen man’s condition is also a sin. In Luke 6:43–45 we read, “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.”<sup>44</sup> Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars.<sup>45</sup> A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. The Lord Jesus lays down the position that the state of man’s soul produces his sinful disposition, which in turn does immoral acts. Thus, the underlying condition of the sinner is sinful.<sup>14</sup>

With a firm comprehension of sin, we can observe the first time it infiltrated the earthly realm through man. Students of all schools are agreed that we have in the Old

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<sup>13</sup> Francis J. McConnell, ed. James Orr et al., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Sin,” (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 2,798.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 418.

Testament story of the fall of Adam an eternally valid account of the way sin came into the world, Genesis 3:1–6:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”

The question is not so much to the literal historic matter-of-factness of the narrative as to its essentially psychological truthfulness. The essential thought of the history is that both Adam and Eve disobeyed an express command of God. The seductiveness of temptation is nowhere more forcefully stated than in this narrative. The fruit of the tree is pleasant to look upon; it is good to eat; it is to be desired to make one wise; moreover, the tempter moves upon the woman by the method of the half-truth (see Adam in the Old Testament). God had said that disobedience to the command would bring death; the tempter urged that disobedience would not get the end, implying that the management of God had meant that death would immediately follow the eating of the forbidden fruit. In the story, the various avenues of the approach of sin to the human heart are graphically suggested. Still, after the seductiveness of evil has thus been set forth, the fact remains that both transgressors knew they were transgressing. In Genesis 3:2, it states, “The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden.” Of course, the story is told in a simple, naïve fashion, but its perennial spiritual truth is at once apparent. There has been much progress in religious thinking concerning sin during

the Christian ages. Still, progress has not been away from this central conception of willful disobedience to the law of God.<sup>15</sup>

When sin is not properly acknowledged and dealt with, it produces a “missing the mark” action and mindset. Due to an improper mindset, man has contrived being superior in a great many avenues. From accomplishments, to societal contributions, to various “workmanships,” humanity has even distinguished its language and writings to the separation of the gender with the masculine dominating the feminine. The Scripture itself has mainly a masculine and neuter noun: there are a few feminine nouns that use these masculine endings.<sup>16</sup>

The disconnect of masculinity is not the physical actions of man but it lies dormant in the mindset of men which gives way to be birthed into action. The textbook, *Responsible Leadership: Global and Contextual Ethical Perspectives*, reveals to us a deficit in ethical leadership.<sup>17</sup> This again is only in existence due to sin being introduced into the world. Stückelberger and Mugambi’s approach to unethical leadership is men losing their way to their proper responsibilities and, as a result, they possess a mindset of superiority and entitlement, placing everyone and anyone that does not coincide with their beliefs to be characterized as a subpar being that is only allowed to operate within the realms that are beneath them.

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<sup>15</sup> Francis J. McConnell, ed. James Orr et al., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Sin,” (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 2,798–2,799.

<sup>16</sup> F. J. Long, *Kairos: A Beginning Greek Grammar*, (Mishawaka, IN: Fredrick J. Long, 2005), 45.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Stückelberger and J. N. K. Mugambi, *Responsible Leadership Global and Contextual Ethical Perspectives*, (WCC Publications), n.d.



It is here that responsibilities have been lost due to the separation of God and man. As a result, through the generations that extend from the origins of Adam, we find that men have been absent from a present God. Hence why the fleshly embodiment of him was consequential in Jesus, without such actions the separations would be permanently immanent.

What has been widely preached, taught, and accepted by the vast majority who are presented with the comprehension of sin, is that it occurred when the fruit was consumed. Adam and Eve “fell” into the deception of the serpent, which was a medium that Lucifer was utilizing to converse with the man. But after analyzing this thoroughly, and with the almost universal agreement of sin being an archery term of “missing the mark,” this student would like to present another quantity of evidence that differs from the universal understanding of sin.

To do this, we must look at Genesis 2:20-25:

For Adam, no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, who becomes one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked and felt no shame.

Here we see the forming and creation of a woman in chapter two, still unnamed until chapter three and subsequently was not named by Adam until after the fall. But by his admission that a wife is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, man should unite with his wife. The word “unite or cling” is defined in Hebrew as דָּבַק (*dā·bāq*): cling to, i.e., fasten oneself to an object (Ruth 1:14: “At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her

mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her,” or 2 Samuel 23:10, “but Eleazar stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The Lord brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.”); stick to (Ezekiel 3:26: “I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be silent and unable to rebuke them, for they are a rebellious people.); joined fast, be attached (Job 38:38: “when the dust becomes hard and the clods of earth stick together?”); be made to cleave, stick to (Psalm 22:16: “Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.”); 2. stay close, formally, cling, i.e., be close to another object, (Ruth 2:8: “So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me.”); 3. catch up, overtake, engage, i.e., make a linear motion to come to the same place as another person or party, for either favorable or hostile intent, to cover.<sup>18</sup>

Observing that the definition was set by man to “cling” with his wife, it is essential to follow how that was put into practice when tested. Genesis 3:1-7 states:

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

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<sup>18</sup> James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

The Scriptures were not written obscurely in such a manner that this piece of evidence has been shunned away. But in fact, it is a notification that is not often discussed or attributed to the “fall” of man. The significance of this is that by Adam’s own admittance of what a man should do for his wife, he himself “missed the mark” and fell short. He himself transgressed against his responsibilities as a man and husband and did not cover his wife during the conversation of deception. It is unconcealed in verse six that Adam was not far away or not present during the conversational exchange between the woman and the serpent. He was with her, so being with her, he, too, could have heard the conversation; he, too, very well could have seen the conflict within the woman during the conversation with the serpent and did nothing. He did not cover, protect, or cling to her as described by his words and those that follow within the Scripture. By the lack of actions taken at this moment, he truly missed the mark; he failed to operate in the full function of a husband and cling to his wife during times of distress.

Adam followed this inability to act to further this educated position by accusing the woman of his fallen act. In Genesis 3:8-12 we read:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the garden's trees. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Verse eight shows us that both man and woman heard the voice of God, so the disconnect has not transpired between God and man. But it is verse nine that illuminates the incompetence of Adam in covering his wife. God calls out to “man,” not the woman; he held the man accountable for the act that has transpired, a significant notation in Scripture

as God very quickly and was well within his right to call both Adam and woman, but He chose to call Adam.

In doing so, by calling him out of hiding and out of reprieve, Adam abandons his wife. Verse twelve illuminates that Adam does not take responsibility for his action and lack thereof but places sole blame on the woman. He was, again, leaving her uncovered and attempting to absolve himself in his self-appointed absence.

Herein lies the seed in which man has had a perpetuating enigma when family conflict or responsibility emerges. It is the propensity to run away, to remain absent, or to cast blame, that we see as a repeated cycle that has echoed throughout humanity from its origins to the present day. That man from its roots has not been present; this is evident within the ecclesia, a community or family that is called out from among them. This has resulted in a disenfranchised family and church unit that we see today, resulting in, according to pew research, only 47% of Black men attending church services a minimum of once a week.<sup>19</sup>

<b>Racial and ethnic composition</b>	<b>At least once a week</b>	<b>Once or twice a month/a few times a year</b>	<b>Seldom/never</b>
White	34%	32%	33%
Black	47%	36%	17%

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<sup>19</sup> Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/> (accessed January 9, 2020).

<b>Racial and ethnic composition</b>	<b>At least once a week</b>	<b>Once or twice a month/a few times a year</b>	<b>Seldom/never</b>
Asian	26%	42%	32%
Latino	39%	35%	26%
Other/Mixed	34%	32%	33%

*Table 1 — Rate of church attendance by race<sup>20</sup>*

It was the Scripture of Genesis 3:9 when God asked, “Adam, where are you” that has echoed from the garden into the present day, which this researcher is attempting to uncover. God’s poignant inquisition of the whereabouts of man has stirred, provoked, and challenged humanity to be restored to order. Dr. Jawanza verbalized it in this manner: “It is like everybody is looking for the Black males. Black women are looking for Black men to marry. Black children are looking for male role models to pattern after mature Black males are being sought by schools to volunteer as a role model to students.”<sup>21</sup> The absence of Black men has plagued history, and we are still observing and living with this harsh truth in Black communities and churches.

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<sup>20</sup> Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/> (accessed January 9, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, *Adam! Where Are You?: Why Most Black Men Do Not Go to Church* (United States of America: African American Images, 1994), 4.

Opening the door widely for a term that is becoming more pronounced as society today has repeated itself in attempting to define itself. Flawed masculinity has been a current topic of swirling amongst society, in the argument around what is an appropriate mindset and behavior of a man's masculinity to be displayed.

On this societal term, academic scholar, Njoya, has formulated M.E.W. (Men for the Equality of Women), a group dedicated for the equality of men and women to liberate the oppressive ways of masculinity. He went as far as to show a detailed diagram to exemplify the scientific data that supports his claim of a lack of physical activities that males voluntarily adhere to. The data shows the lack of these activities can be and are harmful to the longevity of men's health as they have physical complications that appear in their lives much earlier than women.

Against the naturalistic, materialistic theories of origins, the biblical view starts with the assertion that the eternal God has created man, the most significant of all his created works. It is not necessary for one to subscribe to a particular chronological scenario for God's work in the creation of man. The biblical teaching on man begins with a right notion concerning God. The biblical perspective of anthropology (i.e., the study of man) is centrally displayed in the context of an elevated theology (i.e., the study of God). A high and reverent view of God leads to a noble and dignified view of man, whereas a poorly developed concept of God often produces a distorted perspective on the man. Hence, a man may be viewed more important than he ought, or man may be seen as less

important than is biblical. Either view is sub-biblical. The place to begin a study of man, then, is with a high view of God, his Creator.<sup>22</sup>

This bears much fruit in the research this student is conducting as we can locate the origin of the enigma. Man's inconsistencies are not only taken into account but are charged as separation in the courtroom of God. This has a great deal of effect today as to why black men have been absent from church, the separation in a lot of men's lives has always existed, and many do not possess the information of anything else.

Flawed masculinity has now ascended to the heights of being the cultural norm and is now, as history repeats itself, being challenged and confronted. Those who have dwelt in the space of the oppressed, including women, are no longer being silent victims of such behaviors within the culture. As a result, many coalitions and groups have formed to combat the misogynistic tyranny of culture.

Many are the excuses for Black males' attendance declining as of late, but the reasoning behind such behaviors or lack thereof can be traced to the origins of "Flawed Masculinity." Somewhere in males' historical lineage, there was a disconnect between God and them. The disconnect blossomed into many other forms of mindsets and behaviors but has produced the ideology of remaining absent from church and seems to hold no significance or bearing of lasting effects. This behavior of disconnect was not only practiced but has been incorporated in the passing of knowledge from one generation to the next. This has spawned generations of men with the flawed mentality that church is not only inconsequential, but it has now metamorphosed into the culture of

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<sup>22</sup>W. A. Elwell and B. J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), s.w. "Man, Doctrine Of."

that family. This can be on display when viewing Black churches around the country as many Black men are absent from its attendance.

Masculinity is given by God and not earned by man, and once this is established and realized, the narrative of the “flawed” masculinity can be overturned. The disheartening cycle of propensity from generation to generation of “flawed” behavior must be stopped at its point of origin, the accepting and normalization of sin. Hence, the importance of the church: it aids in establishing that God and not man is the definer of masculinity. Re-establishing this connection between God and man can be done without the church itself, but in some fashion, the church is involved as whoever helps in enlightening men to the truth is correlated to the church itself. Imperative work must be put into action as the men who are absent for whatever reason are victims of falling further and further apart each moment the doors of the church are open and men are not present. For flawed masculinity to be attended to and attendance of Black men to be on the rise in churches today, is to mend the broken relationship between God and themselves. Re-training the male mind that the responsibilities they possess are not for them to burden alone, but to relieve themselves of this burden by understanding dependence on who God is and what God is in their lives.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH QUESTION

Why is there a significant decline in African-American/Black males' attendance in church? What is the traumatic trigger of the enigma, and what is the solution to address the problem at hand? This question was birthed through a personal experience this writer had encountered for many years and has recently confronted.

Through this encounter, this student was curious about how one would address this situation with the disparity emerging in the numbers and percentages of statistics.

### **Research Findings**

The following report derives from a survey that was conducted with a total of nine Black men. These Black males are positioned in three distinct categories to obtain diversity in perspective and response. The categories consist of three Black male pastors, three Black churchgoers/leaders, and three Black male nonchurch attendees. The survey questions (see Appendix C) consists of an array of questions that provoke each category of men to confront the subject of Black men in the church. Not only are the questions and answers diverse, but the dwelling locations of the participants are also diverse, as they derive from the western region, midwest region, southern region, and eastern region of North America to produce further a collective national response to the crisis matter.

### **Pastors/ Churchgoers**

The findings of this research were common in some answering and in others perplexing as their responses and experiences differed from this researcher's theoretical approach. The results and effects are as follows: out of the three survey participants, three out of three had their parents and a strong male role model in their lives.

No surprise from the results of this survey that a hundred percent of the Black male pastors, when asked if they had their father in their lives, it was unanimously said yes. This data does not differ from the church leaders/ churchgoers as well, which is represented in the survey as three out of three survey participants had their fathers in their lives.

One churchgoer had suffered tragedy as his father passed in his teenage life. But this loss of the patriarch did not deter him or his family from attending worship services. Along with fathers being present in these now men's lives, they all are recorded stating their fathers indeed influenced them to have a relationship with God and attend church every week.

This illuminates the statistics given in Appendix B on the importance of fatherhood: "Sociologists and psychologists have also suggested that involvement in their children's school-community members, such as pastors and teachers, is pivotal in which parents influence the child's cognitive competency."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G.H. Brody, Z. Stoneman, and D. Flor, "Parental Religiosity, Family Processes, and Youth Competence in Rural Two-Parent African American Families," *Developmental Psychology* 32, no. 4, (1996): 696-806.

In unison, these Black male pastors and churchgoers/leaders have equated their advancements in life and society to the lessons and instructions given by the church. In unanimity, they gave personal accounts of how being present in the church has aided not only in their spiritual journey, but in their societal and communal one as well. Leading mental health experts share that church attendance is a factor that has been linked to better health and physical functioning. Studies have shown that church attendance has been associated with lower hypertension prevalence, blood pressure, and mortality. Researchers analyzing data from the Established Populations for Epidemiologic Studies of the Elderly published articles indicating that church attendance was associated with better physical functioning. Churches are typically places where males are valued and receive emotional, psychological, and behavioral resources that can be leveraged during stressful situations, including disease management and recovery. Participation in organized religious services has been linked to hope, resilience, stress mitigation, and enhanced longevity. Numerous studies have examined the impact of church attendance on various health outcomes. Yet, remarkably few have considered how this form of religious participation has implications for mobility limitations among men in general.<sup>2</sup>

In the table on the previous pages, we see the analytics, though, that the Black population in North America is only 13%; they are the clearly the majority when believing in God and going to a church. The more staggering percentage is that according to [pewresearch.org](https://www.pewresearch.org) and other national survey databases, approximately 92% of Black men in North America do not go to church.

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<sup>2</sup> National Center for Biotechnology Information, U.S. National Library of Medicine, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/> (accessed September 13, 2022).

