

MORE THAN SUNDAY SERVICE: THE FLOW OF AN INCARNATIONAL LIFE

A professional project submitted to the  
Theological School of Drew University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree,

Doctor of Ministry Advisor: Dr. Gary Simpson, Dr. Leonard Sweet

Brandon McLauchlin  
Drew University  
Madison, New Jersey  
May 2021





## ABSTRACT

### MORE THAN SUNDAY SERVICE: THE FLOW OF AN INCARNATIONAL LIFE

Brandon McLauchlin

St. Charles AME Zion Church, Sparkill, New York

This project is about intentionally slowing down to have daily encounters with God. God does not only want to spend time with believers during Sunday morning worship, but he wants to be with them every day. With the world moving at a fast pace, it seems people are missing important moments with God that would help them live with more peace. I believe Jesus shows us how to live and have daily encounters with God.

Incarnational flow is looking at the life of Jesus and implementing it into daily life. Jesus did not run from the world and its troubles, but he came into the world. Jesus lived at his own pace in the world. He showed the importance of not only doing the work of the kingdom of God but also having moments of rest. Jesus illustrated to his believers how to withdraw to engage the world. He intentionally slowed down not to procrastinate but to prepare for the day and what was ahead of him. I believe this flow is important for believers who are encountering the difficulties of the world every day.

Living this flow is possible when believers engage in contemplative practices. For this project the church not only focused on individual contemplative practices but communal contemplative practices. Using the work of Kirk Byron Jones and Tish Warren, participants were able to see God in their everyday activities and not just on their sacred day.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beautiful wife Nicole, thank you for your love and support.

To my mother Shirley McLauchlin and my second mother Helen Gilchrist, thank you for never giving up on me.

To my grandparents Vera McCall McLauchlin and James Thomas McLauchlin, I'm still looking up to you.

To my uncles Johnnie R. McLauchlin and David L. Gilchrist I, thank you for your countless sacrifices.

To Annjanet Woodburn, thank you for believing in your pastor and pushing me to keep writing. You are truly missed.

To my dad Presiding Elder, Henry A. Gregory Jr., I hope your son has made you proud.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....vi

Chapter 1 .....2

Chapter 2 .....22

Chapter 3 .....38

Chapter 4 .....67

Chapter 5 .....77

BIBLIOGRAPHY .....97

Appendix A .....100

Appendix B.....108

Appendix C.....146

Appendix D .....151

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my church, St. Charles for your unwavering support, love, and encouragement. You have helped to ease the burden of this process. I would also like to thank my spiritual father, Presiding Elder Chalmers McDougald for starting me on this journey. Thank you, Bishop Dennis V. Proctor, for believing in me and allowing me the opportunity to serve at St. Charles. Thank you to my peer mentor and cohort for making this an amazing process. Thank you to my advisors Dr. Simpson and Dr. Sweet for your teaching and support. I want to also acknowledge “The Brothers” who have continued to push me to be better.



## CHAPTER 1

### BUILT FOR THIS

#### “THERE’S A LESSON IN WHAT YOU SUFFER”<sup>1</sup>

When I was in elementary school, I was not good at art. I recall times where we would have to work with clay and create different things to show our understanding of art as well as develop a love for it. One of the ugliest things that I ever created was a whale, but to this day my mother still has it in her home; she loves it. I formed a pumpkin one year and other creative items followed. Then, I learned that you could shape the clay into whatever you wanted it to be based on your assigned task. I was not good at shaping. As I examined this thought, I realized that for the work that we will be looking at in this paper that it was God who built me for this time and this work in my life. I was clay in the hands of God molded overtime for the work that I am engaged in today. Chandler Moore has a song titled, “Built for This.” The meaning of this song is there is not a battle that God will allow you to face that you have not been built to handle. Examining my life, I realize that this is true. Everything I’ve faced, everything I have gone through has built me for every calling God has assigned me. My grandma’s generation would often quote the timeless Christian Hymn by Adelaide A. Pollard, “Have thine own way, Lord/ Have thine own way/Thou art the potter, I am the clay/ Mold me and shape me after thy will/ While I am waiting, yielded and still.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Moore, Chandler. Built for This. MoWorks, 2020, Accessed March 30, 2021. <https://muslyrics.com/lyrics/built-for-this-chandler-moore-ft-brian-moore-lyrics/>.

I am the only son of a single-parent mother. I was born in the late '80s. The world was experiencing tremendous strides in technology and in the internet. I like to think I was born in the sweet spot, which meant that you went outside to play with your friends, and if you wanted to play a video game with them, you could invite them over to your house. The internet was expanding, and we were about to receive information quicker than we could have ever imagined. When I was born, my mother was in the military, and my father was not present. My grandparents made sure that my mother had all the support she needed to raise me. So, for the first three years of my life, they raised me in their home located in the back of the woods in Fayetteville, North Carolina. My mother was stationed in Baltimore, Maryland, but would travel back and forth every other week to spend time with me. The fact that I was raised by seniors during the elementary years of my life is one of the first things that I can look at and say God was building me for my later work.

My mother took me back with her at three years old. Because she was in the military, we did a lot of traveling early in my life. While traveling from Virginia, Germany, and Pennsylvania, I had the opportunity to interact with many different people and cultures. With all of these stops, one thing that never changed was that my mother raised me in the church. Other than a brief moment when my mother and I moved to Pennsylvania, I have been a part of the Black church. Therefore, I consider myself a product of the Black church.

I can remember getting out of church at 2 p.m.; I wondered why we had to be in church so long. I remember testimony services where one person would get up and thank God for "life, health, and strength." Another person would get up during that same

testimony service and sing songs like “Victory is Mine.” I grew up when there were shut-in prayer services. The children would be asleep on the pews while prayer was going on. I grew up in the era of the Black church where if you were caught misbehaving by one of the mothers of the church, you were in trouble with them – and with your parents. It was also a time when your parents were told that they had to spank you. The members of my home church were more than just church family, they were my family. My generation of young adults call our church family the village that raised us and watched over us. Jessica Brown gives her perspective of the Black church, which is very similar to my upbringing.

From a cultural and historical perspective, the black Church has functioned as a “village,” just as our geographical communities once did. Churches are places where we gather to celebrate happy moments and to mourn with each other. At our best, churches are places where we see ourselves reflected in other believers and Christ reflected in us. Our church communities can provide powerful resources from a social and emotional perspective. They can provide us with a sense of belonging and a reminder of God’s love for us. That capacity is what we all hope for in a church.<sup>2</sup>

My home church is New Bethel AME Zion Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina. I was raised by New Bethel, and then by my mother. I left North Carolina and went to live with her in Virginia, Germany, and Pennsylvania. Sometime after my mother received military orders to be stationed in Pennsylvania in 1996, she received orders to be stationed in our hometown of Fort Bragg in Fayetteville. I was ten years old when we moved back to North Carolina. It was at New Bethel where most of my spiritual formation took place. Fayetteville was the place where I believe God did most of the building for what I would need for my journey. I was heavily involved in church

---

<sup>2</sup> Brown, Jessica Young. *Making SPACE at the Well: Mental Health and the Church* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, April 2020), 16. Kindle Edition.



activities. Every week, I was in Sunday school learning as much as I could. I was an acolyte, usher, musician, actor in church plays, and later minister. I learned a lot about serving in all kinds of positions. God shaped me with all of these good positive things around me, but I was headed for one of the most challenging periods of my life. I was going to need my family—and church family—to get through it.

When I was with my mother during my early years, I was a problematic child for her. I was dealing with a lot of anger. I was always in trouble and acting out. I believe this was due to my father not being present. Even though my mother had me in church every chance she could, there were still many things going on in my life that made it a struggle. Later in life, she told me that there was a moment where she felt that I had one more chance before she would have to send me away for someone else to help me. One day, she took me to the church and had me talk with the pastor. He asked me, “Are you scared of anything?” I replied, “No!” His response sticks with me to this day, “Then you’re going to die young.” I think a therapist would have been an excellent step for me to deal with all that I was going through in my life, but that was never an option. The demons of my past showed up when I was in Fayetteville later in my life. While my mother was stationed overseas because of the war, I went to live with my Aunt Helen, Uncle Vern, and my two cousins.

My cousins and I were excited about the move, but it didn’t take long for my temper and everything from my past to show up. My attitude caused a strain while I lived in the house. My aunt, just like my mom, still had me attend church every Sunday with an offering in hand for Sunday school, along with having me participate in every activity. Looking back, my aunt was doing the best she could with what was passed down to her

through generations. In the Black culture, one prays that the devil would lose the child and keep them in church.<sup>3</sup> As a child, I already dealt with abandonment issues because of my father's absence, and now my mother was gone. This caused me to write very dark poetry. My aunt found some of the writings and began to watch me closely. There were times that I would sit in a dark room, and she would come in and turn on the light, saying, "I'm not going to let you sit in the dark." She was afraid that I was going to try to commit suicide. When it was too much for my aunt to handle, she sent me to live with my grandmother and my Uncle Ham.

Living with my uncle and grandmother, who was in her late 70s at that time, is where I would spend most of my high school years. I learned so much about my future while living with them. My grandmother was the driver for all of her senior friends at the church. She was the president of the No. 2 choir at our church. I was the drummer, which meant that when the choir had practice, I would have to ride with my grandmother and be "sandwiched" between the other seniors that she would pick up for practice. I got to spend a lot of time with the seniors of our church. The conversations between them were some of the funniest and most memorable moments of my life. I had the opportunity to watch my grandma and learn things from her generation that remain with me today. I learned how to shuck corn, snap and shell peas, scale fish, and store items for the winter.

My Uncle Ham was and still is my hero. He was always doing for others before he would do for himself. When I was in high school, he would pick me up from school

---

<sup>3</sup> Charlamagne the God, *Shook One: Anxiety Playing Tricks on Me*, (New York: Atria Books, September 2019), 106.

every day and take me wherever I needed to go. He didn't go to church much, but you could see God using him to be a blessing to others. I was able to see Jesus working in everyday situations through my uncle.

By 11<sup>th</sup> grade, my aunt finally let me move back into her house. There were a lot of factors that allowed me to move back. Each of them were things that I believe God used to build me into who I am today. One of the most significant factors that happened to me in high school was getting involved in the school gospel choir. There were so many things that I could have done in high school to get me into trouble, but because of the gospel choir, I did not have time to get into trouble. The choir helped me to spend my time wisely. Also, it surrounded me with people who kept me accountable. I remember when I was on the bus with the track team, and I started cussing about something. The coach knew that I was a member of the gospel choir. He told Mrs. Robinson, who was over the choir, what had happened. She got me straight. I never did that on the bus again. The gospel choir also connected me with other students who loved God; they would help me to build my relationship with Him. Some of these relationships that I built with the members in the gospel choir followed me in college and even today. Membership in the choir helped to calm me down and started me on the right track.

Another instance that helped to build me was Anderson Temple Church of God in Christ. One of my friends, Charles Robinson, was a member there. I knew Charles when we were in middle school, but it was while in the gospel choir in high school that we became great friends. My friend Tony and my cousin Tre'vene were leaders in the gospel choir. I would go over to Charles' house to play gospel music, hang out, and laugh. From there, we would go to his church for Bible study with Ms. Sonia, who was the teacher.

Ms. Sonia would also be at Charles' home with us. She would challenge how I viewed the Bible. Because of her Bible studies, I found a love for the Bible that I never had before. I was in high school carrying around a Bible from class to class because of her teaching. I didn't know it at the time, but God was using her to build the love of His Word within me, which impressed upon me to become a preacher.

Along with the high school gospel choir, attending Anderson Temple with my friends for Bible study, my home church youth department also kept me very active. Ms. Sandy, who we all called Mama Sandy, was over the youth department at our church. They made sure that we were always involved in different church activities. I traveled to other cities for conventions and retreats that were building and shaping me for God's call on my life.

I was changing and becoming a different person. At the start of my 12<sup>th</sup> grade year, I started reading my Bible and taking so many notes that I filled up many notebooks. During that summer, there were three different times that I woke up in the middle of the night hearing a preacher on television talking about the call of Abram. I considered that as a sign from God that it was time for me to become a preacher and preach His Word. As a senior in high school, I preached my trial sermon. Growing up in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, a branch of Methodism, I knew that I had to preach a trial sermon to become a preacher. The trial sermon shows that you believe God has called you to minister. It also allows others to see the call to be a minister on your life through an examination of your life and the preaching moment. In essence, everything that I had gone through and overcame in my life to this point was what God

used to cause me to believe that I had been called. It was also others around me and in my community that confirmed his hand on my life.