In unison, pastors and churchgoers offered the same response to the inquisition of their congregations. They all fall under the statistic that for the past decade or more, Black women have held upwards of 60% or higher in churches today. Calculating that a strong representation of Black men in church today would equate to only 35-40% in churches.

The age range of these Christian Black men varied between the thirties and early fifties. But they all referenced the peak of the civil rights era in which this statistic was not the case. They referenced the height of male engagement within the church and are striving to return there. Two pastors explain their caution in accomplishing such feats, as they both realized the result of the sacrifice in marching, boycotting, and other acts of demonstration for equality and how it led many to leave the church altogether.

After the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, Africans in America traded their African souls for a piece of the American dream. They released the values that got them this far for the iconic proclamation that they have “made it.” According to Gregory Hardy, Black men today continue to suffer from a double consciousness mind. They have changed their identity, religion, community, and culture to be accepted by their white counterparts. Being accepted by the majority culture has stripped the Black identity that ignited unity and commonality. Once Black society falls prey to the divisiveness of becoming successful by any means necessary, the fabric of family and community dissipates into an abyss of emptiness.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Gregory Hardy, *Adam Come Home: The Renewed Commitment of the Church to Encourage Black Men to Return to Their Faith Community* (Drew University, UMI Number: 3619142, 2014).

Black men often reflect a duality of consciousness in understanding that their historical experience in America has not met their basic needs. However, as the Black male transitions from childhood to adolescence, and unresolved conflicts related to psychosocial development are retarded due to insufficient access to masculine status and the historical continuance of social, cultural, and economic disadvantages, it becomes increasingly evident that academic, career and social prosperity in the later stages of development have the potential for adverse outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

These scholars all agree that a different approach is needed to reach and keep men in the church. Describing, at times, the lack of representation and how low men's attendance can and will discourage others from coming back. With the data displayed in the graphs and the responses given, this problem that the Black church is experiencing is much more than a problem; it has been converted into an epidemic that has plagued the Black church for many years.

Those boys who are happiest and most well-adjusted have warm, loving fathers—fathers who score high in precisely “feminine” qualities. The key component of a boy's healthy relationship to his father is affection, not “masculinity.” The boys who fare poorly in their psychological adjustment are not those without fathers, but those with abusive or neglectful fathers.<sup>5</sup>

The greatest cost of the less than/better than dynamic of traditional masculinity lies in its deprivation of the experience of communion. Those who fear subjugation have

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<sup>4</sup> Charles R. Foster, Fred Smith, and Grant S. Shockley, *Black Religious Experience: Conversations on Double Consciousness and the Work of Grant Shockley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Terrence Real, *I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression* (New York: Scribner, 2003).

limited repertoires of service. But service is the appropriate central organizing force of mature manhood. When the critical questions concern what one is going to get, a man is living in a boy's world. Beyond a certain point in a man's life, if he is to remain truly vital, he needs to be actively engaged in devotion to something other than his own success and happiness. The word discipline derives from the same root as the word disciple. Discipline means "to place oneself in the service of." Discipline is a form of devotion. A grown man with nothing to devote himself to is a man who is sick at heart.<sup>6</sup>

In one survey, one participant shared with this student personal information that his father had passed away in his teenage years. His years with his father were fulfilling and he credits his father for the stability he enjoys in his life presently. However, he did share that there was and is void that was difficult to overcome. The milestones in his life were and are traumatizing to endure without his father alive in his life.

When a child's father dies, a child can properly grieve. The child can eventually (as painful as it may be) come to understand that death is final. When a father leaves, it creates a plethora of psycho-logical ramifications for the child (self-blame, anxiety, resentment, etc.). When a father dies, fatherhood lives on in the head and the heart of the child, and the legacy of fatherhood is preserved. The mother generally aids in this process of preservation. When a father leaves, the child suffers, and his fatherhood is diminished and the value of fatherhood as a whole suffers. In many cases, because the mother is hurt, she aids in the diminishing process."<sup>7</sup>

The term fatherless is mentioned frequently in the Bible. The English transliteration is "yathom" or יָתוֹם a masculine noun with a short definition of "orphan." Strong's Concordance defines the word, "From an unused root meaning to be lonely; a

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<sup>6</sup> Real, *I Don't Want to Talk About It*.

<sup>7</sup> M. E. Strong, *Church for the Fatherless: A Ministry Model for Society's Most Pressing Problem* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Books, 2012), 23-24.

bereaved person—fatherless (child), orphan.” An overwhelming majority of the biblical references to the “fatherless,” (orphan; noun; masculine) are contained in the Old Testament. Overwhelmingly, the rabbis of *Jewish History* agree to the dual definition of “yathom.”<sup>8</sup>

We may draw the conclusion that widow and orphan are each in their own way the very picture of weakness and vulnerability. A final observation: it is remarkable that Hebrew has only one word for orphan: *ytwm*. It is reasonable to suppose that in Israel as elsewhere in all times there were children who lost both father and mother at an early age. I admit that it is an *argumentum e silentio*, but in the light of this sad situation, it is unlikely that *ytwm* has only the meaning of “fatherless.”<sup>9</sup>

### Nonchurchgoers

In the next portion of the interview survey that this researcher conducted, nonchurchgoers participated in a similar sets of questions. (See Appendix C.) Here are the results of these collections. The first question that the answers were striking is the commonality that one hundred percent of the non-churchgoers didn’t have their fathers present in their lives while the most influential figure that led the now pastors and other churchgoers were indeed their fathers. Herein lies the significant disparity and the after-effects which were birthed from it. “Over the last few decades, marriage has been a declining institution among all Americans, and this decline is even more evident in the

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<sup>8</sup> Dwight David Croy, “God’s Focus on the Fatherless: A Lens to Inform Spiritual Impact in the Local Church” (doctoral thesis, George Fox University, 2015), 104.

<sup>9</sup> J. Renkema Kampen, “Does Hebrew YTWm Really Mean ‘Fatherless’?” (*Jewish History* 11, no. 1, Spring 1997): 121.

Black community. In 2019, only 30% of African Americans were married compared to 48%. Half or 50% of African Americans have never been married compared to 34% of all Americans.”<sup>10</sup> This leaves an apparent void within the household and affects the family

The second question this researcher has excavated further with his participants is their reasoning on why they and their companions wish not to participate in church. The data collected shows that one-third of the participants reasoning is the church is non-trusting. Another third believe that education is a large hurdle for men to get past. Lastly, the remaining one third believes that work or incarceration is the reasoning for the large absenteeism in church today.

From the perspective of this writer’s hypothesis, the non-trusting factor came as no new revelation for this student. But for the latter two responses, this writer was not anticipating the participants to answer. They were unpacking the first of the two answers: education. Additionally, the component of not having a father and the influence of a father’s involvement on academic achievement extends into adolescence and young adulthood. Numerous studies find that an active and nurturing fathering style is associated with better verbal skills, intellectual functioning, and academic achievement among adolescents.<sup>11</sup>

Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, researchers examined the association between maternal parenting stress, mother-father relationship status, and fathers’ participation in parenting in terms of engagement, sharing in child-

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<sup>10</sup> US Census Bureau, “Data,” Census.gov, <https://www.census.gov/data/> (accessed September 13, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> National Fatherhood Initiative®, a 501c3 Non-Profit, “Father Absence Statistics,” National Fatherhood Initiative®, <https://www.fatherhood.org/father-absence-statistic>.



related chores, and cooperative coparenting. They found that fathers' engagement with children and sharing in child-related chores were negatively associated with maternal parenting stress while cooperative coparenting had a spurious relationship with maternal parenting stress. They also found little variation in these associations by mother-father relationship status suggesting that fathers' participation in parenting was important for both mothers and children even if the mother-father relationship had ended.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 19.5 million children, more than 1 in 4, live without a father in the home. Depression and delinquency scores were much higher among the portion of adolescent respondents who reported having a father that had, at some point, been incarcerated. In 2011, children living in female-headed homes with no spouse present had a poverty rate of 47.6%. This was over four times the rate for children living in married-couple families. Men who grew up with absent fathers were more likely to become absent fathers. They also found that women who grew up with absent fathers are more likely to have children with absent fathers. Researchers using a pool from the U.S. found strong evidence that father absence has an effect on early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy. Teens without fathers were twice as likely to be involved in early sexual activity and seven times more likely to get pregnant as an adolescent.

Additionally, adolescents in single-mother and single-father families are at higher risk of risky behaviors, victimization, and mental distress compared to those in two-parent families. Being raised by a single mother raises the risk of teen pregnancy, marrying with less than a high school degree, and forming a marriage where both partners have less than a high school degree. However, higher quality father-daughter relationships are a protective factor against engagement in risky sexual behaviors.

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth found that obese children are more likely to live in father-absent homes than are non-obese children. A study of 109 juvenile offenders indicated that family structure significantly predicts delinquency. Additionally, adolescent boys with absent fathers are more likely to engage in delinquency than those who are present.

A study using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study revealed that in many cases the absence of a biological father contributes to increased risk of child maltreatment. The results suggest that Child Protective Services (CPS) agencies have some justification in viewing the presence of a social father as increasing children's risk of abuse and neglect. It is believed that in families with a non-biological (social) father figure, there is a higher risk of abuse and neglect to children, despite the social father living in the household or only dating the mother.

Even after controlling for community context, there is significantly more drug use among children who do not live with their mother and father. Additionally, individuals from father-absent homes are 279% more likely to carry guns and deal drugs than peers living with their fathers.

Father involvement seems to reduce the occurrence of behavioral problems in boys and psychological problems in young women, as well as enhancing cognitive development, while decreasing delinquency and economic disadvantage in low-income families.<sup>12</sup>

This response of education was followed by a response from one of the participants that in the area that he dwells in (Las Vegas), his associates and others in the

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<sup>12</sup> National Fatherhood Initiative®, "Father Absence Statistics."

region are so far behind that they can quickly be deemed as illiterate. He further explained that reading such a history book as the Bible is tremendously intimidating. As a result, his friends and those alike avoid gatherings of any size that you are obligated to read in public to avoid public humiliation.

Ingenuous of this information provoked this writer to research the topic of reading deficiency among Black males further. As a result, this researcher studied the three major cities in North America with the highest Black populations and probed the education data for the ages of 8<sup>th</sup> grade and onward. (See Appendix D.) These cities consist of Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York City, and all have produced staggering percentages illuminating the illiteracy problem among Black males in this country. The results yielded facts of twenty-six to thirty-three points, a score below the average in that region and with their white counterparts in class.

Here lies another problem that is hidden in plain sight. Because of the lack of fathers in the home, and the traumatic implications that this affects Black male adolescents, they are left with emotional difficulties and hurt that are not being addressed. Presently you have a Black male student who possesses emotional trauma and is coming to class with such setbacks they are expected and deemed unfit inside a classroom when they cannot “perform” the duties of the school curriculum.

The prevailing assumption among many educators is that the achievement task for African Americans is the same as for any other group. African Americans have to be able to do what all other children have to be capable of doing to achieve in American schools. Such people proceed with their assumptions that beyond individual differences—which they are willing to concede particularize the task of learning, if you know what works for the white child, then you know what works for the Black child. Generalities are made across the schools, but an argument

must be made that more social, emotional, cognitive, and political competencies are required of African American youth precisely because of their ethnicity.<sup>13</sup> In this regard, the educational system has some intention for the academic well-

being of its students. Still, the hyperfocus on performing numbers has left many children, including Black males, at a significant disadvantage as they are surpassed and left behind educationally. “One of the first tragedies to note about the effects of this class education on Blacks is that it further reinforced colonialism’s policy of perpetual disunity in Africa and within the states. The line dividing the “upper” and “middle” classes from the black masses and their basic aspirations is more rigidly drawn and the superior class mentality is becoming even more crystalized since our freedom.

### **Education**

The second greatest tragedy is what is called “education.” It is mainly role learning, memorizing phrases, concepts, and other required data. Thinking is neither required nor expected. Critical analysis and evaluation of the subject matter are not adequately required. But the ability to absorb and recall is needed. The brilliant scholar then can readily quote authorities and remember well their bibliographical resources.”<sup>14</sup>

Black males are continually subjected to oppressive elements such as low expectations, disparate suspensions and expulsions, and disproportionate enrollment in special education.<sup>15</sup> As revealed in the pernicious achievement disparities, the United

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<sup>13</sup> Theresa Perry, Claude Steele, and Asa Hilliard III, *Young, Gifted and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African American Students* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>14</sup> Chancellor Williams, *Destruction of Black Civilization* (Hawthorne, CA: BN Publishing, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> T. Fitzgerald, *Black Males and Racism: Improving the Schooling and Life Chances of African Americans* (Herndon, VT: Paradigm Publishers, 2014).

States public school system has not adequately addressed the educational needs of African American males to ensure academic and social success. Author I.M Young reveals in his writing that “all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings.”<sup>16</sup> The antithesis of this statement suggests that the conditions of humanization encompass an environment in which individuals possess the ability to develop, exercise their capacities, and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings. Black male students within public education have not been provided with adequate educational resources, including culturally relevant pedagogy, to reach their full academic potential, and often these students are unable to express their needs, thoughts, and feelings regarding their deficient educational environment.<sup>17</sup>

Cultural capital from within the church, allows leaders and members to propose alternate educational solutions for Black male students, who are exposed to the sophisticated culture of power embedded in public education in which most teachers are white and female.<sup>18</sup> In general, social, human, cultural, and economic capital generated by the church, has the potential to address the concerns of high teacher turnover, limited instructional technology, and concerns of fear and safety within public education, which the Black church may address through social justice advocacy, partnerships, or financial

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<sup>16</sup> I.M. Young, The Five Faces of Oppression, in M. Adams, W.J. Blumenfeld, R. Castaneda, H. Hackman, M.L. Peters, & X. Zuniga, ed., *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 33-45.

<sup>17</sup>Deborah King McEwan, “The Perspectives of Black Church Leaders on Their Roles in the Empowerment of Black Male Students,” (doctoral thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> J. McFarland, B. Hussar, J. Zhang, X. Wang, K. Wang, S. Hein, M. Dilibert, E. Forrest Cataldi, F. Bullock Mann, and A. Barner, “The Condition of Education 2019,” National Center for Education Statistics, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019144> (accessed June 18, 2019).

donations.<sup>19</sup> Historically, the role of the Black church has shifted based on the era and prevailing social conditions.<sup>20</sup>

As a result, Black males are viewed as unfit to be in the classroom, resulting in categorization as a “problem” within the school. This gives the persona that is often shifted to their behavior within the classroom. The frequent lack of support from home and the absence of a father or male figure is now emotional trauma that manifests through the child’s behavior.

The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are assumed to be at risk because they are too aggressive, too loud, too violent. Too dumb, too hard to control, too streetwise, and too focused on sports. The trouble with Black boys is that most never have a chance to be thought of as potentially smart and talented or to demonstrate talents in science, music, or literature. The trouble with Black boys is that too often, they are placed in schools where their needs for nurturing, support, and loving discipline are not met. Instead, they are labeled, shunned, and treated in ways that create and reinforce an inevitable cycle of failure.”<sup>21</sup>

With behavioral issues taken into account and now injecting the recent pandemic of Covid-19 that swept the globe, many students have not even stepped foot back onto campus. According to an article by Kevin Mahnken, shrunken enrollment was also concentrated in specific age bands. The number of high schoolers fell by just .4 percent, while elementary and middle schoolers accounted for a 3 percent decrease. By contrast, enrollment of kindergarteners declined by three times as much, while the pre-K

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<sup>19</sup> McEwan, “The Perspectives of Black Church Leaders on Their Roles in the Empowerment of Black Male Students.”

<sup>20</sup>C.E. Lincoln and L.H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

<sup>21</sup>P. A. Noguera, “The Trouble with Black Boys: The Role and Influence of Environmental and Cultural Factorson the Academic Performance of African American Males,” (*Urban Education* 38, no. 4, 2003): 431-459.

population plunged by an astonishing 22 percent.<sup>22</sup> Though these numbers seem miniscule, when taken into consideration that each state has seen a dramatic impact of vacancy in schools (see Appendix D), this results in thousands of kids in each state around North America. We are witnessing another pandemic in this nation; plenty of students are not returning to school; some are not returning at all to any form of school institution and, as a result, their academic year in that particular grade level has lapsed by almost two years, meaning that these students are two years behind in their education. Most have elected not to return to campus for their educational needs and have opted to remain at home and enroll in a virtual school curriculum. This has impacted young students from grade school to high school as the lack of present social engagement has become the norm. These students are not learning conflict resolution, public awareness, and other life skills. This creates more of a divide in the education system and serves as a sizeable daunting barrier for Black male students to return who previously had a hard time coping in a school setting.

Having a father involved in schools is associated with the higher likelihood of a student getting mostly A's. This was true for fathers in biological parent families, for stepfathers, and for fathers heading single-parent families. Additionally, students living in father-absent homes are twice as likely to repeat a grade in school.<sup>23</sup> Coinciding with the national statistics we see in Appendix D, it is apparent that not only do we have a education problem in poor schools, but also that these schools should be held

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<sup>22</sup> Kevin Mahnken, "Federal Data Shows Pandemic Fueled Huge Drop in K-12 Enrollment," The 74, <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/perspectives-black-church-leaders-on-their-roles/docview/2333661049/se-2>.

<sup>23</sup> National Fatherhood Initiative, "Father Absence Statistics."

accountable. In addition the lack of family support from a father or father figure that these male children are enduring without is another proves to be a detriment all to itself.

Statistics circle back to the primary source of severance being the lack of a proper home life structure that aids the Black male student to position themselves to succeed inside and out of the classroom.

Researchers have agreed, at least since James Coleman and colleagues issued the famous mid-1960s report *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, that conditions in families have much to do with student achievement. Over the years, questions have arisen. About how much these family factors and other before-school and out-of-school factors affect student achievement compared to school quality.”<sup>24</sup>

The lack of family structure and the behavior that it frequently produces seen through statistics illustrates the damning choices for these now Black male students, soon to be Black male adults, as incarceration or low paying jobs.

The educational system that proceeds in the patchwork of equipping Black males is a broken and flawed approach—resulting in a fractured and depleted Black student, who, if fortunate enough to grow to a mature age, is now a fractured Black male adult who is currently living his life and making decisions from a broken place. This quickly can propagate into a disjointed family of his own by only mimicking the social construct pattern that laid before him in his youth. This approach can be altered and approached from a healthier perspective if the educational system and parents would see it from the author Tatum’s lens.

In addition, several other factors need to be considered when planning effective literacy instruction for black males because these factors can potentially interrupt literacy development: 1. The roots of black male turmoil. 2. The black male’s

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).



response to the turmoil. 3. The ways institutions have responded to this turmoil. 4. How this turmoil affects black males' literacy development?<sup>25</sup>

The link to education and religion has a distinct relationship. According to this chart below, we can observe not only the percentage difference in males versus females in church attendance, but we can observe the education distinctions as well.

**A Detailed Look at Worship Service Attendance**

	% who attend at least weekly among ...									
	Gender			Age				Education		
	All	Men	Women	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	HS or less	Some coll	Coll grad
Total population	39	34	45	33	36	40	54	40	40	39
<b>Larger traditions</b>										
Protestant	50	46	54	48	46	50	58	48	50	54
Evang. churches	58	54	62	54	57	59	65	54	61	69
Mainline churches	34	31	38	32	27	34	48	32	32	39
Hist. black churches	59	49	65	55	53	65	68	56	62	64

*Figure 2 — A Detailed Look at Worship Service Attendance*

It has been documented that within certain Christian traditions, including members of evangelical, mainline and historically Black Protestant churches, as well as Mormons, those with more education tend to attend church somewhat more often than those with less education.<sup>26</sup>

## **Incarceration**

A large percentage of African American males comprise the US prison population, being imprisoned at a higher rate than whites. “African Americans make up

<sup>25</sup>A. W. Tatum, *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males: Closing the Achievement Gap* (Grandview Heights, OH: Stenhouse Publishers, 2006), 26.

<sup>26</sup> Pew Research Center.

2.7% of the nation's wealth, and 40% of the incarceration population, these racial disparities are older than the United States itself."<sup>27</sup>

In "Halting African-American Boys' Progression From Pre-K to Prison: What Families, Schools, and Communities Can Do!" author Barbarin writes, "The penal system thrives on a steady supply of African-American males who account for more than 10 percent of youth, but over 60 percent of youth under the under the age of eighteen."<sup>28</sup> Author Jean Bonhomme writes, "The are great racial disparities within the US prison system. In 1999, nine percent of African males aged 25 to 29 were in prison. African American male school dropouts were jailed or in prison, while few found employment."<sup>29</sup>

This is a perpetual cycle that seems to have no toxic end. Author Michelle Alexander describes it in this manner:

Those who are lucky enough to get a job upon release from prison find that *up to 100 percent of their wages may be garnished* to pay fees, fines, and court costs as well as the costs of their imprisonment and accumulated child support. What, realistically, do we expect these folks to do? When those labeled felons fail under this system to make it on the outside—not surprisingly, about 70 percent fail within three years—we throw up our hands and wonder where they all went. Or we chastise them for being poor fathers and failing to contribute to their families. It's a setup.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibram Kendi X, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (London: The Bodley Head, 2017), 2.

<sup>28</sup> Oscar A. Barbarin, "Halting African American Boys' Progression from Pre-K to Prison: What Families, Schools, and Communities Can Do!" *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 80, no. 1, 2010), 81–88.

<sup>29</sup> Jean Bonhomme et al., "African-American Males in the United States Prison System: Impact on Family and Community," *The Journal of Men's Health & Gender* 3, no. 3, 2006), 223–226.

<sup>30</sup> Michelle Alexander, "Where Have All the Black Men Gone?" HuffPost, Last modified May 25, 2011, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/where-have-all-the-black\\_b\\_469808](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/where-have-all-the-black_b_469808).

In this instance, the church is not even remotely in the hemisphere of these males' thought process; they have mentally and externally made the automatic survival switch to survive and endure to see another day. These two responses of education and incarceration leave a seismic rift that the church at one time was able to fill and provide for.

Those who do leave prison are at a strong disadvantage to those who never have been incarcerated because the stain of their record goes further than a public file. Those who have been incarcerated have dilemmas within their own families. Incarceration has a traumatizing effect on the prisoner's family as the emotional strain is a heavy toll. If the man who has been in prison possessed a job, not only is that gone, but the financial strain is very stressful on the family back home.

After release, those who have a record not only have to encounter the intimidating component of finding a job with a record, but the time lost also erects as a problem including time updating skills, time with family, and time contributing to society in a beneficial manner. Dr. Anita Phillips words it in this manner: "pain can heal, but untreated trauma can last forever." Trauma can be defined as "an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being." Essentially, a traumatic event is one which is potentially life threatening and which overwhelms the body's natural coping mechanisms.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ann-Marie D'arcy-Sharpe, "How Is Psychological Trauma Linked to Chronic Pain?" *Pathways*. Last modified August 31, 2020. Accessed February 5, 2023. <https://www.pathways.health/how-is-psychological-trauma-linked-to-chronic-pain/>.

Though the pain of prison is, in part, healed by the release of the man, the trauma of the experience may linger for quite some time and may result in unhealthy thoughts and choices in the present and in the future.

Another aspect to observe is that the treatment in these correctional facilities often do not favor people of color, to be more specific, Black. Institutional bias and structural stigma are macro-level issues that impact institutional policies, which lead to discrimination and the unfair restrictions to opportunities of particular groups of people. While institutional racism can sometimes develop from intentional biases, it does not require individuals support, intention, or awareness for discrimination to operate. An area where this often unintentional and implicit institutional bias is operating is within the legal system.<sup>32</sup>

Within legal institutions, life altering decisions are made every day. At a basic level, police officers and correctional officers need to make quick decisions whether an individual poses a threat, prosecutors need to determine whether or not to charge a suspect, and juries decide whether or not to convict. This process leaves a lot of opportunities for potential bias to creep in despite their high stake's nature. A study by Sommers and Marotta in 2014 examined how unconscious racism influences legal practices such as policing. They found that of more than 4 million stops conducted by the NYPD between 2004-2012, 52% were African American.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>J. M. Jones, J. F. Dovidio, and D. L. Vietze, *The Psychology of Diversity: Beyond Prejudice and Racism* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

<sup>33</sup>S. R. Sommers and S.A. Marotta, "Racial Disparities in Legal Outcomes: On Policing, Charging Decisions, and Criminal Trial Proceedings." *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, no. 1, 2014), 103–111.

Research conducted by psychologists Nicholson and Kugler in 1991 found that minority and unmarried individuals were more likely to be found incompetent compared to their white and married counterparts. A study by another psychologist, Sundsmo, in 2007 found that African American defendants were less likely than European American defendants to be found competent and were also more likely to be diagnosed with a psychotic disorder.<sup>34</sup>

With the amount of significant pressure that a Black male is encountering outside the justice system, we find that in the justice system, he bares a heavy burden, and one that can reap unwavering consequences that can last a lifetime.

### **The Rise of the Church**

During the civil rights movement, the church was not only flourishing in the community, it was the epic center of the community. “In the civil rights era, Modern black families have required church attendance by children, including older ones. This is because of the belief that within the extended family of religion, children receive moral education, positive group identity and personal worth, morality, and rituals providing unity-a glue that welded families and communities to each other.

The church welds community and unrelated families to each other through preaching, teaching, cooperative benevolence, symbols, belief systems, morality, and rituals. Likewise, the church is representative of a modern-day tribe. In the church,

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<sup>34</sup>Isolde Hughes, “Examining Racial Bias within the Items of the MacArthur Competence Assessment Tool Criminal Adjudication,” (doctoral thesis, George Fox University, 2020).

members are referred to as brother and sister, elders are respected, and the minister is appreciated.”<sup>35</sup>

Another brilliant scholar, W.E.B. Du Bios, plainly recorded it in this manner:

In origin and functions, the Negro church is a broader, deeper, and more comprehensive social organism than the churches of white Americans. The Negro church is not simply an organism for the propagation of religion; it is the center of the social, intellectual, and religious life of an organized group of individuals...it is, in fine, the central organ of the organized life of the American Negro for at times amusement, relaxation, instruction.”<sup>36</sup>

The church was responsible for the holistic life of the attendee, education was another factor in which the church had a hand of influence in. Over the decades, these church-founded colleges and universities developed a finely tuned balance between their religious roots and their secular missions. As institutions of higher education accredited by secular agencies, and as educators of students who, upon graduation, needed to compete in the job market, they offered courses that would prepare their students for employment. But as church-affiliated institutions, their education provided another element: the education emphasized moral character and community service.

Many HBCUs are affiliated with denominations and are widely recognized for their support in the African American community—the various Baptist conventions, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the United Methodists, and the United Church of Christ. But Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana, the nation’s leading educator of

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<sup>35</sup> L. H. Williams, “The Influence of the Black Church on Black Parenting,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 36, no. 1, (2009): 39-46.

<sup>36</sup> Curtis Evans, “W. E. B. Du Bios: Interpreting Religion and the Problem of the Negro Church,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 2, (2007): 268–297.

future black physicians and pharmacists, is a Catholic institution. And Oakwood University in Alabama is closely affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>37</sup>

The Black church has been historically considered a critical foundation within the Black community.<sup>38</sup> In the Black church, members experience a smaller insulated community to counteract the inhibiting and stifling environment encountered by oppressive societal organizations. It operates as a source of social, human, cultural, and economic capital for the Black community. Embedded within these types of capital, are specific elements, which may offset the seven previously identified factors within public education that erode the academic performance of African American students.<sup>39</sup> Social capital represents individual benefits that are derived from the membership in a social network such as the Black church.<sup>40</sup> Some of the benefits are high expectations communicated to the Black students, who attend the church, which may counteract the lack of curriculum rigor and low expectations frequently communicated from public education.<sup>41</sup> These social networks generate human capital in the form of role models and

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<sup>37</sup>Michael Lomax, "Churches Played Vital Role in Historically Black Colleges' Success," CNN, Cable News Network, Last modified September 20, 2010, <https://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/09/19/lomax.uncf.black.churches/index.html>.

<sup>38</sup>J. Avent and C. Cashwell, "The Black Church: Theology and implications for Counseling African Americans," *The Professional Counselor* 5, no. 1, (2015): 81–90.

<sup>39</sup>McEwan, "The Perspectives of Black Church Leaders on Their Roles in the Empowerment of Black Male Students."

<sup>40</sup>J.S. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *The American Journal of Sociology* 94, S95-S120, (1988).

<sup>41</sup>B.D. Barrett, "Faith in the Inner City: The Urban Black Church and Students' Educational Outcomes," *Journal of Negro Education* 79, (2010): 249-262.

intergenerational relationships that can also offset limited teacher preparation and inexperience.<sup>42</sup>

### **Leadership**

Bishop T.D. Jakes of the Potter's House in Dallas, Texas elaborates on leadership this way: "The words of a leader are never more important than during a crisis."<sup>43</sup> This is what the Black church's overall arching provision gives to the community: leadership and the ability to lead through a plethora of problems of all sizes. In the past, the African American church played a role in families by helping them when a crisis came up; they reached out to enable the families to cope with and overcome the problems. Now the church occasionally shies away from proper rehabilitation and support.<sup>44</sup>

The leadership in the local churches has lost its influence in the outside world, respect for preachers has decreased, and leaders have lost the care of the people they are assigned to serve and guide with spirituality.<sup>45</sup> The remedy for this, according to H. Beecher Hicks Jr., is that the Black preacher must engage in biblical and culturally oriented, instructive, directive, and supportive relationships with Black persons as well as interpret life's meaning and advocate for life's potential in light of the required commitment to Jesus Christ. The main functions of the Black preacher are to proclaim

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<sup>42</sup> A. Billingsley and C. H. Caldwell, "The Church, the Family, and the School in the African American Community," *The Journal of Negro Education* 60, (1991): 427-440.

<sup>43</sup> T. D. Jakes, *Don't Drop the Mic: The Power of Your Words Can Change the World* (New York, NY: Faith Words, 2021), 9.

<sup>44</sup> Victoria M. Venable, "Black Church Members' Perspectives on the Role of the Black Church in Rehabilitative Process of Juvenile Sex Offenders," *Social Work & Christianity* 42, no. 3, (2015): 350.