While accepting God's call on my life and my community's confirmation, I flourished and was extremely excited about the ministry. I walked around the class with the Bible and paper in hand. I took notes for sermons when I should have been paying attention in class. In high school, I started to lead people as if I was a pastor. There were so many young people at the school that gospel choir and I were impacting every day. I recall times where we would have choir practice, and the students in the school would be in the hallways crying out to God. I was getting early experiences of caring for members of the church. There was one incident where members of the choir wanted to kick a student out of the choir. He had been having some issues during that time. I was so upset that they were trying to kick him out. Tears rolled down my face, and I said, "If we kick him out, we are going to have to kick everyone out of the choir." Even back then, I had a passion for God's people that has followed me today. I wasn't going to give up on him. The same way my church family didn't give up on me, I wanted to make sure that we didn't give up on him.

By this time, my cousin Tre'vone and I started a ministry called "First Fruits Deliverance Evangelistic Ministries." I have no idea what we were thinking with that name, but we wanted to do a revival on the high school campus, and we needed a name to do it. Before we graduated that year, we held the first two-night revival on my high school's campus. We organized everything and even went to different churches throughout the city to get resources to do the event. The revival was one of the biggest

moments in my life, and it will always serve as a reminder to me that Jesus isn't just confined to our church buildings; He is wherever we go.

After graduating, I was the college preacher. I visited all kinds of places preaching, teaching, and forming relationships with preachers I am accountable to today. I continued to follow the path laid out for preachers in the AME Zion tradition and was ordained in the church. At this time, I was still young, maybe a little arrogant, and I got into some trouble with my pastor. Without praying about it, I left the church and went to another AME Zion church down the street. My elder at the time, Henry A. Gregory, would not let me leave the church on bad terms; he told me that I had to go back to my home church. I didn't know it at the time, but God was using him by sending me back. It was less than a year later that my father in the ministry came to pastor at my home church. The connection that God allowed me to have with him would forever change my ministry outlook and build me for the pastoral ministry I have today.

My father in the ministry, Chalmers L. McDougald, came into my life when I needed to understand what it meant to be a pastor fully. I thought that if I knew how to preach, that was the only thing I needed to do well, and everything else wasn't as important. Then I saw how he loved our church family. I was able to see how he was involved in the community. My pastor showed me that pastoring was more than a Sunday morning sermon. It was an all-week calling to be there for the church family.

After God allowed me to learn from my pastor, I was moved to pastor a church. The move would be the most challenging year and a half of my life. I viewed this church much like Joseph viewed the pit and what his brothers did to him. This church was known for being hard on pastors. I was the ninth pastor in less than sixteen years. A few

of the former pastors, who were not moved to new churches just quit. One of the pastors had a mental breakdown. During this time of my life, my poor mental health led to physical health issues. The excitement that I had when I was a young preacher in high school was gone. I was not doing the things that once brought me joy. I would often sit at home in the dark, wondering if life was still worth living. The toll of pastoring this church caused me stress and anxiety as never before. My body started to react to the stress on my mind. I began to have stomach problems and started taking medicine for acid reflux. I started having breathing problems because I was having anxiety attacks and didn't even realize it. With all that was going on with my mental health, I never sought professional help. I was never taught to do that. I lost 40 pounds during this period of my life. But if you looked at me on Sundays, I was the "perfect" pastor. I was preaching, the people were shouting and praising God, yet I was a wreck the rest of the week. I was experiencing Sunday highs and Monday-through-Saturday lows. I could not understand why God would allow me to go through this. I felt like I was trapped in a pit. I was looking up and seeing the light but had no way to get out and save myself. What I did not realize, but do now was the pit that I experienced was necessary to get me to the place where God wanted me. The concept of my project came from this experience. I reflected on the things that I was dealing with at that time and thought how could I have handled that differently? What things did Christianity have to offer during this season of my life that I missed because of the stress and anxiety?

The church I was pastoring was challenging; however, we were still experiencing success in church growth. In the AME Zion Church, you can be assigned to pastor a church anywhere in our denomination. Because people recognized our church growth,

my name began to be thrown around about moving to New York to be a pastor. I knew that if I had been asked to move to New York to pastor before I pastored at my first church, I would have said no. My wife and I loved our life in North Carolina. We had a church that we both loved to serve in, a brand-new house, a new car, and enough money to live comfortably. The pit that I struggled with changed some things about how we viewed our life in North Carolina. My mental and physical health were both suffering, then I received a call from my new bishop about moving to New York to pastor. I didn't know the congregation he would be sending me to in our tradition. Ministers do not know where they are to be appointed until their name is called for a church at our annual conference. Even with that, my wife and I trusted that God had something better for us. I got the call on a Thursday and Saturday night we were traveling to New York to get a church that Sunday. The transition was quick, but I knew after all that I had faced, God had built me for the charge. The bishop sent me to St. Charles AME Zion Church in Sparkill, New York.

My current congregation was a church in need of a humble pastor. Over the years, they became servants to the servant rather than servants to God. They had accomplished many great things throughout the history of the church. Purchasing and building the church on the land it now sits on. The church did a million-dollar extension project that opened it up for use to the community. The church also started summer programs to serve underprivileged communities. One of the things that my predecessor was remembered for was taking trucks of supplies for Hurricane Katrina victims in Mississippi. However, upon my arrival, I realized that it was a church in serious need. The church that once reached out to the community had become insular and was focused on the wrong things.



Many of the members were leaving. There were not many young adults or children attending services, and the congregation was getting older. A famine was on the way; low church attendance was coming. The church was on its way from being a landmark to becoming a museum; a thing of the past. I did not know it at the time, but all my life, especially during my time in the pit, the Lord was molding me for this congregation and to understand what they would need to survive the famine in the land.

My story involves God sending me to difficult places. It is a story that involves me being assigned to places where others have had difficulty. My church was a difficult place. It was the perfect match for the work God had always placed in me. In the past, it was difficult starting a worship service at 8 a.m., and only having one row of people show up on the morning of its inception. It was difficult to start a multicultural worship service on the campus where I did my graduate work. So, this place of famine was no different. Everything I had faced to this point prepared me for the work I had to do in this difficult place.

Before I arrived at my present church, St. Charles AME Zion Church, I was told that other preachers had scouted the church. My bishop, Bishop Dennis V. Proctor, believed that God built me for this church; therefore, he sent me there to pastor it. As I began to pastor, we started healing each other. The two of us know what it is like to be sick. That is why I believe that we are a church that is so well suited for the work God needs to be accomplished in the community. The people around us need healing; it might be physical, spiritual, mental, or even financial. We know what it is like to need healing and what it is like for God to make ways for us. We also know what it is like for God to shape us in uncomfortable ways but for our good.

My experiences growing up in the Black church and as a pastor are what inspired the concept of my project. Time at the new congregation and reflecting on my past experiences at the first church made me question if I could have done some things differently for my mental and physical health? It made me think: What does Christianity have to offer for people who are currently going through issues that I was facing during that time? I realize that Christianity does have gifts to offer those who are stressed, depressed, anxious, and dealing with other mental or physical ailments. Along with leading me to the concept of my project, my life and ministry have helped me understand the theme of the program.

### **Pastoral Identity and Prophetic Fire in Fluid Culture**

At one of our member meetings, the congregation and I decided to look at Google together. That week, I was looking at schools to attend and came across a video of Dr. Leonard Sweet giving a lecture. In this video, he has someone go to a search engine and look up “why are Christians so...” The outcome was shocking, and I could not wait to have St. Charles look at what people were thinking about the church. Each member took out their phones and typed into the search engine “why are Christians so...” Once we did this, we were able to see what people were looking up when they use these words. The search engine provides the most popular searches when you type in words. We were able to see what people thought about Christians. The first result was “why are Christians so judgmental and hypocritical. We went a step further, and after the word “so,” they typed one letter in the alphabet. Our first letter was “H,” and words like “hateful” and “hypocritical” populated. We did multiple searches, and each time it produced negative words describing Christians. This exercise was an eye-opening

moment for each of us. We are surrounded by a culture that does not get a warm and fuzzy feeling when it thinks of the church and the people who populate it weekly.

Today's culture has a negative view of our churches.

Our culture has seen more scandals about clergy than you can count. Recent scandals include the Catholic Church in Pennsylvania covering up years of sexual abuse. People have lost trust in the clergy when they should be able to trust them. When I was in my early stage of ministry, a young man asked me about something involving drugs that I believed to be immoral. When I said to the young man, "I'm a preacher." He responded with a word I will never forget, "So." In his mind, even though I was a member of the clergy, it meant I could be just as immoral as the other clergy he had observed.

When I was growing up, there was a pastor in my home church who was extremely gifted. The church was growing at a fast rate and things were looking like we were going to be the next mega church in my hometown. This was shortly before women started complaining about what he was saying to them. Afterwards, financial issues started to occur. Before the end of the year, he was removed from the church. I have seen corrupt pastors in my lifetime. My congregation was hurt by some of the ministers that were here before me. Many in the church and those outside of it have seen this corruption take place in some manner. This has branded the church, and it is the reason why our current culture has a different view of our church. People in our culture believe that the church is just as evil as the evil things they see in their everyday environment. One reason for this is because when people leave mountain top worship experience in the

church, they don't bring God down with them in the valley to do the work of God's kingdom. It seems some forget that they are signs that should be pointing to God.

My identity as a pastor has been molded by my life experiences and the community I serve. I believe that the identity of the pastor is fluid. Growing up dealing with anxiety and mental health problems shaped who I am as a pastor. I believe those talks and experiences riding in the car with my grandmother and other senior-aged church members shaped my identity as a pastor. Those experiences are forever part of the building process God used to show me how to serve His people. Along with my past experiences, my present work is also shaping how I view myself as a pastor.

My present work is where I put those things from my past to practice. It is also in the present where I've evolved my idea of who I am as a pastor. Previously, when I thought of myself as a pastor, it was only as a suffering servant. It is important to be intentional when using metaphors. During my present work, I see my identity as more than someone who suffers for those he is serving. Presently, I am more mindful that my identity is not complete and is ever-changing, and because of that, I'm always on a journey to find out who I am as a pastor. Howard Thurman says this

In answering the question "who am I?" ... "I am not sure who I am, but I have given all of me that I can find to the pursuit of this consuming purpose, and the answer to the question is beginning to make itself known, even to me."<sup>4</sup>

He further discusses that this process of finding out "who I am" is made more evident through encounters with Jesus. During my work, I will continue to acknowledge that the church is the visible image of Jesus. My pastoral identity is being made more known to me the more I interact with Christ's Church. The more I interact with Jesus, the more we

---

<sup>4</sup> Thurman, Howard. *Disciplines of The Spirit* (Richmond: Friends United Press, 1963), 29.

come to know myself. I am using all that I have learned about myself to continue to continue to learn more about myself when I'm connected to my work.

As I continue to pastor, my identity as a pastor is going to continue to change. Experiences that I have not yet encountered will change who I am. The congregation that I serve will change over time, and those who come in the future will shape who I am as a pastor. The same way my past has shaped me and the present is shaping me now, the future will be no different. Culture is fluid, and so is the identity of the pastor.

Though the identity of who I am as a pastor changes, in the book, *Journey & Promise of African American Preaching*, author Kenyatta Gilbert describes elements of African-American preaching. The three elements are prophetic voice, priestly voice, and his sage voice. In my view, these are not just elements of Black preaching, they are also voices that each pastor should have. I believe the office of pastor in the Black church has consistencies that are the same. I think these aren't just elements in the sermon, but they are the roles that pastors live out each day in the community. When describing the prophetic voice, Gilbert says,

“The prophetic voice is a mediating voice of God’s activity to transform Church and society in a present-future sense based on the principle of justice. The prophetic voice speaks of divine intentionality—what God demands and expects of God’s human creation.”<sup>5</sup>

As a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, justice has always been at the forefront of the office of pastor. The second element of the pastoral office is

---

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert, Kenyatta R. *Journey & Promise of African American Preach (Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, April 2020), 12. Kindle Edition.

priestly. In this voice, the pastor is responsible for helping members cultivate a healthy spiritual life.

The priestly voice is a sacramental mediating voice of Christian spiritual formation that encourages listeners to enhance themselves morally and ethically by integrating elements of personal piety, that is, keeping to devotional practices like daily prayer and Bible study, and striving after holiness through abstention from cardinal sins.<sup>5</sup>

Lastly, Gilbert focuses on the sagely aspect of what I believe every pastor should have. It is the pastor's sage voice that looks to help the congregation understand their story and preserve the vision and mission of the Church.<sup>6</sup> When I consider my responsibilities as the pastor of St. Charles, and what kind of pastor they expect, I see each of these elements at work: prophet, priest, and sage. Over the past few months of my pastoral ministry, I have seen myself playing each role at one time or another because of the great anxiety of a pandemic around us and the civil unrest in the streets because of police brutality and an unjust justice system. An area where I have grown is in understanding my prophetic voice as a pastor.