<sup>45</sup> John P. Hoffmann, "Declining Religious Authority? Confidence in the Leaders of Religion Organizations, 1973-2010," JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41940813> (accessed March 1, 2023).



the gospel, parent the extended family through the Black church, and empower persons in the context of congregation and community.<sup>46</sup>

Now more than ever, the state of the church is in desperate need of leadership, but in the specific epidemic of absent Black males nationwide. The rapid lack of leadership across North America has left Black males lost and without a homing beacon to go home to or be attracted to. With the many possibilities of solutions that can adequately address the problem, any solution that does not attentively address the vacuum of leadership is likely to be the victim of repeated history. Authentic leadership does not halt at management but lends itself to direction, support, and equipping those under their watch.

Dr. Valmyr, the author of *The Vanguard Leader*, elucidates in this manner:

Most people use the term leadership and management interchangeably. Technically, leadership is leaders inducing followers to act upon certain goals that represent the values and motivations, the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations of both leader and followers. Furthermore, management is a function, a discipline, and a task to be done; managers carry out the functions and discharge the tasks.”<sup>47</sup>

Leaders that can adequately govern and act can be the genesis of eroding the problem of missing Black males in the church today and filling the void of present leaders that Black males are searching for.

Christian leadership that reflects the virtuous life of Jesus can bring vibrant, new growth from the listless, predictable, lifeless, and religious orders of current practice and serve to stimulate, awaken, encourage, and spur on the many people who are seeking to

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<sup>46</sup> Beecher H. Hicks Jr., *Images of The Black Preacher; The Man Nobody Knows* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1977).

<sup>47</sup> William Valmyr, *Vanguard Leader, Great Leaders Lead From the Front* (Oklahoma City, OK: Dust Jacket Media Group, 2020).

find sacred vitality despite the acknowledge complexity of the world around them.<sup>48</sup> Hans Rudolf Heinimann's observations from the field of ecology provides excellent framework for Christian leadership development: Adaptation and emergence are linked to the question about the range within which the system can change its behavior without losing its essential properties. Resilience is the capacity of a system to renew and sustain specified conditions of processes in spite of exogenous disturbances or changes in driving forces. The resilience concept replaced the earlier worldview of nature and society as nearby equilibrium systems. It also suggests that the concept of stability is an illusion that has to disappear.<sup>49</sup>

Unlike other components which prove to be impactful in a man's life, it is leadership that does not reside in the confines of statistical percentage data. We can observe the product of leadership by the residual effect it leaves with people. Whether it is good leadership or bad leadership, it can be observed through directional impact that it imprints on those who are under it .

The most impactful component of leadership is being present. An impactful leader must be a motivator while establishing a healthy atmosphere, enjoying and understanding people's strengths and weaknesses, keeping an up-front agenda, complimenting often and openly, and giving people a reputation to uphold.<sup>50</sup> Situational studies reveal cases in which circumstances call forth leaders, but prediction is also low here due to novelty of

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<sup>48</sup>Dave Persad, "Down to Earth Leadership: Influencing Communities Through the Virtues of Jesus Christ," (doctoral thesis, George Fox University, 2016).

<sup>49</sup>Hans Rudolf Heinimann, "A Concept in Adaptive Ecosystem Management—An Engineering Perspective," *Forest Ecology and Management* 259, no. 4 (2010): 850.

<sup>50</sup> K. M. Lattea, ed., David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill, *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), s.w. "Leadership."

situations. Style approaches are helpful in identifying how different leaders express their different personality styles.<sup>51</sup> But the root of the different approaches to leadership is being present. None of these great qualities of leadership and the ripple effects they produce can be initiated with an absent person.

The greatest example of present leadership is Jesus himself and how in a matter of only three years of recorded ministry on earth he had impacted the world. The ultimate example of powerful, effective, and beneficial leadership is Jesus. He had an ability to create vision, shape values, and empower change as transforming leadership. Jesus' leadership was both modeled and taught, culturally relevant and transcultural, enabling, empowering, and enduring. Christian leaders in any arena of influence must allow Jesus to lead through them. Any inspiring leader in any genre can examine the developing themes by studying Jesus, the leader, as son, strategist, seer, servant, shepherd maker, spokesperson, struggler, and sustainer.<sup>52</sup> Jesus' greatest attribute to leadership was and is his ability to be present for his believers and for non-believers. He is omnipresent, being present everywhere at once, which is one of God's unique attributes. One of the characteristics of created objects is that they are limited by space. An object or person can occupy only one place at a time. Because God created the heavens and the earth, as in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters," and through His Son continually sustains all that is. This is illustrated in Hebrews 1:3: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact

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<sup>51</sup> Lattea, *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, 675.

<sup>52</sup> Lattea, *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, 675.

representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” He is present to the whole of creation and to its parts. King David realized that there was nowhere he could go to escape God’s presence.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there, if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you” (Psalm 139:7–12).

No conditions such as darkness could hide him from God. Even though God is present everywhere, He is not perceived everywhere. He can be fully present and yet hidden from the eyes of creatures, or He can make His presence felt either in blessing or judgment.<sup>53</sup> A present leader is an effective, impactful leader, and a present leader is crucial in a man’s life.

In the survey above of the men who did not have a father in their lives, all believe their lives would have taken a more positive trajectory if their fathers were present. Without performing any fatherly act, a father’s presence brings and creates a more holistic family community. A present father deters outside threats and brings balance to a home. Just their presence alone invokes more of a sense of responsibility within the home.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Steve Bond, ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.w. “Omnipresence.”

<sup>54</sup> Steven Rowe, “The Role of a Father: Responsibilities and Importance,” Psych Central, Last modified June 16, 2021, <https://psychcentral.com/lib/fathering-in-america-whats-a-dad-supposed-to-do> (accessed February 5, 2023).

## Myth of Black Fatherhood

Though the numbers shown in previous chapters hold great significance, as it presents critical analytical data on the various subject matters, it contains and is limited to just that, data entry. Research is composed of this very data and is the crux of the academia outlook in which information is processed and analyzed, but some data cannot be surveyed, and some numerical reports do not entirely present the complete representation.

One must be able to absorb the data without being consumed by the limitations that are not present at the time. Dr. Cynthia James of the Potter's House of Dallas, Texas, lectured about it in this manner:

“Everyone thinks it is our nature to automatically think critically. Left to itself, much of our thinking may be biased, distorted, partial, uninformed or downright prejudiced. Often the quality of our life and what we produce or build depends heavily on the quality of our thought life. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life. Excellence in thought, however must be systematically cultivated”<sup>55</sup>.

She further lectures by expounding on the definition of critical thinking and of its beneficial use:

“Critical thinking is that mode of thinking—about any subject, content, or problem in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by a skillful analysis, assessment, and reconstruction. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem-solving abilities as well as a commitment to overcome one's native egocentrism and sociocentrism.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> “Our Concept and Definition of Critical Thinking.” *Our Conception of Critical Thinking*. Accessed March 1, 2023. <https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/our-conception-of-critical-thinking/411>.

<sup>56</sup> “Our Concept and Definition of Critical Thinking.”

The usage of doing so is to identify the purpose, the question, the information, draw your own conclusion(s) assumptions, implications, main concept(s), and form your own point of view. This is done by utilizing and assessing thinking, checking it for clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, significance, logic, and fairness.

Conservatives often address this question by contending that Black fathers are not adequately present and involved with their families. They push to create policies that encourage marriage among families, particularly Black families, as a way to foster child well-being and success. The success sequence, for example, suggests that individuals are most likely to avoid poverty and be successful if they finish their education, obtain full-time employment, marry and then have children—in that order. The idea itself seems intuitive and positive. After all, proponents contend that this ordering would create more stable and successful Black families. Critics, however, point out that the success sequence disregards the impediments that individual effort cannot always overcome. As Brian Alexander wrote in *The Atlantic*, it conveniently frames structural inequalities (i.e. high unemployment, lack of education, racial discrimination, etc.) as matters of individual choice. This is why removing barriers to structural equality is equally important to the success of families—especially Black families.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, the media plays a large role in how Black fathers are viewed in society. There are many media myths that should be addressed and dispelled related to Blacks in general and Black dads in particular. For example, media reports or depictions often

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<sup>57</sup> Kenneth Braswell, Matisa Wilson, and Stacey Bouchet, “Black Dads Matter,” *Institute for Family Studies*, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/black-dads-matter> (accessed February 6, 2023).

misrepresent Black fathers as “absentee” dads who abandon their children by connecting non-marital births with parental involvement. Research tells us, however, that many Black fathers are deeply engaged with their children, and physical separation is not always synonymous with lack of father involvement. According to sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, these “controlling images” shape people’s thinking about certain groups after being exposed to negative representations repeatedly. Left unchecked, they can make policy and lawmakers unsympathetic to the plight of Black dads.<sup>58</sup>

The percentage and statical data are factual and bear great significance, but as previous explored in Chapter 2, some information is controlled by one who seeks the advantage of another’s displacement. The data is displaying the fathers that represent negatively, but there is still a percentage of Black fathers that are opposite on what the data is exhibiting. Many Black men, though some might not be in the home with the children’s mother, they still are present fathers and participate in being active in their children’s lives.

Another aspect that is not being displayed and not easily presented through the public’s eye, is the effect of mentors, coaches, and other surrogate male role models that are present with a child who has no present biological father. This includes step-fathers. Speaking from experience, this writer understands the significance of being a step-father and how if the responsibility of being present for the child or children is done properly, the distant gap that befalls biological and non-biological shrinks when the child is made the priority.

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<sup>58</sup> Braswell, “Black Dads Matter.”

Jesus himself was a byproduct of having a step-father while He was on earth. Joseph was not his biological father, as He was born through the miracle conception of the Holy Spirit and being placed within Mary. The Scripture provides the reader little about Joseph, but it is clear Joseph was a present father and he cared for him.

Matthew 1:24 reads “When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.” Not only was Joseph present, the Scripture unveils to us he named Jesus.

Another example of Joseph caring for Jesus can be found in Matthew 2:7-8, 19-23:

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him. After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Joseph cared for Jesus as his own, protecting him from hurt, harm, and danger from the government threat that was upon him. Moved with compassion and concern for Jesus, Joseph left his home country and fled to another one. He allowed himself to be a refugee in a foreign land to seek refuge amongst people that spoke a different dialogue, and this was all done to ensure the well-being of Jesus was a priority over his own comfort and domestic surroundings.



Providing proper care for a male child should not be limited to the biological father, but those who have the capacity to extend their presence and guidance for the youth, can, and will prove to be beneficial. Much of this method of disciplining is explained in greater detail in Chapter 5 as it is the proposed solution for this researcher's problem.

Another myth of Black fatherhood is the idea that Black men have always behaved in the manner of absenteeism. That the absent fathers were not just a dilemma today, but was a problem since the 1960s. But this myth could not be further from the truth.

### *The Man of the House Rule*

Division has been the weapon of choice when attempting to debilitate and cripple the Black family unit. During the height of the civil rights movement and the Black family accomplishing many great things, one divisive weapon was spawned and utilized to destroy it all: the "Man of the House Rule." Though the origin of the law was formed in 1938 for government assistance, it was not until it reemerged in the 1960s to separate fathers and men in the home.

These reflections describe how welfare's *Man in the House* rules broke up families entering the St. Louis, Missouri, Pruitt-Igoe Housing Projects, and throughout other major cities across the United States in the 1960s. Part of a long history of the state's moral regulation of the poor, the rules assumed married women should not need welfare assistance because the family's income should be earned by the man in the household, and, conversely, single women deserved aid because women should not work. To enforce the rules, state welfare offices conducted midnight raids aimed at finding

evidence that a man might be present in the household. Such evidence would suggest the woman was morally unfit to raise her children, and that the man—presumed to be the household’s breadwinner, was engaged in welfare fraud. Public housing tenants who also received welfare were subject to these rules and were thus compelled to break up their families or hide personal relationships as a condition of receiving support.<sup>59</sup>

Although the *Man in the House* rules were struck down by the Supreme Court in 1968, social scientists have documented the persistence of punitive modes of regulating social safety net programs including housing, often with particular attention to women and families, and often through strategies that criminalize poor people. The punitive turn in poverty governance, identifies the entry of Black families into social welfare programs as the precipitating factor that drove this turn. The primary area of social support where this has been documented is the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. Its 1996 reform into the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) program shrunk aid while criminalizing recipients by imposing regulations that presumed their guilt, excluding poor people with certain criminal histories from receiving aid, and sharing program data with the criminal justice system. Notably, health programs such as Medicaid and the child welfare and foster care systems have also become sites of deep government intrusion into the private lives of women, and this intrusion has expanded from physical space to digital space.<sup>60</sup>

In light of how punitive welfare regulation shaped public housing in the 1960s and continues to shape these programs through drug and criminal record bans today, this

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<sup>59</sup> Rahim Kurwa, “The New Man in the House Rules: How the Regulation of Housing Vouchers Turns Personal Bonds Into Eviction Liabilities,” *Housing Policy Debate* 30, no. 6 (2020).

<sup>60</sup> Kurwa, “The New Man in the House Rules.”

article asks what happens when today's punitive turn touches public housing's successor, the Housing Choice Voucher program. Whereas many have documented how similar racialized discourses of crime, deservingness, and failure have driven policy changes in both welfare and housing assistance, particularly the decision to demolish significant parts of the nation's public housing stock, these actions were a direct targeted attempt on the Black family and the separation of the household. By separating the men from the house, it forced families to make a critical decision of survival for them to remain in the house.

As a result, men all over major cities of the United States decided to leave their households in hopes that their families may receive the much-needed help they were due. One of the many social consequences from this government-enforced trauma is that men grew very accustomed to staying away. So much so that it no longer became a difficult decision, but now has morphed into a preferred lifestyle.

## CHAPTER 5:

### SUGGESTED SOLUTION

#### **Rites of Passage**

The understanding that men are lacking in church today is a strong first step in regaining their attendance back in service as well as comprehending that men are different in the their processing of life and how they relate to people and to God. It would behoove any leader of any ministry or church to incorporate an all-inclusive worship service that can appeal to all demographics, and in this instance: the men.

Men's brains struggle when structure is replaced with ambiguity and teams become mostly social interactions.<sup>1</sup> Churches with less-focused ministry teams will, over time, lose men and professional women.<sup>2</sup> Churches that desire to see men serve would be wise to teach their leaders to run meetings with purpose and meaning. The people present can know what is happening and how it fits into the bigger picture of the church. Meetings that stay on-task allow men to stay connected and enthused.<sup>3</sup> Teams that meet for a specific purpose rather than just meeting for the sake of stability will find more success keeping everyone engaged. Stetzer wrote, "Leadership is rated the factor having the highest impact for comeback churches. Churches that are in a pattern of plateau or

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<sup>1</sup>John Piper and Wayne Gruden, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991).

<sup>2</sup>Mike Conan, "Revitalizing the Church Through Reaching Men With Families," (doctoral thesis, George Fox University, 2019).

<sup>3</sup>Conan, "Revitalizing the Church Through Reaching Men With Families."

decline need strong leaders who will point the way to revitalization.”<sup>4</sup> Focused and effective ministry that has more of an inclusive service will help the congregation continue moving forward together and male retention has a stronger possibility of existing.

The solution this student proposes derives from the words of Frederick Douglass, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” What is particularly unique about this program this student and others embarked on in 2008 and are still altering to this day is that its focus is not on a singular target. Still, it has a three-fold development intention for the spiritual aspect and the Black-conscious awareness component for both the young participants and the mentors assigned to them. With this being a two-fold target for the participants, the manuscripts that can be used are also broadened and can be used to transcend to affect both areas needing development. In the Artifact, the central scripture from which the foundation for this entire program comes is from 1 Corinthians 13:11: “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, thought as a child, understood like a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

The Rites of Passage program will mirror a great deal of robust mentorship programs that are in place. In many societies across the world (and throughout history), adult males have been responsible for helping the adolescent males transition into manhood. Today, many of our youth lack this guidance and are trying diligently to find their way. In 2008, the men’s ministry of the Trinity Missionary Baptist Church sought to develop a Rites of Passage program designed to aid in the growth of our young men in

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<sup>4</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2007).

the city of Tucson. The goal is to provide mentorship and empowerment for adolescent males, particularly in the African American community, while learning about them and from them. Our group of committed men will help the youth examine issues of the heart, soul, mind, and body, as well as the meaning of manhood (given to us by God). The Rites of Passage will occur over a period of ten consecutive weeks. The tenth Saturday will be followed by a week-long culmination of all things learned, and it will conclude with a celebratory display of all participants.

This program was inspired by the fraternal bond, church community, and African roots we possess with one another, and the thousands we hold with across the world. Like the other passages from adolescence to adulthood, it challenges the young person's beliefs and attempts to define their character from within. Like different cultures around the world used to magnify this momentous transition through ceremonies, we closely observed the most popular ones we see today. Of course, one cannot be remised of ignoring the Jewish culture's version, the Bar Mitzvah. A sacred ceremony is held in a synagogue to permit a member of childhood into adulthood in the Jewish community. It would take place after the young boy gained the appropriate amount of knowledge of the Judaic history and culture; this led to the crescendo of the transitioned man reading and quoting scripture from the Torah. This was conducted in a Jewish boy's life at 13 (for those who have both parents) and 12 (for those who have only a single parent). This ritual, though not labeled or referred to in the Bible, was indeed conducted by Jesus Himself in Luke 2. The other we observed is most common in my current living region of the country (one that holds a large Mexican and Hispanic population) is the Quinceanera. Though it is a tradition held for females in the Latin community, it contains values that

we incorporate into our program. In this celebration, at the age of 15, the girls have been taught by their elders how to become a woman. This entails how to cook, clean, sow, and other responsibilities considered womanly in that culture, as it was expected in this age, they were to prepare themselves as a proper bride. Lastly, we took a look at the infamous Masai (Tribe in Africa) warrior's ceremony of lion hunting. At the appropriate age, a young male is received into the warrior's camp, and many tests are given to the individual, though all are dull in comparison to the lion hunt. This proves the male's courage in combating one of the fiercest beast in the world, and his loyalty, as it shows he is willing to lay his life down if need be, to protect his family, home, and village. We incorporate all these infamous rites of passage and infuse them with our traditions of pledging to a historically black fraternity.

The demographic that we seek for this discipleship program is young African American (though not always subject to) males from the ages of 13 to 18. Though this is a ministry conducted with our church, we do not want to quench the possibilities of providing and making this available to all regions of the country. The need to transition adolescent black males to adulthood is so desperately needed in all corners of this nation.

This program was created to mentor and tutor young children in the African American community, or those who are in need of male mentorship. This mentorship program is and will be demanding as it is designed to break harmful self-destructing behavior and habits. In addition to attending class once a week, youth are also required to complete assignments, adhere to a code of conduct, and make measurable gains in specific areas.

The Philosophy of the program is to impact the lives of each mentee and mentor by providing an environment which nourishes academic, social, spiritual, and professional growth. This is obtained by striving for set objectives. These objectives are as follows:

- Utilize culturally awakening learning materials.
- Develop critical thinking and analytical skills.
- Foster class participation and development of confidence.
- Utilize interdisciplinary and whole learning techniques.
- Utilize both objective and subjective assessments and evaluations of student progress.
- Develop time management and organizational skills.
- Develop library, research, note taking, and study skills.
- Develop listening skills.
- Provide context and foundation to newly learned material.

With absenteeism being the goal to be addressed it is participation that will take proper time in being prepared. Upon reading the assignments with a critical approach, students are expected to attend classes prepared to discuss the readings. Participation must be at 90% or higher for each male to be promoted. If attendance is missed, they need to notify their mentor immediately, and their mentor needs to notify the rest of the group of the young male's absence and it must be agreed upon by the group of men whether to accept his excuse to be absent.



However, it is up to the young male to actively engage his fellow line brothers and be properly updated on what he missed so he may be abreast on any and all information that was conveyed to them. The group and himself will be held responsible for material and information not properly memorized and known by next meeting.

### **Inclusivity**

Acts 2:1-12 reads:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

The significance of this is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh as prophesied in Joel 2:28-29, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.” From the explosion of the day Pentecost presented in Acts 2, it was inclusive, as people from all nations were gathered to not only bare witness but participate and be filled.

Modeling this great demonstration of the Holy Spirit, the mentorship models its inclusiveness on it. Though the program is targeted for young Black teenagers, it will not turn away any other ethnic person who is need of this program. It should be acknowledged that the program will not acquiesce to other participants' cultural background, but they will learn from the Black heritage in which this program is founded for and from. However, within the program it will be encouraged to derive from different cultures and learn how to find the beauty within their own culture and draw from it while proceeding through the program.

This program is intended to display Ubuntu, but for one to see the beauty in others, one must identify, acknowledge, and appreciate their own from within before one can truly appreciate the beauty in others.

### *Attendance*

One of the many deterrents that this discipleship program is attempting to establish is the elimination of absenteeism of Black men. So it is a requirement that all students are required to attend the weekly classes and work with meticulous regularity. Students who attend all weekly meetings significantly increase their chance of improving life skills. If the program is conducted during the school year, they must meet twice a week. The first meeting is for a mandatory study hall, in which all students will bring their school work to the designated place of meeting and all will work on homework, class assignments, or strive to get ahead in their studies. The second meeting will preferably be during the weekend and this will be the actual process the program was designed for.

### *Writing*

Each student will be given a journal titled *In Search of Honor*. They shall complete daily journal entries detailing mentoring experiences, research findings, and personal growth. A journal entry must be kept for every day and assignment. Journals will be reviewed by the mentor each week to ensure all materials are updated and information is correct.

### *Assessments*

Students are required to be educationally assessed every week to ensure they are retaining the lessons that were given to them the previous week. Such examinations will be given in paper form and will be done at the beginning of each session starting on week two. Forms and assessment tools will be provided. There will be one at the beginning of the program and another at the conclusion of the program. They will need to pass with an 80% or higher to move on to the next week. If they fail, they will be given the opportunity to verbally go over the test, and if they still can't prove knowledge of the material, they will be granted a retake the next week, accompanied with the new information. If they fail again, they will be removed from the program.

### *Evaluations*

Students and mentors are required to evaluate the program. There will be two evaluations. One evaluation will be conducted at the midway point of the program and another at the conclusion of the program. The purpose of this is to remain on track of the

program, and assess the needs of the young males, ensuring they are being acknowledged and addressed.

### *Discipline*

Discipline will play a major factor in this program as it will be a tool to induce growth and learning. Some young males will not comprehend what discipline is, and for that reason, measures must be put in place by all mentoring men that will be agreed upon beforehand so that all men participating may be of one accord, present a united front in front of the participants, and to eliminate any of the participants' confusion on how to move forward.

Discipline comes in many forms but under no circumstances is anyone to touch, grab, or use any other form of physical touch or force! Discipline should be conducted with and by an instructor and it should be difficult and seem unrelenting, but this has a purpose to breakdown the participants to build them up. It is vital to know the participants well and how much they can endure, the goal is to dismantle improper mindsets and to build them up, not tear them down and let them remain there.

### *Education*

The scripture powerfully embodies the entire vision for the program and is used to strongly impress upon the youth (soon-to-be men) that the time for adolescence has come to an end and to honoring the responsibility of becoming a man is at hand. Scripture is used and infused within the program as the adolescents' journey through this course will be given new scriptural verses to know to broaden their understanding of the Word of God. Such scriptures are The Sermon on the Mount, The Lord's Prayer, the story of

Exodus, and many teachings and miracles of Jesus. After memorizing these passages, we develop them mentally and require a formal report be done, with all the proper grammar, structure, and spelling as in school. Believing that we are not just hearers of the Word, but that faith is an action verb, the program gives them many physical and mental tasks to accomplish to show the mentor and older disciples they comprehend this knowledge not only in an academic setting, but one that can transcend into the physical arena as well. In the program, they will be broadening their knowledge base. Examples of this include the usage of Black Renaissance authors and their poems such as Langston Hughes and the National Black Anthem by James Weldon Johnson. Bridging the gap between the old and the new, the program incorporates more contemporary, meaningful authors that have a resounding impact on the Black community and their literature can be used for spiritual awakenings.

Another author used in the program will be Tupac Shakur, a well world-renowned rapper whose lyrics were, at times, controversial. Still, his book of poetry unveils his heart and exposes very passionate and influential writings. The disciples are meant to be present where conflict is current, to exemplify the glory of God. The reason is so they can be adequately equipped for the unavoidable struggles ahead.<sup>5</sup>

This program aims to delve into a deeper depth of discipleship and explore the beneficial avenues it holds. By disciplining young men, it is taking a commitment that goes beyond the borders one's personal experience. It is embarkation to build not just a young male but the village around him and the generations that follow him .

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<sup>5</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship, Volume 4*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

Notice the vocabulary of “disciple” and not the expression “mentor.” To mentor is to be under a tutelage and glean from their wisdom and knowledge. This can be done unbeknownst to the “mentor.” By incorporating how many people in one’s life, whether present or past, that has held an inspiration role to mold a specific area of your life, is the experience that is useful in such a mentoring program. But a disciple, the term we see in the New Testament, is that of one Rabbi (teacher), and they pick their students to impart wisdom. Such an example is Jesus when He hand selected the twelve disciples.

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately, they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, in the boat with Zebedee, their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him” (Matthew 4:18-22).

This program is modeled on various cultures and teachings, conglomerated together to produce a unique blend of tools and avenues that the young men being disciplined may partake in. For example, the five V’s from Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington with Robert Coleman, *Disciple Shift (Five Steps that Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples)*, is an example guide in which the direction of the program takes formation. Adding to this masterful template one “V” is added to enhance the experience and overall goal of the mentoring program. As you sojourn through the program, you will notice the heavy influence of Black fraternal processes coupled with athletic team structuring. The old ways of the Maasai rites of passage in Africa are also a heavy influenced on this program.

What is particularly unique about this program that can be adapted and altered while possessing a focus that is not one singular target is that sScripture will be used and infused within the progress of the adolescent's journey through this course and new scriptures are added to broaden their understanding of the Word of God

### **The 6 V's**

#### *Vision*

It is an absolute indispensable truth that vision must be established. Proverbs 29:18 proclaims, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." It also states in Habakkuk 2:2, "Write the vision down and make it plain on tablets that he may run can read it." Vision is a crucial foundation for this program and was most certainly in the establishment of the Kingdom of God, as the word vision, or a form of vision, appears in the Bible over 60 times (including both the Old and New Testaments); this solidifies why the vision is imperative in being established.

But while obtaining vision, it is also with the utmost importance to establish what you are envisioning and how you are observing it. Henry David Thoreau describes it as, "It is not so much what you see, but how you see it."<sup>6</sup> The likes of world changers, like Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., have used this well-written statement due to the importance of how objects and situations are observed. This topic is explained in great detail in the example packet after this paper, specifically in the syllabus and in the background portion. It is also essential that we spend a great deal of time on the

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<sup>6</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Resistance to Civil Government: Civil Disobedience*, Elizabeth Peabody's Aesthetic Papers, (Concord, MA: Princeton University Press, 1849).

interpretation of the texts, both the Spiritual texts and the Communal texts. This transitions into a daily application and how it pertains to the individual first and secondly to the community as a whole. This technique in observation of views was done precisely by Jesus Himself. Jesus spoke in parables when teaching His disciples and the masses of crowds. The purpose of this teaching method Jesus crafted so well is to establish a genuine life connection between the message and how it applies to human interactions. We have found our young people are brilliant through this experience and that as adults/spiritual guides (parents), we do not give them the adequate opportunity to portray their comprehension on such matters. We place them in a judgmental box and label them as an outcast and a trouble to society with little or no hope to effectively contribute to the Kingdom of God and the Black community positively. Vision is the first “V” that will be modeled in this program. This program will give in detail the ultimate goal and the motivating forces that will provide tools to complete the task toward the envisioned goal. In explaining these details, the intentionality of this program is revealed to enhance focus and precision on such a wide number of possibilities that these young men can and will partake in. Vision casting is not only for the young men in the program, but for the team as a whole.

Vision holds the young men and the mentors accountable for what needs to transpire and the proper steps on how to accomplish such tasks. There will be no hesitation in writing out the vision for this program and the young men participating in it; writing it down, it becomes more than a thought, but now it becomes a physical manifestation of the mandate.



The vision of this ministry is not only to make the disciples aware of the transition that is needed but to properly guide them into an understanding of who they are in Christ, who they are as a Black male in this country, and how they coincide with each other. Doing so will produce a disciple that has a deeper relationship with Christ, immersing themselves in the studies of the Word, while also developing a Black conscious mind that empowers both themselves and the community around them. The power of God can and will transform them into men that become a light in the world for Christ and an agent of change within the Black community. It will aid them in not being just a follower but forming them into the leaders of the future. Stop hiding behind the normality of being a follower and step into the forefront of leadership.<sup>7</sup>

### *Value*

The second “V” that will be incorporated into this discipleship program is value. This program is a great ministry tool, and the essential value that will be in place to conduct this program is to effectively disciple youth. In doing so, the principles and passages of Scripture and other well-written manuscripts will be incorporated as tools to progress and be directed to the completion of the vision. The importance of values will shape this program and give it its potency to be effective. Moral values produce integrity, integrity shapes character, the character creates habits, and habits shape lives.

The other “value” that needs to be heavily considered is the value of each of the young males who participate in the discipleship program. Whether they come from an ideal situational home with two parents, or come from a single parent, or if they are

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Damazio, *The Making of a Leader* (Portland, OR: City Bible Publishing, 1988).

raised by a relative, or the local government system, each youth will need to see the value that they possess for themselves. The intent of this program is to build them to a place where they do not lay hold of the circumstances that surround their environment, but they see that they are indeed valuable in all environments and sectors of their lives.

### *Views*

The third “V” is views. By sojourning down this avenue, the most imperative perspectives will be shaped to produce proper balance. The definition of discipleship/disciple, within the same context to give a clear definition of leadership/leader and other vital components, will be defined for the succession of the pupils that are enrolled in the program. This is to set up and lay the proper foundation so the participators have a new understanding in what is being imparted to them and what they are expected not only to comprehend, but to apply in their daily undertakings. Possessing the proper view shapes the way these young men will observe and engage in life.