The prophetic fire must always burn. Without a vision for the future, the congregation will roam aimlessly without understanding what they must do in the community to please God. The Lord said to us that the poor will be with us always. This is not a pass for the Church to overlook those in need; it is a reminder of those who we should stand on watch. Everyone's prophetic fire will be different. Prophetic fire, in my context, is prophetic preaching. Some take the fire to every protest they can, some take their prophetic fire to boardrooms; however, what keeps my fire burning is prophetic

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 14.

preaching. As the congregation's pastor, I must be able to see beyond the walls of my church into the society that surrounds us. What are the pains and the struggles that people are facing, and what does God have to say to those in power who could help? Marvin McMickle gives insight on what prophetic preaching is in his book, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?*

Prophetic preaching points out those false gods of comfort. Further, it points out a lack of concern and acquiescence in the face of evil that can so easily replace the true God of scripture who calls true believers to the active pursuit of justice and righteousness for every member of society. Prophetic preaching also never allows the community of faith to believe that participation in the rituals of religious life can never be an adequate substitute for that form of ministry that is designed to uplift the “least of these” in our world.<sup>7</sup>

As stated, being prophetic is something that I believe is the role of pastors who are taking the pulpit; however, I see more and more help from prophetic voices that might not be in the church. Previously, the civil rights movement that the Black church spearheaded with prophetic voices came from within the community. Today, the Black Lives Matter Movement was started by women with a prophetic voice. The Black Lives Matter Movement has sparked the prophetic fire of many, both young and old, and not all are from within the church. Someone might question where this leaves the pastor if they aren't leading the marches and protests. It's been a helpful and humbling reminder for me that God uses those who will allow Him to make themselves His mouthpiece. I have always believed in the priesthood of all believers; this era has taught me more about the prophethood of all believers a term used by J DeOtis Roberts. This is not new; God used Amos, a shepherd, not a “prophet.” For me, this only confirms my thought, which I will

---

<sup>7</sup> McMickle, Marvin A, *Where Have All The Prophets Gone?: Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America*, (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006, loc. 106. Kindle Edition.

discuss later in Chapter 3, regarding us seeing God in everything, even in a movement which was not started in a church.

I will conclude with discussing fluid times. From what I have learned, because times are fluid the church cannot walk blindly as if everything that we have always done as a church is going to work. I have gained that our churches can learn from hip hop artists and other musicians alike to sample. In the process of sampling, we take the best notes from the past and link it new notes in the present. For the church, this connection of the past and present is to fulfill the prophetic vision God has given us for the future. As the pastor of the church, I believe it is my responsibility to be prophetic and examine the larger culture that the church is in. I must be a sagely by understanding where we have come from. Then priestly, by spending time with God to understand what the congregation needs to fulfill the vision and mission of our church in a world full of changes.

Fluid times need a manifestation of Jesus that is flowing with it. They should be able to see Jesus through Christians. Christians must be people worth paying attention to. H. B. Charles, in his book, *On Preaching: Personal & Pastoral Insights for the Preparation & Practice of Preaching* said,

There are three kinds of preachers: the ones you can listen to, the ones you cannot listen to, and the ones you must listen to. I desire to be the kind of preacher that you must listen to. That requires more than desire. It requires hard work; the hard work never ends, if you take your preaching assignment seriously.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>H.B. Charles, Jr., *On Preaching: Personal & Pastoral Insights for the Preparation & Practice of Preaching*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 10.



I believe that our lives are good and bad sermons. Each of us are sermons that God desires to use to point to Himself. We must try our best to be sermons that people must listen to or lives that people must pay attention to. In his book, *Discernment*, Henri J. M. Nouwen has a chapter that is about paying attention to the people in your path. He wrote about coming into contact with people who he believed God used to speak to him. “While it is true that God reveals wisdom and direction through the Bible, the books, and the articles that we read, as well as the *Book of Nature*, it also is true that God speaks through the people we meet in daily life.”<sup>9</sup> My prayer for the future involvement of my church and myself in this culture is that we would flow in it so that when people meet us, they cannot help but see Jesus. In order for this to happen, we must be involved in the fluid culture of our context.

---

<sup>9</sup>Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Discernment*, (New York: HarperOne, 2013),65.

## CHAPTER 2

## RESPOND

“I ACCEPT THE INVITATION... TO DANCE WITH MY FATHER”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus came to earth; He was and is the Word of God wrapped in flesh from childhood until He died. He understood the context and culture in which He lived. It was His understanding of the culture that helped Him to minister to the people He met. Jesus went to parties. Jesus walked with the people, ministry, and culture connected in one. If churches are going to continue to carry out the call from the Lord to make disciples, they will first have to join the dance of culture. Leonard Sweet writes, “We don’t take Jesus into the world. We discern where he’s dancing and join in the dance. God takes the initiative. Heaven is entering into the triune life of God, the circle dance of creation.”<sup>11</sup> Understanding the context of where the church lives is part of finding out what God is already doing in the community. The ability to do real ministry requires that a person follows God into the culture in which one lives looking for signs of his presence. Living incarnationally requires living in the community as Jesus did. It is impossible to be a part of the great work God is doing without living in the same places he is.

---

<sup>10</sup> Greene, Travis. Respond. Provident Label Group LLC, 2019, Accessed March 30, 2021. <https://genius.com/Travis-greene-respond-lyrics>.

<sup>11</sup> Sweet, Leonard. *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, publish year), 9. Kindle Edition.

When I came to St. Charles, we as a church had not taken the time to think about what was going on in our community. My church, in particular, was in survival mode. The church was in debt; thus, the focus was trying to pay bills. The church has two properties, and both of them, upon my arrival needed major repair. It was hard for leaders to think about ministry with the church in the condition that it was in. The church's focus became insular. As an outsider, I had much to learn about the culture of our church and community. After many conversations, outings, and investing time with the community, these are the things I have come to understand about my ministry's context from both past and present.

#### St. Charles AME Zion Church

St. Charles is located in Sparkill, New York, in Rockland County. Rockland has the smallest area of any county in the state outside of New York City with 174 square miles.<sup>12</sup>

The church is listed as 155 years old. It was started in 1865; however, it has roots that are even earlier than that. The original church was not on the land which the church stands on now. In the early 1800s, the church was located in a place called Skunk Hollow. It is a short distance from the existing church today. The people who lived there were former slaves and/or African Americans. It was known as the mountain community. The first pastor William "Billy" Thompson deeded the land for the first church. In 1889, the trustees decided to go search for land to build a new church. They found land in

---

<sup>12</sup> Britannica. "Rockland County, New York, United States." 11/17/2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rockland-county-New-York>.

Sparkill next to a creek. Others told them that they should not buy the land, but they had faith to purchase it anyway. The land that was purchased long ago is where our church presently sits on today. During the building project, they brought stones for the church. They ran out of money for the building; however, a woman named Mrs. Taylor noticed the building process stopped. When she found out they didn't have any more money, she gave them the rest of the funds to finish the project. Because of her generous donation, the church received its name St. Charles after her late husband. When I think about our name, I'm reminded that God has always provided for this church. There were 25 pastors before my predecessor Rev. Dr. Louis Sanders. Unlike most AME Zion churches, St. Charles had pastors who have had long pastorates. Some churches in the AME Zion church, in which I will go into more detail soon, have a new pastor every 3 or 4 years. Rev. Sanders was at St. Charles for 36 years before he retired in 2017.

At the start of the congregation most of its members lived in the same community as the church. Today, Sparkill is a hamlet in the town of Orangetown that has a population of 1,565 people of which 1.9% of them are Black.<sup>13</sup> Over time, many people of color left the Sparkill area but the church stayed. More than half of the members of the church live outside of the Sparkill community.

#### AME Zion Church

St. Charles Church is a part of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion denomination. The AME Zion Church emerged from the John Street Methodist Church in New York City. The group initially started from homes and was a class of the congregation's African American members. A class in the Methodist church is a small

---

<sup>13</sup> City Data. "Sparkill, New York." 11/17/2020, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Sparkill-New-York.html>

group ministry that stays in contact with one another to see how a member's soul is fairing. The treatment by the white clergy was unfair to the Black congregants. Black people had to wait to take communion and sit in the back of the church. Black clergy could only preach with white clergy present. It was because of this unfair treatment that the class pulled out of the church and started the AME Zion Church.

The AME Zion Church is known as the "Freedom Church" because of its involvement in the abolitionist movement. Many abolitionists like Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Fredrick Douglass, and many others joined the AME Zion denomination. There were many churches in the denomination used in the underground railroad. Most notable is Mother Zion AME Zion, which was the first Zion church established over 200 years ago. Throughout the history of the AME Zion Church, it has been involved in fighting for the rights of people of color and helping to improve the conditions of black people. Some of the AME Zion churches were the birthplaces of the historically black colleges we see today. Fayetteville State University, of which I am an alumnus, has a hall named after one of the Bishops of the AME Zion Church; it is called Hood Hall named after Bishop Hood. Today, the church has multiple colleges and universities in the United States and abroad.

The AME Zion Church is Episcopal, which means the church polity is from the top down. The bishops have oversight of the churches, and those laws govern the church. Each bishop has an episcopal area that is made up of annual conferences. Each annual conference is comprised of a district, in which each district has multiple churches. St. Charles is in the North Eastern Episcopal District of the New York Annual Conference,

Westchester District. St. Charles is a part of what is called the Mother Conference because the New York Annual Conference was the first conference in Zion.

Because of St. Charles' connection to the AME Zion church, it takes part every year to help meet the budget of the general church to fund ministry in the states and overseas. A great responsibility every year is to make sure the church raises funds for the ministry in its community, along with raising funds for the assessment they are assigned each year for the connectional budget.

Being a part of the Freedom Church means a lot to the members of the St. Charles congregation. The first Black fire chief in Rockland County, Charles Bullock, was a member of St. Charles. The first Black police officer was Benjamin Lawson; also a member of St. Charles. The Rockland County Civil Rights Hall of Fame has six names who are connected to St. Charles and the AME Zion Church. The church's connection to the freedom church and those who have come before us are why the church is always heavily involved in the community. Many of our members are leaders in the two NAACP branches in Rockland County. They are part of civic organizations that do amazing things in the community. There is also the Rockland Negro Scholarship Fund. The majority of its board members are also members of the St. Charles Church. The members are very active at the church and in the community.

When I wrote in chapter 1 about the pastor's identity, I said that one element of the pastoral office is to be a sage. As a member of an itinerant ministry, I can be sent anywhere at any time. When arriving at the new church, I had to learn the story of the church so that it isn't just their story but our story that we share. St. Charles' story is our story together; therefore, as a sage leader, I must use that part of me to inspire my

congregation for more work in Rockland County. I will go back to the words of Gilbert about the sagely voice.

...there is a tacit assumption that the preacher knows the history of the church and will faithfully interpret it and inspire those to honor it in their continued witness of their own participation in the historic journeying as a congregation trusting in God.<sup>14</sup>

The story of our past inspires us to look at our community's present context and try to find ways to minister.

Presently, the world is now dealing with a global pandemic because of COVID-19. It seems that anxiety is at an all-time high for people who might not have otherwise been anxious previously. This virus hasn't picked a particular group of people; everyone is in danger of catching it. When this pandemic first started, New York was affected terribly. There were many that contracted the virus and also many that passed away. Schools were forced to decide if they would close or stay open. Nurses were recognized as frontline workers, and many faced trauma every day from losing patients. There was a doctor who took her life after dealing with the pandemic. Her father, also a physician, said she had described devastating scenes of the toll the coronavirus took on patients. "She tried to do her job, and it killed her."<sup>15</sup> This is extremely troubling because we have members who are first responders and frontline workers. Trying to make sure they are both physically and mentally healthy is essential to our church.

---

<sup>14</sup> Gilbert, Kenyatta R. *Journey & Promise of African American Preach (Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, April 2011), 14. Kindle Edition.

<sup>15</sup> Watikin, Ali. "Top E.R. Doctor Who Treated Virus Patients Dies by Suicide," April 29, 2020. Accessed 12/1/2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/27/nyregion/new-york-city-doctor-suicide-coronavirus.html>

One of the most challenging and saddest things about this virus was having a family member dying from COVID-19 in the hospital, and I couldn't be there. People watching their mother, father, brother, or sister go into an ambulance knowing that it may be the last time they will ever see that person alive again is a haunting image. This was the reality that many were facing and still are today.