This technique in observation of views was done precisely by Jesus himself. Jesus spoke in parables when teaching his disciples and the masses of crowds. The purpose of this teaching method that Jesus crafted so well is to establish a genuine connection between the message and how it applies to human interaction.<sup>8</sup> It is no surprise or secret that young people are pretty brilliant through this experience and that as adults/spiritual guiders (parents), adults and society do not give them the adequate opportunity to portray their comprehension of such matters. Adults place them in a judgmental box and label

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<sup>8</sup> J. Scott Jr., *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995).

them as an outcast and trouble to society with little or no hope to effectively contribute to the Kingdom of God and the Black Community positively.

This program will allow participants to turn inward and allow them to view themselves in a new way. Some participants will come from distraught backgrounds with wounds and heavy shame. Through study and gaining a new perspective, it will equip them to view themselves as Christ views them and it will begin the process of maturity that has a profound impact on their lives.

### *Vehicles*

The fourth “V” used in the discipleship program is vehicles. The object in which we choose to transport the potential prospects into astute pupils can aid in future programs to multiply the number of disciples. This will be the program’s primary focus: to effectively use the proper tools to produce the envisioned product. Many vehicles, both conventional and non-conventional, will have their role in the program, leading to the expected goal. With these tools in place, the implication of the program will be properly structured and assembled to flourish. They will serve as the pillars of structure on top of the foundation laid by the views of the program. Vehicles are consequential to this program because they will also equip these young men to transport from the place they are in to the destination they are striving for. Giving them the proper vehicle will allow them to be mobile and break out of stagnation. To be paralyzed can have serious effects, and if not given a vehicle of transport, stagnation can settle in permanently.

This program uses several vehicles to transport the message we are attempting to convey to the young men. Though we could accept many youths in the program at one time, having smaller groups was much more effective. This writer has seen a similar

belief of doctrine in Dave Earley's book that smaller groups have proven to be more effective in multiplying disciples. Throughout the New Testament, we find Jesus was the Master in using this teaching method. He had 12 disciples and within this small group, He even had an inner circle of three (Peter, James, and John) who were entrusted with more responsibilities than the others.

The method of small groups allows the program to be more spiritually intimate with the young men. This vehicle will also introduce a quasi-boot camp (pledging) style through which the program puts the young males. In this method, the program is adopted from the historically Black fraternities and sororities. The program groups the young males and lines them up on a wall and they go through various strenuous activities for the common good of knowledge. In the black community, the reason for this style of learning is multifaceted. One, it demands the participators become a family and care for one another. Two, it accentuates their strengths and weaknesses and forces them to accept their flaws and for them to bring them up. Thirdly, it allows them to comprehend historically what the Black ancestors had to endure with the harsh reality of persecution.

These consequences are a large portion of this program's criteria. T.D. Jakes exclaims, "The sooner men can grow up and deal with their consequences, the sooner we can see healing take place."<sup>9</sup> Allowing the young men to make their own decisions will enable them to deal with the upcoming good or negative consequences and will help them to comprehend in a small measure how the real world operates. This process is closely monitored and calculated among the elders and mentors. Though life experience is the intention, balance is required, or the program can produce more harm than good. In

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<sup>9</sup> T. D. Jakes, *He-Motions* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons & Publishing, 2004).

conclusion, this program embodies the physical manifestation of the work of author Oscar Barbarin in *what churches and families can do to help African American boys*:

- Begin with protecting their health and well-being
- Support and continue learning at home
- Develop a partnership with the school
- Talk to, read to, and have fun with the child
- Use the three X's (expose, explain, expand) in conversations with the child
- Address any problems in direct but affirming ways
- Raise them to take pride in his ethnic and cultural heritage
- Raise them to be caring, responsible, and ethical<sup>10</sup>

### *Verification*

Verification is the fifth and final “V” that will conclude the exploration of this discipleship program. After all the others have been implemented and executed, one cannot understand the success rate without the proper verification tools to annotate. The significance of this is to properly manage and assess the program’s predominant needs and effectively reproduce the areas of success. These verifiers will allow the disciples to observe their progression and enable the leaders to take a constructive critical look at themselves and how to make this program flourish and enhance it in years to come. Verification will also show areas needing work. It is a great tool that will allow the program to grow effectively. One can’t be afraid to reach out and incorporate the young

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<sup>10</sup>Oscar A. Barbarin, “Halting African American Boys’ Progression from Pre-K to Prison: What Families, Schools, and Communities Can Do!” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 80, no. 1, (2010): 81–88.

men who have graduated from this program into the next one. Their experience will aid in where things can be reshaped or even removed .

This writer is truly blessed and honored to see the fruits of the seed planted by the Holy Spirit within young men. The verification comes when we see, as mentors and elders, the significant change in their lives. It is such a product of evolution that the program was considered for implementation in the juvenile justice system in Tucson, Arizona. It is a healthy alternative to other troubled youth programs. Locked up behind bars, these misunderstood youth have a chance to be loved and poured into in places where their lives matter. The attendance of the Holy Spirit is such a confirmation in verification, and it is this sweet reminder that God's stamp of approval is present.

It is with great pleasure this writer sees how this program will reach the height only few can imagine for themselves. Now, applying all the study materials in this course brings another aspect that can alter this program for the better. Through this mentorship program, it has been widely observed that small groups are a very influential ministry to reach the people. It is Putman's version of church 2.0 that puts this into clear picture form. It is time for the church to evolve to reach the location of the people; without the proper adjustments to develop to get to them, the people will remain lost.

### *Vindication*

The goal of this program is to improve the life of the young male participants by equipping them with tools for life at home and in society. This would all be in vain if the participants have not experienced vindication from the negativity that has been placed on them by themselves and by others. The tools given in this program are to help the disciples view themselves in a different light, as Christ sees them: as sons worthy of His

love and vindicated by Him to move forward in the direction they feel called to. This “V” is consequential as this has the empowering component to propel them forward, or lack thereof, leaving them in a state of paralysis in their current situations.

### **Structural Components**

#### *The Network*

The program will consist of 10 weeks and all ten weeks will need to be prepared beforehand. After selecting the men for 3:1 or 2:1 mentorship at minimum, select which young males will be chosen simultaneously. Being mindful of the ratio, it doesn't matter the number of youth, but it is crucial that for every number of youths, that ratio must be fulfilled. The desire should be aimed at the quality of the process and not the ability to pad numbers.

The network of the program is the centralized theme for the length of the ten weeks. Within this program, it is vital that months in advance, networking should commence. Healthy partnerships will be essential in the development of the program and for the development of the young men involved. A healthy network will give a society within a society for the participants. This creates a sense of belonging to a group, also building a sense of responsibility for a family.

The network of all participating can be enhanced by bringing in trained experts and people with a wealth of experience in a particular field. These professionals are an essential facet within the wholeness of the program of grooming a holistic young man who has a firm grasp on various vital aspects of manhood. To have such men with that experience is a significant component to possess.

*Banker/Financial Advisor*

The importance of bringing in this expert is to give the participants the financial literacy needed to properly manage their own finances. This expert needs to be well-versed in how finances are handled and can present the various ways currency is being used today. It is also helpful to foster a good relationship with your financial institution and pull on their resources to educate young males. Teaching the participants financial responsibility comes in various forms including writing a check, balancing a checkbook, and comprehending how a checking account works.

For those who have more resources and a banker/financial advisor who can assist in this measure, set up educational fictitious accounts for each young male. It is possible for them to go through the process of setting up an account and going through the paperwork. Some resources provide a simulated debit card, this will be a great and useful tool to have to teach them about money and how it operates. Finances is such a vital part of being an adult. This is how they have the ability to purchase the necessary items that are needed in life. By providing them such an education, the program equips them to have a sense of stability in life.

*Physical Trainer*

The advantage to having an expert in this field is they can provide experience in calisthenics and nutrition. Throughout the program, these young males need to be working out. This will also be the punishment assigned for not following instructions, not accomplishing a certain task(s), and for other reasons. It will be paramount for the



church/organization to have a properly trained individual that can assist the program with the physical demands it needs to implement.

The importance of this aspect is to provide the young participants the knowledge on how to live a long life. A healthy life provides a stronger chance to be the most productive in life and society.

### *Tailor*

This expert will teach the proper way to wear their clothing. The tailor will assist in how to properly wear slacks, dress shoes, or semi-casual dress shoes, color patterns, how to tie a tie and bowtie, the length of sleeves and pant lengths, how to wear a hat, if one likes to do so, etc. This person is crucial in instructing the young men on how to look their best and present themselves in the most advantageous manner possible on any and every occasion. This will provide them with a healthy sense of self-esteem when they present themselves in the most professional manner possible whether it is for job interviews, special occasions, or formal gatherings.

The importance of this relationship with a tailor is also if the church/organization has the resources, they can buy each boy a suit. For some of these young men, it will be the very first suit they have owned. These suits should not be purchased in front of them but should be purchased with them being unaware. The purpose of this is to present them with the suit the last week so they may graduate all together with their suits on.

### *Police Officer*

This expert is needed now more than ever due to current events in North America displaying racial tension between the Black community and law enforcement. This

crucial expert allows the young black males to understand the importance of law enforcement, how to respect the law, and coming to know in a healthy way the men and women who enforce it. Inviting law enforcement can have different responses in each young male. Please advise the officer(s) of the situations of the young males so they are appropriately informed on how to approach the group. Most officers, if they are called upon in advance, have informational packets. Anything that can be passed out to the males would be helpful. It is important to stress these men in uniform are not all bad. The majority of law enforcement officers take their oath of service and protection seriously.

The police officer must address the tension between the community and law enforcement. The more real they can be when addressing relevant topics, the better the chance these young males can have a different outlook on law enforcement, and potentially change the narrative. Despite the past tragedies that occurred or the recent injustices that plague North America, this expert with the proper support staff can begin to heal a cultural wound that has haunted the Black community for decades.

### *Chef*

This person(s) is imperative when discussing not only nutrition but how to prepare and cook food. Whether they come to the program or the boys are taken on a trip to go meet them, this visit is very important, as the objective is to help young males have a better relationship with food. The goal is not just to hold a lecture for the young males, but for them to learn how to cook at least three meals for themselves: a breakfast meal, a lunch meal, and a dinner meal.

Teaching the young males how to cook allows them another aspect of responsibility but is also an advantage on how to care for themselves. This also enables

them to apply lessons from the financial expert in relation to food as the cost of food will be a discussion. The advantages of cooking for oneself versus takeout also displays healthy life decisions that can and will affect their health. This knowledge will be useful in everyday life for the young males when they mature.

### *Maître D*

Along with the restaurant owner, it is important this expert be involved in the program. It would be most beneficial if they would follow the portion of the program when the chef instructs on nutrition. This person can come to the program or a trip can be undertaken. They will teach the young males how a table setting is to be placed and how proper etiquette is to be displayed in a formal eating engagement. The purpose of these visitors is not to “take away” from who they are but to add another layer to them so they may thrive in a variety of different societal settings. By expanding their experiences and surroundings, it gives them the advantage to thrive in any setting they are in.

### *Young Women*

This phase of the program is imperative as it gives a healthy look and engagement with the opposite sex. It allows these young males, who are going through the physical maturing process, an appropriate platform to acknowledge their sexuality and their desire for relational companionship.

These young ladies/women will be of assistance when teaching about respecting women. The program is designed to be as wholistic to their lives as possible and interaction with the opposite sex is a huge part of this. Teaching these males on how to approach a woman, how to engage a young woman, and behave in their presence is

necessary for their manhood development. The young women can give honest feedback to the young males on their interaction with them from how they engaged them in conversation, to their body language, and confidence. Another aspect of this component of the program is having the perspective of the young women. Having their feedback gives them another voice to hear from and this proves an excellent way to build consideration for the opposite sex.

Having a healthy and open perspective towards the opposite sex has the potential to assist in breaking some cycles of fractured home relations. Holding women in high regard and seeing them as valuable and vital in the community can help change the trajectory of how women are portrayed in front of them.

### *Mechanic*

This person will assist you in teaching the young males the importance of maintaining a vehicle. If possible, go to their shop so the male participants can get the full experience of how a vehicle works and the importance of maintaining it. They will learn the basics: how to change a tire, how to change the oil, how to replace a battery, and what is the proper gas for the vehicle. The beauty of going to the mechanic is they will have adequate space and vehicles to practice on for the young participants. The more hands-on learning they have, the better for them. Whether they do all their maintenance themselves or they take a car to the mechanic, it proves useful to them as they will need transportation in their lives to be successful. Either choice will also provide them with knowledge on how to budget their money accordingly, as they will know what is needed for a vehicle to run optimally.

### *Social Media Influencer*

Since we live in an age where we operate and interact greatly on social media, this person will explain to them the benefits and dangers of social media platforms. This includes: how to use them properly, what to do with trends, the repercussions of cyberbullying, and other factors. The goal is to equip the young participants on how to be responsible with such exposure and capabilities. This is also a great opportunity for the older generation to engulf themselves with the younger generation by using the medium of social media to do so. As the older generation may be slightly intimidated or less understanding of this way of information, it would be good for them to admit some vulnerability to the youth as well. Common ground can be useful in attempting to reach those who seek empowerment.

### *Graduation*

Graduation of the program gives the young males an appreciation of the work they engaged in and endured. The celebration of their accomplishments does more than acknowledge their body of work, it will give them a sense of confidence they are valuable and contributors within their circle of society. Celebrating their accomplishments gives their community from which they derive a healthier look at these young men. The intent of the program is for the young males to start as adolescents but graduate as recognized men in their own “village.”

*The Village*

This program demands a great deal from these future young men. But in doing so, the program offers up the support they will need to be successful in the form of a “village” or community. The program holds the village accountable for upholding what these young males are learning, and challenges them to put these new skills into practice, not just during this duration of the discipleship program, but throughout the duration of their lives.

Parents are and will be accountable to not only see the changes in their child, but to participate and be engaged in it as well. This is done by following educator and author Oscar Barbarin’s outline to stop the prison pipeline with our youth. Parents can begin by protecting their own health and well-being and by fostering a healthy environment throughout this process where the young males see themselves as valuable. This will come in time for some as emotional walls will be discovered and they’ll have the opportunity to start the process of tearing them down before erecting a new and healthier outlook of themselves.

Parents can support and continue child learning at home. This process is in addition to parenting and the educational system in which the young men are a part. This program is designed to be a support system for the youth and to provide them with a display of options which they can assemble as they build a healthy and stable life for themselves.

This can be accomplished by the following: developing a partnership with the school, educational system is a key factor for these young males, as some this will be their opportunity to escape some of the travesties they had to endure maturing as a male.

It is with the upmost importance that this program and the volunteers associated with it build healthy lines of communication with each male's school. Surrounding the youth with hope, it will encourage them to have hope and remain focused.

Talk to, read to, and have fun with your child. This program is required to be intense. But in all intensity with no joy can quickly turn into feeling trapped and hopeless. It is imperative that the volunteers capitalize on the lighter moments with the youth. Laughing and fun is greatly encouraged as it provides a healthy outlet in which these youth need, as you will encounter some these young males have forgotten how to do so.

Use the three X's (expose, explain, expand) in conversations with child, this program is designed to be teaching active teaching and participation course. Open dialogue is more than required, it will be demanded. These young males will come from all walks of life, but the objective that all of them will have in common is the desire of healthy communication and attention.

Address any problems in direct but affirming ways, affirmation will be the key in addressing these young males. Though problems will arise and other disagreements may take place, it is essential to communicate with these youth with firmly and with affirmation. Some of these young males will have experienced affirmation and be accustomed to your approach. For others it might be alarming because all they have known is disapproval and judgement. This program is designed to build them and allow them to observe themselves in a more elevated state, this is accomplished through affirmation.

Raise your son to take pride in his ethnic and cultural heritage, this program will be heavily influenced by the rich history of the African diaspora's story. It is required to purchase the documentary *Unspoken*, and for it to be utilized as the catalyst to engage their African heritage, so that they may take ownership of the beauty of their people, history, and significance.

Raise your son to be caring, responsible, and ethical, within this short time allotted with the participants, responsibility and ethics must be displayed and taught. The objective is to provide them with the proper tool in which they can see and utilize and apply to their own lives. Though this time will come and go quickly it must be presented in a concentrated form that it shortly becomes their norm for their own lives.

### *Restoration*

In following the perfect example of Jesus, the totality of this discipleship program is to restore these young men back to their identity and to right relationship with the Father. Jesus came to restore people to God as described in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

We are restored to the position of God's original intent in creation. In the Septuagint (the oldest Greek version of the Old Testament), the word, *aphesis*, is never connected with the remission of sins, like in the New Testament, but connected with the Year of Jubilee. Vines Dictionary of New Testament Words. "Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you;



each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan” (Leviticus 25:10). The Year of Jubilee was when everything (land and people) were restored back to the original possessors. Land was returned to each tribe, and each family clan and bond-servants were released from indentured status. It was the means to restore the gift of the Promised Land back to the original owners.<sup>11</sup>

As previously stated in Chapter 3, what was lost in Adam in the Garden of Eden was restored when Christ Jesus came into the world to redeem the fallen. This was accomplished through His once for all sacrifice as the perfect lamb of God, “Look the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” (John 1:29). This was also written by the Hebrews writer in Hebrews 9:28 that “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” The Apostle Peter wrote to his writer in this manner, “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). It is because the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross that allowed our redemption, not just for a moment in time, but Jesus has eternally resolved our sins. This was accomplished that we, both Jew and Gentile, may partake in the fellowship of His family, and receive Him unto and into us as believers of Him.<sup>12</sup> What Adam did in the garden opened the door for sin to enter the earthly realm and penetrate the nature of man, but this was overturned and restored in Christ Jesus.

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<sup>11</sup> Juli Camarin, “Rescued, Redeemed, Restored and Forgiven (Colossians 1:13-14),” JCBlog.net. Last modified November 15, 2013, <https://www.jcblog.net/colossians/1/13-14-rescued-redeemed-restored-and-forgiven> (accessed February 5, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> “Restoring What Was Lost.” *Mathetis*. Last modified May 6, 2020, <https://www.mathetis.org/topic/restoring-what-was-lost/> (accessed February 5, 2023).

Once people were alienated from God and were enemies in their minds because of their evil behavior. The Colossians writer scribes, “But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Colossians 1:21-22.)

The Apostle Paul wrote to his audience in the book of Romans, “We have been put right with God by our faith in Jesus, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1-2). This was done by being united with Christ’s death and resurrection when we were baptized into Christ and raised up to live a new life as a new creation in Christ according to Romans 6:3-5.

As man being the descendants of Adam, people will physically die as a result of sin being present on the earth. But through Christ, God revokes the punishment of eternal damnation, the perpetual state of death. A person’s new and restored relationship with God also brings with it a new, loving relationship between husbands and wives as written in Ephesians 5:22-33:

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing<sup>[a]</sup> her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

The term with “consideration and respect” is also written in 1 Peter 3:1-7:

Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

We love others as Christ loves us as expressed in John 13:34-35: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." In regard to our old way of life, we "put off the old self which is corrupted by deceitful desires" and are "made new in the attitude of our minds and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" as the apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 4:22-24, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."<sup>13</sup>

### *The Father*

Lastly, this research has an origin, a purpose, and a culmination through the comprehension of men seeing God as the Father. The term *abba* is an Aramaic word for

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<sup>13</sup> "Restoring What Was Lost."

“father” used by Jesus to speak of His own intimate relationship with God, a relationship that others can enter through faith. It may also refer to an ancestor, grandfather, founder (of something), protector, or even used as an honorary title for an elder.

In the Old Testament, although *abba* does not occur in the Old Testament, its Hebrew associate *ab* occurs frequently. *Ab* usually refers to a human father. On occasion, the Old Testament speaks of God in the role of Father to Israel as displayed by Exodus 4:22: “Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son,” and in Deuteronomy 32:6, “Is this the way you repay the Lord, you foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?” The biblical writers also speaks of Israel’s king in Psalms 89:26–27, “He will call out to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Savior.’ And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.”<sup>14</sup> The term father has been expressed multiple times in in the New Testament. In the New Testament, the idea of God’s intimate relationship with humanity is a distinct feature of Jesus’ teaching. God relates to believers as a father relates to his child. Some would translate *Abba* as “Daddy” to convey the close, personal meaning of the word. Even when “Father” in the New Testament translates the more formal Greek word *pater*, the idea of *Abba* is certainly in the background. Jesus addressed God as *Abba* in prayer in Mark 14:36: “*Abba*, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” Jesus taught His disciples to pray in the same terms in Luke 11:1–2. “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Fink, ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.w. “Abba.”

him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.”’”

Jesus’ claim of intimate relationship with God offended many of His opponents because they considered *Abba* to be overly familiar in addressing God. Nevertheless, Jesus’ usage established the pattern for the church’s view of God and each believer’s relationship with Him. Paul used *Abba* to describe God’s adoption of believers as His children as represented in Romans 8:15: “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘*Abba*, Father’ and the change in the believer’s status with God that results.” According to Galatians 4:6–7: “Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘*Abba*, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.”<sup>15</sup>

It is important to illuminate that Jesus used the term “Father” in referring to God all but once. This time was when He was being crucified and he cried out in Matthew 27:46, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?, that is to say My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus was recorded to be in communication with the Father. It has been recorded He spoke in parables in reference to the Father. (See the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32.)

Though it is not within the Scriptures but was more popularly classified in the 325 Council of Nicea as the Holy Trinity, God is the triune head of the three. The Scriptures go to great lengths to exhaust its readers with the understanding that God desires to be

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<sup>15</sup> Fink, Holman. *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*.

seen and accepted as Father—a father that is “present” for his creation, and more affectionately, his children. Hebrews 13:5 describes a father who would never leave nor forsake his child. He is a present presence. With all we are facing in our communities today, the solution to this dilemma is knowing and seeing God as Father.

## POSTSCRIPT

In conclusion, in approaching the epidemic of Black males being absent in church today, we see the statistics of the matter are staggering. Numbers show in large margins that the Black population is the leading ethnicity when believing in religion in North America but it's also one of the least represented in worship assemblies. The average Black church in North America attendance is over sixty percent female. Leading worship edifices like Potter's House of Dallas is a rarity as they consistently have a little over fifty percent male attendance. The statistics nationwide also illuminate another statistic: approximately ninety to ninety-two percent of Black males in North America do not regularly attend a worship/religious service.

Looking back, we can see how the origins of the United States were formed, that it was the intent of those who pilgrimed here to solidify and protect their claim to the benefits of the land and to use Black males as heavy slave labor to produce it. This has created an epidemic within an epidemic, as the fleeing of Black male attendance is presently at an all-time high. This student has uncovered this unnerving normalcy has been perpetuated throughout history.

Preceding this historical tragedy and assault on the Black male and his family, this writer illuminated how this behavior of absentee men can also be traced biblically. Starting with the exiles of the children of Israel in the Old Testament, it is well documented that men of high standing were intentionally separated. This served as a psychological and physical weakening as the stewards and governors of the culture were alienated, leaving the remainder of the people vulnerable.

Turning back the pages of biblical history further, we see the origins of the matter. Bible readers can observe in the book of Genesis the derivation of man being absent. From the start of the original man, we see the propensity of man's behavior to be absent. Adam, being the first man, had retreated from properly covering his wife when the serpent came, and again when God questioned him, invoking the renowned inquisition, "Adam, where are you?"

This gives a solid foundation in which present research can be conducted on the matter.

In doing so, this writer engaged with several participants who gave an interview. Both church pastors/participants and those who remain absent were the contributors to this conducted survey. In this interview and on-the-ground research, it was anticipated there was a lack of authentic leadership present in their lives and that the church had failed them in some capacity. They were revealing an opportunity for a solution to emerge through the collection of this data.

Realizing first that all contributors to this interview who were pastors and churchgoing, all had an active father, this rivaled the other data produced by the nonchurchgoers, as they collectively did not have a present father in their upbringing. The three answers retrieved about why they do not go to church differed from one another. Admittedly, all three interviewees had, at one time or another, gone to a church service. But the answers consisted of not trusting the church, education, and incarceration/work as the answers given on why they and others do not attend churches anymore.



After further exploration on the topic of not trusting the church, it was illuminated that many can't perceive participating physically, financially, and with their time to a place where they can't track or see the results of their giving. It has been labeled as "hypocritical behavior" as they believe the church speaks and pontificates on religious matters, but there is nothing to show but the reciprocal fruit of such talk.

Educationally, the alarming omission was that many Black men are often intimidated when coming into church due to the fear of public reading. Many Black men are products of a broken educational system and a failing school institution. This is resulting in many black men with low reading comprehension levels across North America. This poses a threat as the Bible is revered as a holy and historical book that can be difficult to read and understand. So rather than the public humiliation and lack of understanding of what is transpiring during the service, many Black men opt to remain elsewhere with the dignity they feel still intact.

Lastly, incarceration/work is the last reason collected on why black men are absent from church today. A failed education system makes it difficult to find proper employment to support themselves and their families if they have them. The only option they believe they have is to commit a crime to be able to afford things they could have if they had a job that paid them a living wage. Once tried for incarceration, most are unable to afford adequate representation and are often sentenced more harshly than other ethnicities, producing longer sentences to be served. These disparities serve as a prime opportunity for the church to operate at the level of functionality it was created for. Through the inequalities society has produced, this student's artifact is a possible solution that addresses all three of these reasons that the nonchurchgoers presented. The program

allows the church and ministries to target young Black males and admonish them to be strong men that are disciplined and will disciple others in the community.

The church has the prime opportunity to be a servant leader in the community, for preachers to bring and pontificate sermons from the bible that are timely, relevant, and applicable, for the body of the church to show transparencies of triumphs and trials, to allow others who don't know Christ to see Christ within them. This student believes in the words of Frederick Douglass: "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." This is the heart of the program this student is introducing. It's a twofold program where both the youth and the men leading the program can receive adequate healing from the hurts society has given them. When men have a place where they don't feel judged, ostracized, and are heard, both the young and old will not only come, but they will remain.

This can be accomplished in the church by having a more inclusive worship experiences for all demographics to partake in. Accompanied in these worship services and other gatherings is to display God as a good Father. When the lost, the hurting, and the disenfranchised are allowed to see themselves as one of the Father's own, it puts into perspective everything that is needed is present within the Father. There is no absenteeism in the Father. He is omnipresent and desires to reveal himself in all.

## APPENDIX A:

## FATHERHOOD STATISTICS

1. Positive forms of father involvement (involvement in child-related activities, engagement in multiple forms of involvement and developing a positive father-child relationship) were associated with children's social and emotional well-being as well as behavioral adjustment and academic achievement.

*Source: Adamsons, K., & Johnson, S. K. (2013). An updated and expanded meta-analysis of nonresident fathering and child well-being. Journal of Family Psychology, 27, 589-599*

2. The absence of a biological father contributed to increased risk of child maltreatment.

*Source: Bendheim-Thomas Center for Research on Child Wellbeing and Social Indicators Survey Center. (2010). CPS involvement in families with social fathers. Fragile Families Research Brief, 46. Princeton, NJ and New York, NY: Bendheim-Thomas Center for Research on Child Wellbeing and Social Indicators Survey Center.*

3. The lowest achievement and highest risk of school failure and course failure were experienced by adolescents who did not have a resident father figure and didn't know the identity of their fathers.

*Source: Whitney, S., Prewett, S., Wang, Ze, & Haigin C. (2017). Fathers' importance in adolescents' academic achievement. International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies, 8(3-4), 101-126.*

4. Father involvement seems to reduce the occurrence of behavioral problems in boys and psychological problems in young women, as well as enhancing cognitive development, while decreasing delinquency and economic disadvantage in low-income families.

*Source: Sarkadi, A., Kristiansson, R., Oberklaid, F., & Bremberg, S. (2008). Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes: a systematic review of longitudinal studies. Acta Paediatrica, 97, 153-158.*

5. 92% of parents in prison are fathers, and between 1991 and 2007 the number of children with an incarcerated father grew 79%. Even after controlling for income, youths in father-absent households still had significantly higher odds of incarceration than those in mother-father families. Youths who never had a father in the household experienced the highest odds.

*Source: Harper, Cynthia C. & Sara S. McLanahan. "Father Absence and Youth Incarceration." Journal of Research on Adolescence 14 (September 2004): 369-397.*

6. A study of 109 juvenile offenders indicated that family structure significantly predicts delinquency. Additionally, adolescent boys with absent fathers are more likely to engage in delinquency than those who are present.

*Source: Bush, Connee, Ronald L. Mullis, and Ann K. Mullis. "Differences in Empathy Between Offender and Nonoffender Youth." Journal of Youth and Adolescence 29 (August 2000): 467-478. Source: from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Cobb-Clark, D.A., & Tekin, E. (2014).*

7. Father involvement in schools is associated with the higher likelihood of a student getting mostly A's. This was true for fathers in biological parent families, for stepfathers, and for fathers heading single-parent families. Additionally, students living in father-absent homes are twice as likely to repeat a grade in school.

*Source: Nord, Christine Winqvist, and Jerry West. Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools by Family Type and Resident Status. (NCES 2001-032). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001.*

8. Men who grew up with absent fathers were more likely to become absent fathers. They also found that women who grew up with absent fathers are more likely to have children with absent fathers.

*Source: Pouget, E., Serbin, L. A., Stack, D. M., Ledingham, J. E., & Schwartzman, A. E. (2012). The intergenerational continuity of fathers' absence in a socioeconomically disadvantaged sample. Journal of Marriage and Family, 74(3), 540-555.*

9. Data from three waves of the Fragile Families Study (N= 2,111) was used to examine the prevalence and effects of mothers' relationship changes between birth and age 3 on their children's well-being. Additionally, children born to single mothers show higher levels of aggressive behavior than children born to married mothers. Living in a single-mother household is equivalent to experiencing 5.25 partnership transitions.