The world has been turned upside down. There are so many things that people were able to do before the pandemic without fear that would cause great anxiety now. Businesses, restaurants, and other institutions had to find a way to continue functioning during the pandemic. When closing the church, we transitioned to Zoom. The response of the congregation was positive because we already had a few services on Zoom before the pandemic, along with online giving already being established. The most difficult moments for us was the loss of church members. Because of the virus, a family of three died within three weeks of each other. This was a major impact on not just the members, but me as well. The members who died had made my wife and I a part of their family. They were very instrumental in making our stay in New York feel like home. So receiving calls that they were rushed to the hospital and dying a few days later was devastating. As a pastor, I felt helpless and did not know what to do. It was in my nature to go to the hospital for visitations, but this virus restricted me from doing what I knew to do as a pastor. On the other hand, we still found a way to be there for those families, even if it was from a distance. We arranged meals to be delivered to houses, along with sending monetary donations. Burials were streamed on Zoom so that the church family could receive some type of peace and closure.



## Working from Home

A 2019 survey by cloud infrastructure company, Digital Ocean, found that 82% of remote tech workers in the U.S. felt burnt out, with 52% reporting that they work longer hours than those in the office, and 40% feeling as though they needed to contribute more than their in-office colleagues.<sup>16</sup> Not only is the church surrounded by a community of people who are working from home, but is also a part of this reality as well. We can learn from the 2019 survey that if people who work from home regularly have problems with being burnt out, then this new group of people forced to do remote work will have a difficult time. I've had many of my members who are working from home talk about how they feel busier at home than they were when they were going to work. This has been especially difficult for parents with school-age children. I've found that these parents have had difficulty adjusting to their work situation, and also having children at home while they work only adds to the stress level are facing. When I asked my congregation before the pandemic how often do they feel burned out, 34% said often and 38% said sometimes. Based on the conversations I had with people during the pandemic, I would guess that if I asked that question again the amount of burn out would be even higher now.

## Losing Jobs

During the pandemic, many people have lost their jobs including members of my church. The church had to find ways to help members who lost funds in the middle of the pandemic.

---

<sup>16</sup>Garen Staglin. "When Home Becomes the Workplace: Mental Health and Remote Work," March 17, 2020. 2/05/20201, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/onemind/2020/03/17/when-home-becomes-the-workplace-mental-health-and-remote-work/?sh=66b0cd2e1760>.

I can only imagine the toll this has taken on them to lose their career in the middle of a pandemic. Bernard Anderson says, “African Americans were not only overrepresented in COVID-19 cases and deaths, but they were disproportionately impacted by the attendant job loss.”<sup>17</sup> Of course, with people losing their jobs, people have are in need and trying to help their families survive. In Rockland, we have watched people stand in long lines to receive food to feed their families. The areas giving out the most food are areas where there is a higher concentration of people of color. I have watched families who have moved in with their parents to be able to survive during this pandemic.

There have also been job losses in the church. There have been churches that have had to cut their staff because of this pandemic. In the church, I've watched many musicians who might not have any other income source take pay cuts that have impacted their lives. At the start of the pandemic, *The New York Times* reported that 3.3 million people filed for unemployment. The highest for any prior week had been 650,000 claims in 1982. Just weeks before the pandemic, the article says barely 200,000 filed for jobless benefits.<sup>18</sup> According to a report in the *Rockland County Times*, the area that our church is located has seen drops that it hasn't seen in years.

In every region of upstate except Ithaca and Albany-Schenectady-Troy, private employment has dropped to its lowest level on record in the 30 years since the

---

<sup>17</sup> Anderson Bernard E. “State of Black America. “Off Track: How COVID-19 Derailed Black Employment Gains.” 2/05/2021, <https://soba.iamempowered.com/track-how-covid-19-derailed-black-employment-gains>

<sup>18</sup>Ben Casselman, Patricia Cohen, Tiffany Hsu “It’s a Wreck’: 3.3 Million File Unemployment Claims as Economy Comes Apart,” 4/3/2020, 11/17/2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/business/economy/coronavirus-unemployment-claims.html>.

current statistical series began in 1990. The same is true for Nassau and Suffolk counties, and for Orange-Rockland-Westchester.<sup>19</sup>

### Education

There are two school districts that St. Charles has been working with during my time of pastoring. The South Orangetown School District and the East Ramapo Central School District. Our church has three teachers who are a part of the South Orangetown School District, and there are several students from our church who are a part of the district. One of the major issues is that there is very little diversity in the school district. With all of the civil unrest, we believe students of color must see a representation of themselves in the school while white students need to interact with teachers of color.

The second school district, which is the one St. Charles has given the most attention to is the East Ramapo School District. This district is made up of 90% of children of color.<sup>20</sup> These children are not represented well on the school board, and the district has suffered terribly over the years. The private school community has taken over the school board, and the public-school students, faculty, and staff have a lack of resources. I recall our church having to help the PTA host an event because the district would not support them with funds. There has been fraud over the years in this district. The students in this district have less access to technology. The school district had issues

---

<sup>19</sup>Machon, E.J. "NY's job base is wrecked," May 25, 2020. 11/17/2020, <https://www.rocklandtimes.com/2020/05/25/nys-job-base-is-wrecked/>

<sup>20</sup> Cutler, Nancy. "East Ramapo: Majority of public school students considered chronically absent or at risk," October 22, 2020. 11/17/2020, <https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/rockland/2020/10/22/east-ramapo-students-often-absent-thousands-dont-have-chromebooks/6003324002/>

accommodating their student population with the technological resources they needed to be successful students during remote learning. Because of the lack of access to technology, it was said in a school board meeting that almost more than half the district's students have been absent or chronically absent from school. Nancy Cutler of the *Lohud Journal News* noted in an article

Nearly 47% of East Ramapo's 8,834 public school students are considered chronically absent, district officials said, and another 15.15% are at risk. Thousands are still without district-promised Chromebooks as the district continues all-remote learning.<sup>21</sup>

When the teachers and students were initially set to start hybrid learning of remote and in-person learning, the governor designated the areas where many of the students in East Ramapo Central School District live as red and yellow zones. The education board was still going to send students, faculty, and staff to schools amidst teachers and parents concerns. The teacher's union had to go to the news outlets to stop the plan to send students back. The president of the teacher's union, Susan LoRusso, explained why she brought teachers' concerns to the news. "Teachers are scared," LoRusso said. "Teachers are nervous for themselves, and they're nervous for their students. That's what prompted this."<sup>22</sup> My wife is a teacher in this school district. Her school is in a clear zone which educates students who live in a red zone neighborhood. I

---

<sup>21</sup> Cutler, Nancy. "East Ramapo: Majority of public school students considered chronically absent or at risk," October 22, 2020. 11/17/2020, <https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/rockland/2020/10/22/east-ramapo-students-often-absent-thousands-dont-have-chromebooks/6003324002/>

<sup>22</sup> Grosserode, Sophie. "East Ramapo teachers union calls for all schools to close until COVID numbers drop," October 9, 2020. 11/17/2020, <https://www.lohud.com/story/news/education/2020/10/09/east-ramapo-union-calls-all-schools-close-during-covid-cluster/5936865002/>

have been contacting politicians over the last few months to make sure that the students, faculty, and staff receive what they need. One of the main reasons this school district is in the position that it is in is that no prophets were watching, meaning there was no influence or representation of clergy speaking against the unfairness that has been going on in the district. I have been at different meetings and spent time at the schools, and I can count on my hand the number of times I've seen other clergy from the Black church in attendance with the students and at meetings. The district is in bad shape and needs continued support from the Black community and church.

### Racial Unrest

I am also writing about this project during a time where there has been great unrest in the country.

As we have seen through the Black Lives Matter protests, many people are finally recognizing the inequities that are borne out of systemic racism, becoming motivated to speak and act for justice and change. We know now, more than ever, that everyone's voice is important to bring about the change that we seek. The crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and police violence and killings of African Americans are forcing us to confront the injustices and eliminate the inequities that prevent us from living up to our stated ideals of "liberty and justice for all."<sup>23</sup>

There have been too many Black people who have been killed by the police. With people quarantined inside their homes, they had to see the treatment of people of color in a way they didn't want to pay attention to before. Why are unarmed people of color being killed by police officers? The killings of Breanna Taylor and George Floyd during this pandemic has placed a magnifying glass on police and their engagement with people of color. There has been a cry from many to defund the police.

---

<sup>23</sup> Lisa Cooper, "The Silver Lining in COVID-19's Dark Clouds," 2/5/2021, <https://soba.iamempowered.com/silver-lining-covid-19%E2%80%99s-dark-clouds>.

In New York, the governor sent out and executive order No. 203 the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative.<sup>24</sup> This executive order has called for each of the local governments to meet with police and stakeholders in the community to come up with a reform report by April 1, 2021. I was one of the pastors who was asked to sit on this committee. This has been extremely difficult in a town who has many police and retired police officers in it. Members of the congregation and I have talked about many of the social media posts that we see from people in this town who are posting negatively about Black people in support of the police and it has been an eye opener to how people in this town think.

One of the biggest things that caused unrest in the Orangetown community was people getting upset about Black Lives Matters rallies. Again, all over social media group pages there were people saying negative things that should not be said about Black people. Even the Sheriff of Rockland county shared racist articles on Facebook that caused some in the Black community to call for his resignation.<sup>25</sup>

### **Therapy & Jesus**

In the Black community going to therapy was something that had a significant stigma attached to it. You would hear people say he/she is touched, or they would say that the person is just crazy. You didn't want anyone to find out that you were going to therapy. I've even heard some in my community say that's a rich person thing. One of the

---

<sup>24</sup> "NO. 203: New York State Police Reform and reinvention Collaborative," 2/5/2021, <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/no-203-new-york-state-police-reform-and-reinvention-collaborative>.

<sup>25</sup> Cutlter, Nancy. "Falco's Facebook controversy: Rockland Democrats weigh vote to demand sheriff resign," August 3, 2020. 2/15/2021, <https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/rockland/2020/08/03/rockland-democratic-committee-weighs-demanding-sheriff-resign/3288284001/>

other major thoughts in the black church community is that you don't need a therapist; you have Jesus. In this time of the pandemic, the church is having to encourage people to see therapists. Just as people go to the doctor when their body is sick, helping them break the stigma of therapy and seeing someone who can help their minds is important. I know pastors, myself included, who have started therapy during this pandemic because of pastoring demands. Our church has been hosting workshops to help break the mental health stigma in the Black community.

### **The Pandemic and St. Charles AME Zion Church**

The effect of the pandemic was very traumatizing for St. Charles. When reflecting on the members who have passed away, not only from COVID, but from other sicknesses, one of the members said, "the whole front row is gone." Though it has been difficult dealing with their passing, it has brought the men in the church closer together. Our church is now seeing men fill in the void left by the passing of those five men. Closing the doors of the church affected many Christians who have made coming to church on Sundays and other days an essential part of their lives. When I made the decision to close our doors, people were under the assumption that we would return to the sanctuary by Easter Sunday. It was thought that by June or July things would be back to normal, and churches would be open. By June, it was clear that the virus would be around for a while, and no one knew how long the closing of the church doors would last. Some congregation's members who find their joy in coming to church on Sundays now have been at home for months. In my perspective, St. Charles Church members missed the opportunity to fellowship together for in-person worship. They have missed the chance to

share our church's two-minute greeting in the middle of prayer. They have missed the sound of the church when we come together. They miss the choir singing on Sunday morning, the ushers leading them to their seats for worship, fellowship dinners, and celebrating the Lord's Supper together. There are things that people take for granted like being able to come together for a funeral service. St. Charles church experienced death during this pandemic, and for the first time, the church family couldn't come together to mourn the passing of loved ones as a church. Ministering to the needs of our community changed with the pandemic.

The work of the church is now looking into ways to use technology to continue to be the church. St. Charles has to make sure that the church still is in fellowship with one another. For the first time some have had to realize that the church is not the building, but the gathering of believers. The church has had to look at ways to ensure the safety of the congregation if they are having in-person worship. This involves cleaning and sanitizing in ways that many churches have never had to do. It also involves having to budget for personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies that some churches can't afford combined with their other responsibilities.

For as long as I have been able to remember, it seems that church leaders have always taught to find the lost souls and bring them to church. The goal for many churches has been to have a high turnout of people attending their worship service, and it has been seen as a success. Now, the question is what is success for churches that do not have people to see in their congregation?

The other question that ministries have had to wrestle with is, how do we continue to do ministry during a pandemic? The needs of the congregation have changed in a



relatively short amount of time. Churches are reassessing their ministries. Will ushers, choirs, and Sunday school function the same way they use to in the future? The pandemic caused a quick shift that changed the landscape of the church. It has lasted for months, longer than we ever thought it would.

Based on the context of everything people are facing in our community and in the larger Black community I believe this project on slowing down with contemplative practices is important work. With the world moving at such a fast pace, people are burning out trying to deal with all of their problems. With internet, cell phones, and social media it is almost impossible to escape bad news or other reports that effect your mind. The church in the past has had something to offer our world — and still today if we reclaim it. In my context the Black church must reclaim contemplative practices to be able to navigate this world. God isn't always removing people from the problems they face, sometimes it is how we live into the situations around us that needs to change. I believe the cure for how we live in this life is to look at Jesus and have an incarnational flow. Jesus shows us how to live in a world with the odds stacked against you.

## CHAPTER 3

## I WILL MAKE ROOM FOR YOU

“PLEASE LIVE IN ME”<sup>26</sup>

Jay Z says that a rap song is only halfway complete with the beat, it must also have the flow. When beat and flow come together correctly, they form a masterpiece. Jay Z further states, "If the beat is time, flow is what we do with that time, how we live through it. The beat is everywhere, but every life has to find its own flow."<sup>27</sup> This statement is what first made me think, what are Christians doing with their time? What is happening in everyday life of a believer? I know there is the rhythm of coming to church every Sunday to receive a blessing, but what happens when Christians go home from church on Sunday and have to live the other six days of the week? Thinking through Jay-Z's metaphor, I believe that God is involved in this continual beat around us, and he has given us free will to flow into that beat. What does it look like to have an incarnational flow to the beat? What are the practices we are observing to make sure that we live our fluid flow? I view beat and flow in terms of "social rhythms and spiritual flow." Some followers of Jesus do not have a defined spiritual practice that takes place other than

---

<sup>26</sup> McReynolds, Jonathan. Make Room. Entertainment One US LP, 2018, Accessed March 30, 2021. <https://www.metrolyrics.com/make-room-lyrics-jonathan-mcreynolds.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Carter, Shawn. *Decoded*, (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010) 12.

Sunday. Could this be one reason why some people are not equipped to handle the social rhythms that are taking place around them? What do Christians who are intentional with their time look like in a world with so many oppressed, anxious, burnt out, fearful, sick, and broken? I would suggest that every Christian should have an incarnational flow that mirrors Jesus incarnated life. I believe his life is the key to life for those who are fighting a spiritual battle every day that is also impacting their mental and physical health.

### Incarnation

What does the life of believers look like when they take on the work, the rest, and stillness of Jesus? The bible says in John 1:14 that the word became flesh and dwelled among us. This is viewed as the incarnation. In the book, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and for the Church*, Sweet gives a description of what incarnation is:

The word incarnation is most familiar to us as a way of describing God’s self-portrait in Jesus. God took a nosedive into raw human experience and spoke to us in a language we could all understand—the material language of a human life, the language of a person named Jesus of Nazareth. Because God chose to save the world by participating in its life, incarnation and atonement can never be separated.<sup>28</sup>

Sweet goes even deeper into incarnation by saying that is through the incarnation “... Jesus is our best chance to get “human” right and be authentically human.”<sup>29</sup> I believe this is a true statement. God tells humans what to do in the beginning of the Bible, but

---

<sup>28</sup> Sweet, Leonard. *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and for the Church*, (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009) 162.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 163

they do not listen, so He sends Jesus to show what His Word looks like in life.

Humanities truest self can be found in the life of Jesus. Barry Jones in his book *Dwell*

says,

In the incarnation, Jesus embodied the breathing in and breathing out that constitutes the biblical vision of what it means to be human. In Jesus, the personal presence of God took on our humanity and “made his dwelling among us” in order to make a way for us to participate in the divine life. Throughout his life, he modeled what it looks like to live in intimate connection with the Father and dependence on the Spirit. Through faith in his work on our behalf, we participate in the divine life and are filled with the indwelling Spirit, God’s empowering presence. In his incarnate life, Jesus gave us the normative vision of spirituality, of life with God.<sup>30</sup>

Jesus does not just come into human existence and experience one part of it, but he fully engages into humanity. Jesus lived just like people are living today. God has invited believers to participate in the incarnational life. He gives the opportunity for the word be made flesh through believers in the world today. Jones believes the incarnation has impact for Christian spirituality that needs to be reclaimed, “The great need of the church in North America today is to recover a spirituality deeply informed by the logic of the incarnation. When I speak of the logic of the incarnation, I simply mean the implications of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ for our thinking about Christian spirituality.”<sup>31</sup> Jones believes that Jesus shows us what Christian spirituality looks like; however, Sweet uses different language when he says, “The whole message of Jesus’ life was not “let me show you how to be more spiritual.” Rather, it was “let me show you

---

<sup>30</sup> Jones, Barry D. *Dwell*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 12-13. Kindle Edition.

<sup>31</sup> Jones, Barry D. *Dwell*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 15. Kindle Edition.

how to be authentically human.”<sup>32</sup> According to both Sweet and Jones incarnation was not just a one-time event to save humanity from sin but a way of life with God and His people. Incarnational living calls for believers to be manifestation of Jesus in the world today. “We are not called to be an imitator of Jesus, but an planter and an interpreter of Jesus for the world in which we find ourselves. We are not called to mimic the Messiah, but to manifest Christ in the world.”<sup>33</sup> It is by the empowering of the Holy Spirit that each believer is invited to participate in bringing Christ to every area of the person’s life.

### **You Can Have This World, Just Give Me Jesus?**

The incarnation is God coming into the world but it seems some churches and Christians have tried to isolate themselves from the world. One of the major issues that the church which I have not seen in writing but have heard it in my context growing up in the Black church is trying to completely avoid anything that looks worldly. I recall when Facebook was first created hearing church mothers and fathers saying that it was the devil. Now when I look at the stats of who is viewing the live videos on the church Facebook page, it is a high number of seniors, ages 65-plus. The problem with this theology of completely avoiding the world is that it leaves some thinking that Christianity does not have any answers for the things that are going on in their life currently. There have been questions of what Jesus and Christianity have for those in this time? Howard Thurman, in his book *Jesus and the Disinherited*, talks about Christianity needing to find

---

<sup>32</sup> Sweet, Leonard. *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and for the Church*, (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009) 212.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 212

an answer to a fundamental question of “what does Christianity have to say for those who have their backs against the wall every day?” We have open church doors on Sunday, but some churches are closed for the remainder of the week or opened for a prayer meeting or bible study that might not be well attended. What is the answer for the rest of the week? Howard has a problem with the thinking of those who say “you can have this world; just give me Jesus.” He states,

I belong to a generation that finds very little that is meaningful or intelligent in the teachings of the Church concerning Jesus Christ. It is a generation largely in revolt because of the general impression that Christianity is essentially an other-worldly religion, having as its motto: "Take all the world, but give me Jesus." The desperate opposition to Christianity rests in the fact that it seems, in the last analysis, to be a betrayal of the Negro into the hands of his enemies by focusing his attention upon heaven, forgiveness, love, and the like. It is true that this emphasis is germane to the religion of Jesus, but it has to be put into a context that will show its strength and vitality rather than its weakness and failure.<sup>34</sup>

Sunday Christianity by itself is not the answer and it cannot bring holistic healing to a believer and peace to the other places God has placed him or her. Some have thought that they have their sacred space on Sunday and then go to their secular space other days during the week. In her writing, Jessica Brown brings up the metaphor of the church being a filling station on Sundays.

Too often people use the church as a filling station. When we are spiritually or emotionally depleted, we go to get our tanks filled. This process works, in that if we keep going regularly, we don't have to stay in an empty place for very long. However, this gas-tank Christianity requires that we actually come to the church to be filled. If we can get there, great! If we can't, then what? Jesus' admonition to the Samaritan woman can be useful to all of us. God has the capacity to serve more than our immediate spiritual needs. When the church is at its best, we don't have to operate from a deficit model. We can have relationship with God and one another that becomes a renewable resource! When people can bring all their needs

---

<sup>34</sup> Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 29-30. Kindle Edition.

to the church—not just the spiritual ones—the totality of life becomes more sustainable and life-giving.<sup>35</sup>

There are many issues with filling station imagery because it doesn't put believers in meaningful contact with each other and the world. From Brown's words it would seem like she would agree with the statement that Christians have something to offer people who have their back against the wall. Jesus had an impact on the people he encountered. He did not have a one-day week life. He lived every day with us in the common ordinary places. He went to weddings; he walked, cried, ate, and slept like us. I think sometimes people are so focused on his death that they forget that he lived in community. Everyday encounters were holy moments with Jesus. I believe Jesus still wants these moments with us and for us to have those encounters with others.

### God in The Ordinary Places

Everyday encounters with God empower us for everyday encounters with each other. Tish Warren writes in her book, *Liturgy of The Ordinary*, that there is no separation between our work life and our church life. "There is no competition between the work we do as a people in gathered worship—liturgy means "the work of the people"—and our vocations in the world. For believers, the two are intrinsically part of one another."<sup>36</sup> This isn't a new concept in African and African American spirituality.

---

<sup>35</sup> Brown, Jessica Young. *Making SPACE at the Well: Mental Health and the Church*, (Vally Forge: Judson Press, 2020), 44-45. Kindle Edition.

<sup>36</sup> Warren, Tish Harrison. *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*, (Downers Grove: IVP Books, November 2016), 89.

African and African American spiritualities eliminate the dichotomy, the dualism found in most European spiritualities. The sacred and the secular are overcome...Social and political matters are overcome through a spirituality in which there is no division.<sup>37</sup>

Answers to the question of what God has for those whose back is against the wall can't be found when we separate God from our work or every portion of our lives. God must be included in the busyness of our lives. God isn't scared to come to the "secular" places. He is already in those places waiting for us to slow down and see him. In her book, *Listening for God*, Renita Weems talks about the need for a God who isn't afraid to come into the busyness of our days to have communication with us.

We need a God who is not squeamish about disclosing the divine self in a thoroughly secular world and in the midst of ordinary daily existence, speaking to us through the noise of our hopeless routines and willing to touch us in our carnal places.<sup>38</sup>

According to Weems, prayer and other spiritual disciplines we do in the quiet and "scared" places are not the only places God reveals his divine self. God will also reveal himself in the ordinary times of the day. She discusses an invitation we receive from God during ordinary times. "But at the edge of these otherwise everyday, commonplace, ordinary occasions comes an invitation by some irresistible force, by God, to come closer and listen more attentively." <sup>39</sup>If God wants to meet us in all the places of our lives, why is it that people have difficulty experiencing Him outside of Sunday during the week?

---

<sup>37</sup> Dash, Michael. Jackson, Jonathan. Stephen, Rasor. *Hidden Wholeness*, (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1997), 28.

<sup>38</sup> Weems, Rita. *Listening for God*, (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 51.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 48



## Chronic Hurry

The rhythm in today's world is moving fast that I believe this is reason many people struggle to have an incarnational flow. It does not seem to leave time for someone to breathe. All of the problems that people face in today's society does not make you feel like you can stop for a moment and catch your breath because everything is done in a hurry. In his book *Addicted to Hurry*, Kirk Byron Jones states, "When hurry becomes a chronic condition, when we run even when there is no reason to, when we rush while performing even the most mundane tasks, it may be said that we have become addicted to hurry."<sup>40</sup> According to Jones, this addiction to hurry can lead to other issues in our lives. He brings up examples of times that people hurrying can place their lives – and others' lives – in danger such as someone causing a car crash because by speeding. Jones talks about today's marketing and makes the statement that "hurry is life."<sup>41</sup> I have found his words to be right. Recently, my wife and I started watching programming on CBS All Access. During the show, they have an advertisement that pops up. In many of the advertisements, you might hear "faster than ever before," or "quicker than ever before." The company that is marketing the product is trying to keep up with the hurry culture. The quicker your product works or is available, the better. In another one of his works, *Morning B.R.E.W.*, Jones claims that many people have responded to the accelerated pace

---

<sup>40</sup> Jones, Kirk Byron. *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down*. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), Loc. 145. Kindle Edition.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, loc 145

and heavier load of life either by hurrying to keep up or becoming numb to it all.<sup>42</sup> This isn't something we should just scoff at as normal. Byron believes chronic hurry is dangerous when he says, "Hurry is not an innocent and inevitable consequence of modern life. Chronic hurry is a serious malady of mind, heart, and soul, putting at risk our relationship with God, each other, and ourselves."<sup>43</sup> Chronic hurry is a sickness that has infected so many of the people who we encounter every day, including ourselves.