*Source: Osborne, C., & McLanahan, S. (2007). Partnership instability and child well-being. Journal of Marriage and Family, 69, 1065-1083.*

## APPENDIX B:

## BIBLICAL BOOKS ABBREVIATIONS

## Old Testament

Genesis	Gen
Exodus	Exo
Leviticus	Lev
Numbers	Num
Deuteronomy	Deu
Joshua	Jos
Judges	Jdg
Ruth	Rut
1 Samuel	1Sa
2 Samuel	2Sa
1 Kings	1Ki
2 Kings	2Ki
1 Chronicles	1Ch
2 Chronicles	2Ch
Ezra	Ezr
Nehemiah	Neh
Esther	Est
Job	Job
Psalms	Psa
Proverbs	Pro
Ecclesiastes	Ecc
Song of Solomon	Sos
Isaiah	Isa
Jeremiah	Jer
Lamentations	Lam
Ezekiel	Eze
Daniel	Dan
Hosea	Hos
Joel	Joe
Amos	Amo
Obadiah	Oba
Jonah	Jon
Micah	Mic
Nahum	Nah
Habakkuk	Hab
Zephaniah	Zep
Haggai	Hag
Zechariah	Zec
Malachi	Mal

## New Testament

Matthew	Mat
Mark	Mar
Luke	Luk
John	Joh
Acts	Act
Romans	Rom
1 Corinthians	1Co
2 Corinthians	2Co
Galatians	Gal
Ephesians	Eph
Philippians	Php
Colossians	Col
1 Thessalonians	1Th
2 Thessalonians	2Th
1 Timothy	1Ti
2 Timothy	2Ti
Titus	Tit
Philemon	Phm
Hebrews	Heb
James	Jam
1 Peter	1Pe
2 Peter	2Pe
1 John	1Jo
2 John	2Jo
3 John	3Jo
Jude	Jde
Revelation	Rev

APPENDIX C:  
QUESTIONNAIRE

Pastors,

1. What is the name of the church, your pastor?
2. Where is your church located?
3. What is the ethnic percentage consisting of your church?
4. What is the percentage of male attendance in your church?
5. Has it increased or decreased in the last ten years?
6. What ministry or targeted demographic effort do you implement to reach males in your church?
7. What are the contributing factors for men to attend church?
8. What are the contributing factors that are why men do not attend church?

Church Goers:

1. What adult(s) raised you?
2. What male authority has been consistent in your life?
3. Have you or do you have a male mentor?
4. What church do you attend?
5. Where is it located?
6. How long have you been going to church?
7. What is the percentage of men (approximately) that go to your church?
8. What is the contributing factor for you going to church?
9. Why do you go to church?
10. Why do you think men go to church?



11. Why do you think men do not go to church?

12. Has there been an increase or decline in male attendance in your church?

13. What does your church do in an attempt to reach men?

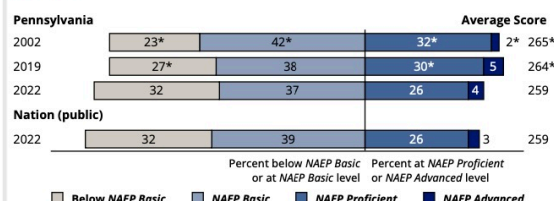
Non-Church Goers:

1. What adult(s) raised you?
2. What male authority has been consistent in your life?
3. Have you or do you have a male mentor?
4. Have you ever attended church?
5. What made you stop? (if applicable)
6. What turns you off about the church?
7. Do you see any value in going to church?

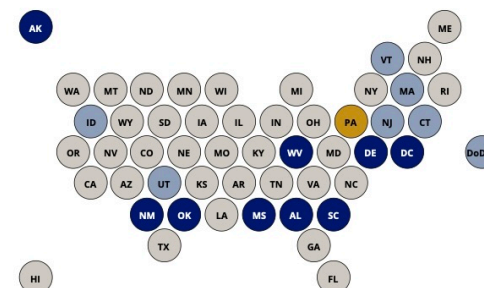
## APPENDIX D:

**OVERALL RESULTS**

- In 2022, the average score of eighth-grade students in Pennsylvania was 259. This was not significantly different from the average score of 259 for students in the nation.
- The average score for students in Pennsylvania in 2022 (259) was lower than their average score in 2019 (264) and in 2002 (265).
- The percentage of students in Pennsylvania who performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level was 31 percent in 2022. This percentage was smaller than that in 2019 (35 percent) and in 2002 (35 percent).
- The percentage of students in Pennsylvania who performed at or above the *NAEP Basic* level was 68 percent in 2022. This percentage was smaller than that in 2019 (73 percent) and in 2002 (77 percent).

**NAEP ACHIEVEMENT-LEVEL PERCENTAGES AND AVERAGE SCORE RESULTS**

\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from the state's results in 2022. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.  
 NOTE: NAEP achievement levels are to be used on a trial basis and should be interpreted and used with caution. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

**COMPARE THE AVERAGE SCORE IN 2022 TO OTHER STATES/JURISDICTIONS**

In 2022, the average score in Pennsylvania (259) was  
 ■ lower than those in 7 states/jurisdictions  
 ■ higher than those in 9 states/jurisdictions  
 ■ not significantly different from those in 35 states/jurisdictions

DoDEA = Department of Defense Education Activity (overseas and domestic schools).

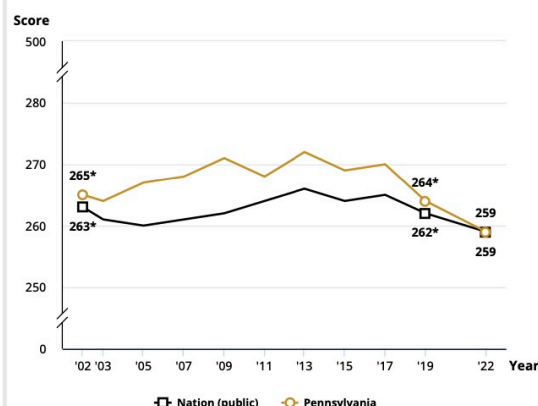
**RESULTS FOR STUDENT GROUPS IN 2022**

REPORTING GROUPS	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS	AVG. SCORE	PERCENTAGE AT OR ABOVE NAEP BASIC	PERCENTAGE AT NAEP PROFICIENT	PERCENTAGE AT NAEP ADVANCED
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
White	65	265	74	35	5
Black	13	240	49	13	1
Hispanic	14	241	49	15	1
Asian	4	286	87	62	16
American Indian/Alaska Native	#	†	†	†	†
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	#	†	†	†	†
Two or More Races	4	255	64	26	2
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	52	255	64	26	4
Female	48	264	72	36	5
<b>National School Lunch Program</b>					
Eligible	45	245	54	18	1
Not eligible	52	271	80	41	7

# Rounds to zero.

† Reporting standards not met.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding, and because the "Information not available" category for the National School Lunch Program, which provides free/reduced-price lunches, is not displayed. Black includes African American and Hispanic includes Latino. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin.

**AVERAGE SCORES FOR STATE/JURISDICTION AND THE NATION (PUBLIC)**

\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2022. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.

**SCORE GAPS FOR STUDENT GROUPS**

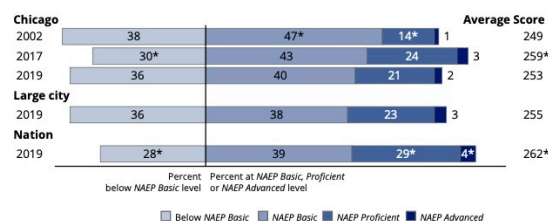
- In 2022, Black students had an average score that was 26 points lower than that for White students. This performance gap was narrower than that in 2002 (35 points).
- In 2022, Hispanic students had an average score that was 24 points lower than that for White students. This performance gap was not significantly different from that in 2002 (31 points).
- In 2022, male students in Pennsylvania had an average score that was lower than that for female students by 9 points.
- In 2022, students who were eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) had an average score that was 26 points lower than that for students who were not eligible. This performance gap was not significantly different from that in 2002 (28 points).

Figure 3 — 2022 Reading State Snapshot Report

### Overall Results

- In 2019, the average score of eighth-grade students in Chicago was 253. This was not significantly different from the average score of 255 for students in large cities.
- The average score for students in Chicago in 2019 (253) was lower than their average score in 2017 (259) and was not significantly different from their average score in 2002 (249).
- The percentage of students in Chicago who performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level was 23 percent in 2019. This percentage was not significantly different from that in 2017 (27 percent) and was higher than that in 2002 (15 percent).
- The percentage of students in Chicago who performed at or above the *NAEP Basic* level was 64 percent in 2019. This percentage was lower than that in 2017 (70 percent) and was not significantly different from that in 2002 (62 percent).

### NAEP Achievement-Level Percentages and Average Score Results



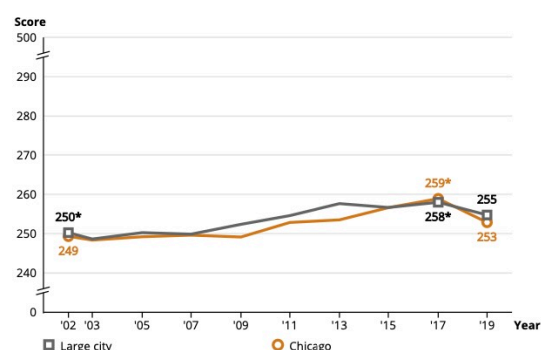
\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from district's results in 2019. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.  
 NOTE: NAEP achievement levels are to be used on a trial basis and should be interpreted and used with caution. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

### Compare the Average Score in 2019 to Other Districts

In 2019, the average score in Chicago (253) was

Lower Than Districts	Not Significantly Different From Districts	Higher Than Districts
8	8	10
Austin Charlotte Duval County (FL) Guilford County (NC) Hillsborough County Jefferson County Miami-Dade San Diego	Atlanta Boston Houston New York City Albuquerque District of Columbia Clark County (NV) Denver	Baltimore City Cleveland Dallas Detroit Fort Worth (TX) Fresno Los Angeles Milwaukee Philadelphia Shelby County (TN)

### Average Scores for District and Large Cities



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2019. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.

### Results for Student Groups in 2019

Reporting Groups	Percentage of students	Avg. score	Percentage at or above NAEP Basic	Percentage at NAEP Proficient	Percentage at NAEP Advanced
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
White	8	282	88	55	11
Black	38	246	58	16	#
Hispanic	49	252	63	22	1
Asian	5	271	77	48	10
American Indian/Alaska Native	#	†	†	†	†
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	#	†	†	†	†
Two or more races	1	†	†	†	†
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	51	248	60	19	2
Female	49	258	68	27	2
<b>National School Lunch Program</b>					
Eligible	82	249	60	19	1
Not eligible	15	273	80	46	7

# Rounds to zero.

† Reporting standards not met.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding, and because the "Information not available" category for the National School Lunch Program, which provides free/reduced-price lunches, is not displayed. Black includes African American and Hispanic includes Latino. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin.

### Score Gaps for Student Groups

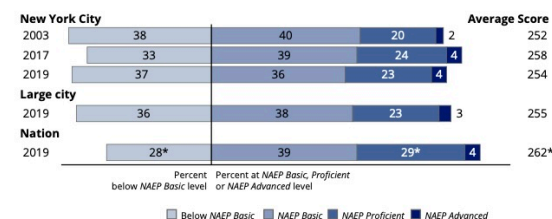
- In 2019, Black students had an average score that was 36 points lower than that for White students. This performance gap was not significantly different from that in 2002 (21 points).
- In 2019, Hispanic students had an average score that was 31 points lower than that for White students. This performance gap was not significantly different from that in 2002 (18 points).
- In 2019, female students in Chicago had an average score that was higher than that for male students by 9 points.
- In 2019, students who were eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), had an average score that was 24 points lower than that for students who were not eligible. This performance gap was not significantly different from that in 2002 (21 points).

Figure 4 — 2019 Reading Trial Urban District Snapshot Report for Chicago

### Overall Results

- In 2019, the average score of eighth-grade students in New York City was 254. This was not significantly different from the average score of 255 for students in large cities.
- The average score for students in New York City in 2019 (254) was not significantly different from their average score in 2017 (258) and in 2003 (252).
- The percentage of students in New York City who performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level was 26 percent in 2019. This percentage was not significantly different from that in 2017 (28 percent) and in 2003 (22 percent).
- The percentage of students in New York City who performed at or above the *NAEP Basic* level was 63 percent in 2019. This percentage was not significantly different from that in 2017 (67 percent) and in 2003 (62 percent).

### NAEP Achievement-Level Percentages and Average Score Results



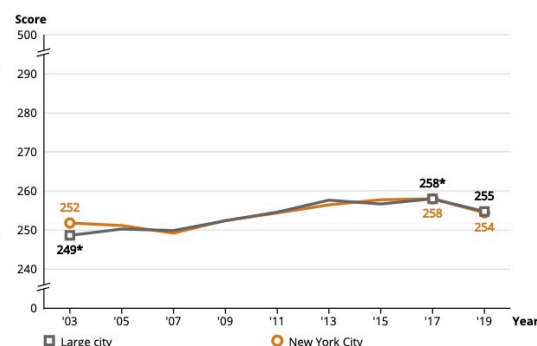
\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from district's results in 2019. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.  
 NOTE: NAEP achievement levels are to be used on a trial basis and should be interpreted and used with caution. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

### Compare the Average Score in 2019 to Other Districts

In 2019, the average score in New York City (254) was

Lower Than Districts <b>4</b>	Not Significantly Different From <b>10</b>	Higher Than Districts <b>12</b>
Charlotte Hillsborough County Miami-Dade San Diego	Atlanta Boston Chicago Jefferson County Austin District of Columbia Duval County (FL) Guilford County (NC) Clark County (NV) Denver	Albuquerque Baltimore City Cleveland Dallas Detroit Fort Worth (TX) Fresno Houston Los Angeles Milwaukee Philadelphia Shelby County (TN)

### Average Scores for District and Large Cities



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2019. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.

### Results for Student Groups in 2019

Reporting Groups	Percentage of students	Avg. score	Percentage at or above NAEP Basic	Percentage at or above NAEP Proficient	Percentage at or above NAEP Advanced
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
White	14	275	80	46	10
Black	25	242	50	14	1
Hispanic	42	249	60	20	1
Asian	18	267	73	41	7
American Indian/Alaska Native	#	†	†	†	†
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	#	†	†	†	†
Two or more races	1	†	†	†	†
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	52	249	58	22	3
Female	48	260	68	31	5
<b>National School Lunch Program</b>					
Eligible	75	249	58	21	2
Not eligible	25	270	76	42	8

# Rounds to zero.

† Reporting standards not met.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding, and because the "Information not available" category for the National School Lunch Program, which provides free/reduced-price lunches, is not displayed. Black includes African American and Hispanic includes Latino. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin.

### Score Gaps for Student Groups

- In 2019, Black students had an average score that was 33 points lower than that for White students. This performance gap was not significantly different from that in 2003 (25 points).
- In 2019, Hispanic students had an average score that was 25 points lower than that for White students. This performance gap was not significantly different from that in 2003 (23 points).
- In 2019, female students in New York City had an average score that was higher than that for male students by 11 points.
- In 2019, students who were eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), had an average score that was 21 points lower than that for students who were not eligible. This performance gap was not significantly different from that in 2003 (30 points).

Figure 5 — 2019 Reading Trial Urban District Snapshot Report for New York City

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