Jones takes it a step further and goes on to talk about how idolatry has been committed and the god that has been worshiped is speed. He lists the danger of idolatry:

Idols, in whatever shape or form, grab our attention, and if we are not careful, our ultimate loyalty. Once they have our attention in this way, idols—things we make—pull a treacherous switch: they begin making us. The third danger of idols is that we usually never own up to how dangerous they really are. The best idols remain cloaked in the garments of innocent acceptableness. By these criteria, hurry may be seen as one of our culture's most dangerous and pernicious idols.<sup>44</sup>

In the chapter, "The Idolatry of Speed," Jones gives three ways that speed has been seen. The list is omnipresence of speed, omnipotence of speed, and the speed of omniscience. When it comes to omnipresence of speed it seems like speed is all around. When ads come on TV, appear at fast food restaurants, or in everyday language: Speed has shown up. Not only has it been present, but it has been seen as what powers the world. Lastly, the speed of omniscience reflects on how in this era information comes to

---

<sup>42</sup> Jones, Kirk Byron. *Morning B.R.E.W. : A Divine Power Drink For Your Soul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2005), 55-56. Kindle Edition.

<sup>43</sup> Kirk Byron Jones. *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down*. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), Loc 145. Kindle Edition.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

people quicker than it ever has. People can wake up and before they get out bed, they can see news information on their phone.

There is major loss with idolatry of speed. Jones ends the chapter by listing seven serious sacrifices that come with worshiping speed: "...seven serious unnecessary sacrifices because of our addiction to speed: patience, judgment, depth, joy, dialogue, personhood, and spirituality."<sup>45</sup> Though each of these listed are serious sacrifices to make, for the purposes of this discussion I want to focus on spirituality. I believe our spirituality influences the other six sacrifices that were mentioned by Jones. When Jones says spirituality, he is talking about, "...our engagement with God, who is always beyond our finest and fullest thoughts. Though ever present, our spirituality is keenly felt in moments of absorption, awe, and awakening."<sup>46</sup> Jones believes that if people are in constant hurry they will find it difficult to have those three moments of absorption, awe, and awakening. These are moments where the individual is caught up or lost in the presence of God. I believe these moments of absorption, awe and awakening are essential for the day. Helping to build the spiritual flow for the chaotic pace of the world.

It is impossible to have this conversation about slowing down for those in the church and especially people of color without going through the work of Howard Thurman. In his book, *Deep Is the Hunger*, Thurman elaborates about the restlessness that people face.

THERE is much discussion concerning what seems to be an increasing restlessness among people. This restlessness takes many forms. Sometimes it

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>46</sup> Jones, Kirk Byron. *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down*, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 14. Kindle Edition.

appears in easy irritation over matters of little or no consequence. Sometimes it results in the sudden rupturing of old ties of family, job and friends. It may be a general instability making for an unwillingness to assume responsibilities and to fulfill obligations. In its simplest and often most crucial form, it makes concentration on anything difficult because of an apparent futility.<sup>47</sup>

One of the things that sticks out to me from Thurman's observation of the restlessness people are experiencing is that it was not just things that had an impact on the person. It was effects that could impact those who work with or live near the person who is experiencing restlessness. Discussion on this topic has given this restlessness different names. Sometimes it is referred to as the "divine discontent" in the heart. Certain mystics call it the "homing instinct" in the human spirit."<sup>48</sup> Thurman says, "The classic expression of it in Christianity is the oft-quoted overtone from Augustine, "Thou hast made us for thyself and our souls are restless till they find their rest in Thee."<sup>49</sup>

Chronic hurry leaves no time to find rest or to just "be" with God in His presence. Not only that, but it doesn't allow us time to enjoy the ordinary things that God wants to meet believers in. Thurman says, "Everyone is in a hurry. There is little time left for the deep experiencing the facets of life that make up the daily round."<sup>50</sup> People are either too exhausted to enjoy encounters with God or in too much of a hurry to listen with all of the hurrying. This hurry has left many dissatisfied in their walk with God, knowing that there must be more but cannot experience it moving at such a face pace. Authors of the book,

---

<sup>47</sup> Thurman, Howard. *Deep Is the Hunger*, (Ravenio Books, 2016), Loc 52. Kindle Edition.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Loc 58

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Loc 64

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Loc 1626

*In Search of Wisdom*, talk about this, "The sentiment among Black people abounds that the current fast paced, knowledge-rich, technological age has not satisfied deep hunger for wholeness or positive relatedness to God, self, others, and the environment."<sup>51</sup> If they are not spiritually satisfied, then the next step is for there to be burnout. The burnout comes because of our constant going without taking a moment with God. It manifests itself into many things in our lives. Thurman says,

We wait until we are sick, or shocked into stillness, before we do the commonplace thing of getting our bearings. And yet, we wonder why we are depressed, why we are unhappy, why we lose our friends, why we are ill-tempered. This condition we pass on to our children, our husbands, our wives, our associates, our friends.<sup>52</sup>

People are burned out and dealing with all kinds of other issues, and pass the sickness on to others they have contact with. It's impossible to have peace in one's own life, much less bring peace to others in one's environment being burned out. Thurman's work was written decades ago but still rings loudly today.

### **Chronic Hurry: Mental and Physical Health in the Black Church and Community**

The restlessness that Thurman's talks about and chronic hurry that Jones talks has been bad for people and especially harmful to people of color. Thurman touched on it in the previous quote of sickness and failed relationships because of the chronic pace. I believe that the social rhythms with chronic speed are causing people to worry and stress

---

<sup>51</sup> Wimberly, Anne E. Streaty; Parker, Evelyn. *In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), Loc 128. Kindle Edition

<sup>52</sup> Thurman, Howard. *Deep Is the Hunger*. (Ravenio Books, 2016), Loc 1638. Kindle Edition.

a great deal. In the article *High Anxiety*, Amy Simpson discusses how many people in America are suffering from worry.

"The majority of Americans say they live under moderate to high-stress levels. This constant stress has many consequences for our health, including high blood pressure, obesity, sleeplessness, fatigue, headaches, depression, and digestion problems. The American Psychological Association indicates that more than half of Americans report stress-related health problems."<sup>53</sup>

For black people, this stress is killing them. In his book, *Shook One: Anxiety Playing Tricks on Me*, Lenard McKelvey, also known as Charlamagne tha God, has a chapter called "Blackanoid". It is a play on the words Black and paranoid. He takes time in this chapter to point out that there are so many people who, because they are Black, are dealing with PTSD. McKelvey States, "Anxiety and blackness seems to go hand in hand. It's like African Americans have permanent PTSD."<sup>54</sup> He further illustrates the damage that high levels of stress have had on the black community.

"When your stress levels are chronically high, it can create all sorts of lasting damage. Physically, it can lead to diabetes, which African-American men are almost twice as likely to develop as white men. It can also dramatically increase your blood pressure, which might explain why according to the American Heart Association, "the prevalence of high blood pressure in African-Americans is the highest in the world." No Wonder that African-Americans are 1.5 times more likely to die of heart disease than whites."<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Amy Simpson, *Hight Anxiety*  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2014/fall/simpson-high-anxiety.html> (October 1, 2014).

<sup>54</sup> Charlamagne the God, *Shook One: Anxiety Playing Tricks on Me*, (New York: Atria Books, September 2019), 57.

<sup>55</sup> Charlamagne the God, *Shook One: Anxiety Playing Tricks on Me*, (New York: Atria Books, September 2019), 61.

In a time where it is being recognized that people are emotionally and physically dealing with issues from stress and health problems, Thema Bryant-Davis says “There is a hunger in the earth realm for clarity, for peace, for stillness, for consciousness, for awareness, it is what people are looking for.”<sup>56</sup> I agree with Bryant-Davis that people are hungry for those things. I also want to go a step further and say that not only are people hungry, but hurry is a sickness that must be cured. Homes believes the cure people have been looking for in this fast pace world is contemplation practices of the Black church. “Those who study contemplation as a practice or religious experience soon find that they are engaging geo-spiritual spaces that have the potential to ease postmodernity's striving and disassociation.”<sup>57</sup> I hypothesize that intentionally slowing down with contextual contemplative practices is what is needed to help flow in the work of Jesus and his stillness for the context that I serve in which is the Black church.

### **Second Awakening**

When I talk about intentional slowing down, I think about the two awakenings that Jones, discusses in *Morning B.R.E.W.* Jones says that the first awakening is something that is done involuntary. It occurs while a person is asleep, so they don't have

---

<sup>56</sup> Thema Bryant-Davis, “The Therapeutic Role of Contemplative Practice: Christian Mindfulness and Embodied Healing,” (2020 integration symposium Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, CA, February 19, 2020).

<sup>57</sup> Holmes, Barbara A. *Joy Unspeakable*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 32-34). Kindle Edition.

control over it. “This first awakening is an involuntary response to bodily stimuli.”<sup>58</sup> For the second awakening, Jones believes individuals have a level of influence over. “We all wake up twice. While the second awakening may be dependent on the first, it is in many ways the more important awakening. And it is the one that we have tremendous influence over.”<sup>59</sup> The second awakening is how one chooses to respond to the first awakening. It is being intentional about how the person is going to address the day ahead. The second awakening is a call to slow down, be intentional with time, and prepare for the day. All this falls under spending time with God. Jones’ idea of second awakening is important because it is during this second awakening that I believe the contemplative practices for the day should take place. Jones uses what he calls the “morning brew”<sup>60</sup> for his second awakening. In my view, this is a contemplative practice that he does to start each day during this second awakening. The experiences that Jones shares about leaning into the second awaking is exactly what I believe it is to have an incarnational flow. Here are some of Jones’ reflections on being intentional with his second awakening.

I did not have to be a branch blown this way and that way by the stressful winds of life. I had the power to fill my mind and heart with enlivening thoughts at daybreak. The initial filling, I discovered, had sticking power. The peace and energy established in the early morning hours were portable, facilitating peaceful inspirations at various intervals throughout the day. I began experiencing astounding new spiritual and physical energy. I felt more peace and joy, more often. I began to see things more clearly, and became more in touch with a deepening understanding about myself and the world. Even on days when I was

---

<sup>58</sup> Jones, Kirk Byron. *Morning B.R.E.W. : A Divine Power Drink For Your Soul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2005), 39-40. Kindle Edition.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 85



feeling less than buoyant, I felt more keenly and regularly aware of my life and my surroundings.<sup>61</sup>

I will give more attention to the specific practice of morning brew that Jones uses later. However, I believe his reflections are available to anyone who takes some intentional time for contemplative practices.

### **Contemplation**

I have seen that contemplation and meditation have been used interchangeably in some sources. Bryant-Davis reminds listeners that meditation is not a new age thing; it is something that has been done by Christians. Meditation is not new age; it is ancient.<sup>62</sup> Looking at contemplation is a look into an ancient practice that is still fruitful in this fast pace new age. In Bryant-Davis' lecture, she says that contemplative practices are “a gazing upon turning into a spectator of sorts so that you can see it ... Sacred pause and gaze upon the things we often look over.”<sup>63</sup> Holmes discusses what contemplative spiritual practices do for the participants “These practices beckon earthbound bodies toward an expanded receptivity to holiness.”<sup>64</sup> When she is talking about holiness she is suggesting that contemplative practices are times that believers make room for God to

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.,71-75

<sup>62</sup> Thema Bryant-Davis, “The Therapeutic Role of Contemplative Practice: Christian Mindfulness and Embodied Healing,” (2020 integration symposium Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, CA, February 19, 2020).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Holmes, Barbara A. *Joy Unspeakable*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), Loc 358). Kindle Edition.

dwell within them. “Contemplation is a spiritual practice that has the potential to heal, instruct, and connect us to the source of our being.”<sup>65</sup> I believe contemplative practices puts individuals in the position for God to dwell within and give an incarnational flow for life. “They provide opportunities for enhancement of experiential and critical self-other-world awareness, expansion of consciousness, and, ultimately, transformation of how we live in the world.”<sup>66</sup>

In my reading of Holmes, I was pointed to Thomas Merton, who is noted as being a great contributor to the conversation on contemplation. In the book, *The Inner Experience*, Merton gives a few terms for how he views contemplation. He says that contemplation can be passive, or it can be active. Passive contemplation is when the participant is not giving effort for God’s presence but the activity in this is God pushing His way into the life of the person for a contemplative moment. Active contemplation is when the participant is making and active effort to have a contemplative moment with God to understand the will of God. “In active contemplation, there is a deliberate and sustained effort to detect the will of God in events and to bring one’s whole self into harmony with that will.”<sup>67</sup> Merton further describes liturgy as active contemplation. “The Christian liturgy is contemplative on two levels: on the level of spoken revelation and on

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Loc 392-393.

<sup>66</sup>Thema Bryant-Davis, “The Therapeutic Role of Contemplative Practice: Christian Mindfulness and Embodied Healing,” (2020 integration symposium Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, CA, February 19, 2020).

<sup>67</sup> Merton, Thomas; Shannon, William H, *The Inner Experience*, (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012), 57-58. Kindle Edition.

the level of ritual mystery, or sacred action.”<sup>68</sup> Spoken revelation is the reading of scripture, and ritual mystery, or sacred action is the observation of means of grace such as communion and baptism. The two are not limited to the examples that I listed. I believe the desert fathers and mothers showed further example of active contemplation as they followed the example of Jesus.

#### Early Monastics: The Desert Fathers and Mothers in Africa

The desert fathers and mothers in Africa have something to offer to the conversation of slowing down and living with a flow that manifest Christ. Historical contemplation has its roots in Africa. Of course over time images of desert fathers and mothers and other church leaders from Africa where shown in art to be European.<sup>69</sup> I believe the depiction of these contemplatives as Europeans has hindered the acceptance of contemplation practices in the Black church and community. Reclaiming this heritage is important. In the book, *An Unbroken Circle: Linking Ancient African Christianity to the African-American Experience*, Father Paisius Altschul examines the impact that African Monasticism had on other Christians. He starts with discussing how two Europeans asked St. Moses what the purpose of the monastic life was. His answer was purity of heart which Altschul says “... purity of heart—the essential goal of monasticism—has been called by the Fathers a state of dispassion, stillness of soul. The monk becomes a mirror that is clean and that can reflect God and His life to other people.”<sup>70</sup> To do this, they withdrew to the deserts. Following the actions of Jesus during

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 61

<sup>69</sup> Altschul, Paisius, *An Unbroken Circle: Linking Ancient African Christianity to the African-American Experience*, (St. Louis: Brotherhood of St. Moses Black, 1998), 42

the beginning of His ministry, they fasted and prayed in the wilderness. Holmes sheds light on events that led up to them withdrawing into the desert and the impact it had on others in her book, *Unspeakable Joy*.

Those adherents who witnessed Rome's public affirmation of Christianity in the fourth century realized that the contemplative aspects of the faith could not be nurtured under the largesse of the state. And so in the fifth century monasticism flourished in the desert as Christian converts retreated for respite and spiritual clarity. Although the desert mothers and fathers sought harsh and isolated sites, they soon found that they were not alone. The decision to retreat drew others to them. Communities formed as city dwellers came out to seek advice and solace. The historical model of contemplation offers the rhythm of retreat and return. It was in the wilderness that African contemplatives carved out unique spiritual boundaries.<sup>71</sup>

There was the public affirmation of Christianity by the Roman State which stopped the kind of persecution that Christianity faced in its beginning, but according to Altschul they realized that there was still a spiritual fight going on. "Christians were aware of the presence of an invisible plane in which they had daily to deal with very real persecution, even though it was spiritual rather than physical... Trusting in the power of Christ, they withdrew to pray, fast and engage in spiritual combat."<sup>72</sup> They went to engage in spiritual warfare and as Homes mentioned, they formed communities. These communities were learning ground for some many that would spread the seeds of fruit that the early desert fathers and mothers had produced in the middle of the desert. This

---

<sup>70</sup> Altschul, Paisius, *An Unbroken Circle: Linking Ancient African Christianity to the African-American Experience*, (St. Louis: Brotherhood of St. Moses Black, 1997), 27.

<sup>71</sup> Holmes, Barbara A. *Joy Unspeakable*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), Loc 448-452). Kindle Edition.

<sup>72</sup> Altschul, Paisius, *An Unbroken Circle: Linking Ancient African Christianity to the African-American Experience*, (St. Louis: Brotherhood of St. Moses Black, 1997), 29.

was possible because of their willingness to receive everyone who came. Laura Swan gives a look at the mindset of the early desert ascetics mind when a guest came, “Although solitude was deeply valued and actively cultivated, the desert ascetic received all guests with a deep spirit of hospitality. With the guest, Christ was received.<sup>73</sup> They showed that it’s not about completely shutting the world out; it’s about how people engage and sees the things that are going on around them.

In a place that was most unexpected, the desert fathers and mothers were experiencing something amazing in the desert. While living in the desert they would find that springs and vegetation would take place.<sup>74</sup> This was also what was a part of people wanting to come and learn from these men and women. It was their connection to God that not only an impact on their own lives but on the lives of others. These where men and women who had a incarnational flow. Their time with God impacted both the spiritual and physical plane.

When I examine the life of these desert fathers and mothers and how they realized they were in a spiritual fight, I wonder how many people realize they are in a spiritual fight today? “Hurry is a spiritual issue.”<sup>75</sup> The desert fathers and mothers in my mind

---

<sup>73</sup> Swan, Laura. *Forgotten Desert Mothers, The: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women*, (New York/Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 2001), 25-26. Kindle Edition.

<sup>74</sup> Altschul, Paisius, *An Unbroken Circle: Linking Ancient African Christianity to the African-American Experience*, (St. Louis: Brotherhood of St. Moses Black, 1997), 30-31

<sup>75</sup> Jones, Kirk Byron. *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down*, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 55. Kindle Edition.

withdrew to engage the spiritual battle. To me, there is no better example of this than Jesus himself.

### Jesus and The Idea of Sabbath Shalom

Before I talk about Jesus' example of withdrawing to engage, I want to discuss the context that surrounded his understanding of going away to pray. Jesus was a Jew who would have practiced Judaism in his lifetime. This context shaped the way he viewed the world and engaged with it. Abraham Heschel says that "Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time."<sup>76</sup> One of my questions at the beginning of this chapter was what are Christians doing with time? Jesus grew up in a tradition that took time seriously and would have understood time as holy. Heschel also states that the first thing that God makes holy is time.

It is, indeed, a unique occasion at which the distinguished word *qadosh* is used for the first time: in the Book of Genesis at the end of the story of creation. How extremely significant is the fact that it is applied to time: "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy." ... The mythical mind would expect that, after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place—a holy mountain or a holy spring—whereupon a sanctuary is to be established. Yet it seems as if to the Bible it is holiness in time, the Sabbath, which comes first.<sup>77</sup>

Following Jesus' example of slowing down starts with this context of the holiness of time that is found in the Sabbath. Keeping with the creation story, Heschel begins to speak about how the ancient rabbis saw that God's work was not complete on the sixth day but on the seventh day when God created *menuha* which is rest.<sup>78</sup> The world was still without

---

<sup>76</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath (FSG Classics)*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 17-18. Kindle Edition.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

shalom until God created *menuha*. Jesus would have understood shalom as not only peace as it is popularly known, but also as wholeness. Barry Jones says, “The nuances contained in this single Hebrew word require a cluster of English terms to adequately represent it: wholeness, harmony, flourishing, delight, fulfillment.”<sup>79</sup> Jesus would have seen the Sabbath shalom as a foretaste of eternal shalom with God. Jones quotes Jurgen Moltmann, who says, “The Sabbath is itself the presence of eternity in time, and a foretaste of the world to come.”<sup>80</sup> Jesus adds to this conversation about slowing down an understanding of Sabbath shalom. Jesus kept the Sabbath because he understood it was a gift from God for his people. It was a way for believers to experience eternity in time. Jones says,

To practice Sabbath is to practice shalom, to rehearse the way things are supposed to be. Weekly Sabbath keeping is a rhythm of remembrance and anticipation—looking back to creation and ahead to the renewal of all things. As we practice Sabbath we live into the vision of God.<sup>81</sup>

### Jesus and Contemplation

Jesus understanding of sabbath shalom is the reason he is the example of a contemplative that all should follow. There are two images of contemplation that come to mind when talking about Jesus. The Gospels show Jesus as someone who flows at his own speed. The rhythm never causes him to move faster than he would like. One story that shows Jesus moving at his own pace is in John 8:1-11 the story of the woman caught

---

<sup>79</sup> Jones, Barry D. *Dwell*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 34. Kindle Edition.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

in adultery. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees wanted him to answer their questions, but Jesus started to write in the dust with his finger. He only answered them when he was ready at his own pace. If Jesus the Word Incarnate flowed at his own pace than those who are supposed to be the manifestation of Jesus on earth today should also have His pace. If followers of Christ are having adverse effects on their life because of the spiritual issue of hurry they must not be following the example of Jesus. There are a few things that are very important contemplative practices for believers to manifest in the world today that Jesus showed in the Gospels. An Incarnational flow must involve stillness, the ability to withdraw to engage, and a sustainable pace.

It is Jones who brings up the point of the power of stillness and learning that stillness from the example of Jesus. “Jesus’ frequent practice of stillness and solitude shows he fully accepted such practices as a way to know God more deeply. Stillness was integral to Jesus’ deepening relationship with and commitment to the one he comfortably referred to as “Father.”<sup>82</sup> If stillness was integral to Jesus, it must also be integral for those who are manifestation of Christ. There are many benefits that come with being still before, during, or after the end of the day’s work. The Gospels show Jesus having moments of stillness. Mark 1:35 says that Jesus went to a deserted place to pray in the morning when it was still dark. I mentioned earlier a moment in which Jesus drew on the ground when people were asking him a question, I believe that was a moment of stillness of the soul. In Matthew 14:23, after Jesus sent the crowds away it says that at the evening he went to the mountain and was alone. Jesus understood the benefits of stillness.

---

<sup>82</sup> Jones, Kirk Byron. *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down*. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 54. Kindle Edition.



Thurman believes that in stillness “WE must find sources of strength and renewal for our own spirits, lest we perish.”<sup>83</sup> Without stillness one is left open to the twenty-four seven cares of this world that will exhaust the person until there is no strength. Jesus was able through stillness to show how to discern what the will of God is and how to receive God. Contemplative practice of stillness puts people in the same position.

In practicing stillness, Jesus was withdrawing to be able to engage the culture he lived in. Jesus was not withdrawing to the point that he did not live with people. Jesus was actively engaged in everyday activities. The Word became flesh and truly lived. However, Jesus had moments of alone time with God before he actively engaged others. Holmes discusses the flow of Jesus withdrawing and engaging that he modeled during the rhythms of his time.

From the beginning, Jesus' ministry modeled the interplay between prophetic utterance, public theology, and intense spiritual renewal. He launches his three-year ministry from the desert wilderness... After an intense time of fasting, testing, and submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit, Jesus returns ready to fulfill his calling. These rhythms of activism and contemplation, engagement and withdrawal resonate throughout his life.<sup>84</sup>

This points towards the importance of being able to withdraw to have contemplative moments before someone enters the day. This is also a reminder that incarnational living requires both engagement and withdrawal. There is no incarnational flow without the two.

---

<sup>83</sup> Thurman, Howard. *Deep Is the Hunger*, (Ravenio Books, 2016), Loc 1863. Kindle Edition.

<sup>84</sup> Holmes, Barbara A. *Joy Unspeakable*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), Loc 435-438). Kindle Edition.

### Communal Contemplative Practices

In each of the active contemplative examples of desert fathers and mothers and Jesus, there is the connection between contemplation and community. The desert fathers and mothers in their withdrawal still formed community and Jesus withdrew for time with God's preparation for his encounters with community. In the African American context, community is important. "Communal bonds among Black men and women appear stronger than any other group in the United States. These socioreligious group ties are a significant indicator of the importance of community in the African American context."<sup>85</sup> That is why Holmes' view of communal contemplation in the Black church is important for this conversation. "Communal contemplation is richer than the immediacy of personal experience because the experience, the story, the event is subjected to the gaze of both the individual and the community."<sup>86</sup> Holmes further states,

Africana worship experiences are contemplative because they create an atmosphere for communal listening and responsiveness to the manifestations of God, they impact the ethos and value system of a community, and they heal infected social and psychic wounds.<sup>87</sup>

In the Black church communal contemplation involves the congregational singing, congregational dance/shout, scripture reading, preaching, and forms of call and response. The concept of communal contemplation in the Black church is an uncovering of

---

<sup>85</sup> Dash, Michael. Jackson, Jonathan. Stephen, Rasor. *Hidden Wholeness*, (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1997), 82.

<sup>86</sup> Holmes, Barbara A. *Joy Unspeakable*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), Loc 52-53). Kindle Edition

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc 1085-1086

contemplative practices that have been overlooked. It also makes contemplative practices reachable in realist ways that have been taking place that some might have missed.

### Contemplative Practices

From my studying, I have found that there are many different individual contemplative practices. There are different contemplative practices that work better for different cultures and context. Each person is going to have to experiment with different contemplative practices to see what better helps establish an incarnational flow for the day. In her article, “Soulfulness as an Orientation to Contemplative Practice,” Shelly Harrel states “It is important to avoid imposing generic practices that lack thoughtful consideration of the dynamics of culture and context.”<sup>88</sup> In order to make sure that participants are fully engaged in contemplative practices I believe it is best to examine different processes that will help individuals find their flow. Ken Shigematsu discusses the rule of life that is used by contemplatives. This is not a common concept in my context but still serves as a helpful term.

The word rule actually comes from the Greek word that means “trellis.” A trellis is a support system for a vine or plant that enables it to grow upward and bear fruit. For a grapevine to produce good grapes it must have a trellis to support and guide its growth or it will slump to the ground. When this happens the fruit tends to rot before it ripens. Grapevines in the wild will use just about anything — a tree or even a rock—as a trellis. It is part of their nature to seek structure.<sup>89</sup>

Shigematsu realizes that the word rule is not very inviting for those who are not familiar with monastic life. “A rule of life is simply a rhythm of practices that empowers

---

<sup>88</sup> Harrel, Shelly, “Soulfulness as an orientation to contemplative practices,” 2018.

<sup>89</sup> Shigematsu, Ken. *God in My Everything*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 21. Kindle Edition.

us to live well and grow more like Jesus by helping us experience God in everything.”<sup>90</sup>

The rule of life is aiming to help the participant see God in every area of life. There are the commonly known spiritual disciplines such as prayer, scripture reading, solitude, and meditating that are modes to participate in the rule of life.

Jones gives a contemplative practice that has a name that would seem more easily accepted. I spoke earlier about Jones’ Morning B.R.E.W., which is a contemplative practice he shares for use. It stands for being still, receiving God’s love, embracing my personhood, and welcoming the day.”<sup>91</sup> Many people start off their day with a cup of coffee so the term morning brew is less intimidating. Jones gives different elements for the participant to engage in during the practice but allows freedom to rearrange and sometimes not finish the whole practices if one stays on one aspect of it the whole time. There is the ability to experiment with different variations to see what helps establish an incarnational flow.

Lastly, to be more orienting for the Black church when it comes to contemplative practices there are some who use the word soul. “The language of soul is not new but has been around for thousands of years. The African American community has used soul in song, communal language, poetry, and so on.”<sup>92</sup> Harrel coined the term soulfulness to be

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.,18

<sup>91</sup> Jones, Kirk Byron. *Morning B.R.E.W. : A Divine Power Drink For Your Soul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2005), 100. Kindle Edition..

<sup>92</sup> Peacock, Barbara L. *Soul Care in African American Practice* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 72. Kindle Edition.

culturally and contextually sensitive in introducing contemplative practices. Harrel gives her working definition for soulfulness.

Soulfulness is the quality of experiencing life in a deeply connected and connecting way, and enlivened inner attunement that illuminates authentic lived experience and radiates into outer expression. It is an “interconnected aliveness” that is often experienced as a resonating, liberating, life-enhancing, spiritually-infused energy of deep connectivity and inspired expression. Soulfulness is further conceptualized as an empowered and empowering energy comprised of four elements: essence, experience, expression, and engagement.<sup>93</sup>

### Passive Contemplation God Showed Up

Active contemplation is making the effort to encounter God daily. Passive contemplation is God showing up. Merton says this about passive contemplation “When Christ says, “I will manifest myself to him,” it means that the “activity” is on the side of the Lord, and that the one who contemplates the divine presence is in no position to bring about its manifestation by any effort of his own.”<sup>94</sup> I believe that in being active it is opening yourself up to have that passive encounter with God. Barbara Peacock uses a quote from Howard Thurman on prayer that I believe also fits for passive contemplation. “Prayer is not only the participation in communication with God in the encounter of religious experience, but it is also the “readying” of the spirit for such communication.”<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Harrel, Shelly, 2018. “Soulfulness as an orientation to contemplative practices: Culture, Liberation, and Mindful Awareness” *The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry*, 5(1),

<sup>94</sup> Merton, Thomas; Shannon, William H. *The Inner Experience*, (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012), 57. Kindle Edition.

<sup>95</sup> Peacock, Barbara L. *Soul Care in African American Practice*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 135. Kindle Edition.

Active contemplative moments are readying participants for those encounters during the day when God just shows up.

The Rhythm of the world does not seem to be slowing down anytime soon. The cure to the face pace world is an Incarnational flow. The flow is slowing down enough to withdraw with active contemplative practices for encounter with God for His people. It is engaging the world with the peace you received from that encounter. It is also being ready for the passive contemplative moments where God shows up and empowers you during the day.

## CHAPTER 4

## BE STILL

“I’LL HANDLE ALL OF YOUR CARES... BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM  
GOD”<sup>96</sup>

Our project started during the season of Lent. On Ash Wednesday, I presented what our church was going to do for Lent, incorporating our project. Our focus was to slow down to find stillness in our soul so God could in return pour into us an incarnational flow. During the second week of the project, there was a global pandemic that stopped our church from meeting in person. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in March, with aid from trustees our church went from in-person meetings to only virtual meetings. This move was in hopes of keeping all our members safe from the virus. We realized that if we kept the church doors open, our seniors who were most susceptible to the virus would not stay home and be safe. The pandemic changed a few things during the project.

Meeting in person at the church was the first thing that I had planned to do during the project that had to be changed. The church service on Sunday mornings went from in person to on Zoom. I chose Zoom over having a service on Facebook for a few reasons. First, many of my senior members and some of my middle-aged members did not have a Facebook page; therefore, they could not watch our worship service on Facebook Live. Second, interacting with one another was part of the project. I thought that Zoom would

---

<sup>96</sup> Greene, Travis. Be Still. Provident Label Group LLC, 2017, Accessed 2017.  
<https://www.metrolyrics.com/be-still-lyrics-travis-greene.html>

be the best option to facilitate this piece of the project because the members would be able to see and communicate with one another despite not being able to get together in person. Lastly, I wanted to focus on the church family during this difficult time and give them the opportunity to invite others to worship with us as they interact with people during the week.

My intentions were to have the church focus on Afrocentric Christian contemplation. These events were going to include prayer service, and baptism on Resurrection Sunday. The Resurrection baptisms had to be placed on hold because of the pandemic. The prayer services were conducted, but were moved to Zoom instead of in person.

The music ministry could not sing songs from the playlist of music that I had put together for the project, but we played the songs during the beginning of Bible study. Also, there was supposed to be dancing to the songs on the playlist, but we were unable to do that as well.

The last part of the project that was changed was the small group gatherings after worship services with the class leaders. We didn't know how to work breakout rooms because using Zoom full time was new to us. After using Zoom for a while we have since learned how to do breakout rooms and have different meetings at once as a church.

#### Survey:

There was a pre-survey to examine the members' practice of spiritual disciples, the amount of anxiety and burnout members were facing, seeing God in their everyday life, and being in a hurry.



### One Minute Prayer:

The first part of the project was our weekday prayer service. The prayer service is called One Minute Prayer hosted on our church Facebook page. There members were able to join in the morning before they went to work or just before the start of their day. Reverend Tiffany Morrison, one of the local ministers in our church, prayed our first One Minute Prayer after the introduction of the project. It was called "Make Prayer A Priority." During the One Minute Prayer service, we purposely spoke about slowing down in the mornings. The One Minute Prayer centered on praying and reflecting on different metaphors, life situations, and scriptures to drive home the point of slowing down and being intentional about how we use our time. Along with slowing down, a few of the prayer services focused on peace and protection because the pandemic was causing great anxiety in our congregation.

The One Minute Prayer is usually well attended by members of the church. This prayer done at 8:30 was also important in case there were members who rushed out the house that morning without spending any time with God. It was also a way for us to include the community in our slowing down.

### Bible Study:

On March 3, 2020, we started our Bible study on slowing down and finding a flow. The church has two Bible study groups. One is held on Tuesdays at noon. Usually, more seniors attend that study. Another Bible study is held on Wednesday evenings with a younger group of people who might be at work at noon on Tuesdays. During the lessons, I used PowerPoint presentations to ensure that the students could grasp what was being taught. The first two Bible studies during the project were done in the church.

Because of the pandemic, we moved the Bible studies online after the first two sessions. At the first two Bible Studies in the church, I was able to do a few things differently than I could do online as we were adjusting to using more technology. First, to start the in-person Bible study, I played a song from my project's playlist. The first week was a song by Jonathan McReynolds called "Make Room." In the second week of in-person Bible study, we listened to the song "Sweet Hour of Prayer" sung by Anthony Brown and Group Therapy. These songs played before the lesson to intentionally help center the students before the class. We talked about how sitting and listening to the song made them feel. For the night group, many of them had just come from work all day and it was the first time they were able to catch their breath. One of the other very impactful parts of this project was the experiment that the Bible study was able to do. To show how much of a hurry people are in, I had each person close their eyes, sit quietly, and raise their hand when a minute and a half had passed. The third week of Bible study is when we had to transition to online learning together. Transitioning to online Bible study allows more people to join. During the first online lesson, we talked about being intentional about waking up. At the second lesson, we talked about things that we can do when we wake up to be in tune with what God is doing. The last studies focused on the connection of slowing down and community, and spiritual disciplines.

#### Sunday Morning Worship:

Another part of the project was Sunday morning worship service together. The first worship service which took place during the project was on March 1, 2020. We were able to do this worship service and the next in person. The worship services for the rest of

the project took place on Zoom. The ministers participated by leading in scripture reading and prayer during the service. Members were encouraged to have their camera on so that the church could still fellowship by seeing one another. This was also helpful during the worship service to see people singing and responding to the sermon physically. To make up for being muted during the service to be able to hear many of the congregation used the chat function on Zoom to be able to have call and response. Moments in the service where the congregation would talk to their neighbor sitting next to them were now done in the chat. The church members didn't have hymn books at home so we started making PowerPoint slides with the words for hymns. I also started to make some PowerPoint slides for sermons. Because of the pandemic, we were not able to do Baptism and the Lord's Supper together as intended. I know some churches were doing the Lord's Supper online, but the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church gave word for us not to do the Lord's supper online.

#### Best Temple:

On Saturday, March 21, 2020, the church started the Best Temple workouts online. Best Temple is a ministry in our church that focuses on getting members active and taking care of their body. In the project, the mental health of congregants was important and exercise was part of helping people who were stuck at home take care of themselves. These activities worked on both physical and mental aspects. They were initially scheduled to take place on Saturdays where we could participate in person at the church, but because of conducting services online, the ministry decided to take a break during their workdays and do an online workout together on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 1 p.m. The workouts involved dancing and walking. It was our hope that even during the

Best Temple workouts people would still have moments of time with God. It was the flow of withdraw to engage. People were taking a moment away from work to exercise and then would go back. The workouts took place on Zoom and the best temple coordinator choose what walks the group would do.

#### Liturgy of the Ordinary

During the first Bible study, we talked about God being everywhere using Tish Warren’s book, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*. The church was given a homework assignment to look intentionally at their daily routines and examine how they see God in them. Each person who attended Bible study came back the following week and provided an update on where they saw God during their day and in the ordinary activities in which they participate.

#### Morning B.R.E.W.

The church was instructed during the second week of online Bible study on the Morning B.R.E.W.,<sup>97</sup> which is a spiritual discipline provided by author Kirk Byron Jones. Each person was instructed to practice the morning brew every day for the rest of the project. While they were practicing the morning brew, I also gave them instructions to write down what they felt during the morning brew and how they felt it impacted their days. The Morning B.R.E.W. encourages participants to participate in “Being still, receiving God's love, embracing my personhood, and welcoming the day.”<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Jones, Kirk Byron. *Morning B.R.E.W. : A Divine Power Drink For Your Soul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2005), 100. Kindle Edition..

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Loc 100

### Prayer Services

Along with the One Minute prayer service that we held every weekday, I wanted the church to come together for a prayer meeting in person. As previously stated, the closing of the church doors made this impossible to do in person, but the church had prayer services during the project on Zoom and Facebook Live. There was a prayer service on Facebook Live during one Saturday morning after losing one of our church members. My wife and I led this prayer service. Most memorable was when the church trustees canceled their board meeting to have prayer for one of our members and their family who was suffering from COVID-19. It was an impromptu move of the Spirit, and the church came together and prayed. The members of the trustee board led this prayer service. There was also a men's prayer service which took place every Tuesday evening.

### Be Still and Know Meditation

The church incorporated meditation to prepare for our private meditation at home using a practice in the book titled, *In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church*.<sup>99</sup> The chapter that highlighted the practice was written by Jonathan Jackson Jr. On Sunday morning, the church sat for a few moments of silence together and then started to repeat, "Be still and know that I am God." We took out one word until we got to the end of the meditation only saying "Be." This was a meditation that members could practice to know God's presence.

---

<sup>99</sup> Wimberly, Anne E. Streaty; Parker, Evelyn. *In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), Loc 2989. Kindle Edition.

### Small Groups & Gatherings

Each member was supposed to meet with their class leader in person after Sunday morning worship. This plan was disrupted by COVID-19 protocols. Instead, small groups and gatherings happened in the following ways. First, class leaders had to get involved differently than I anticipated in the beginning of the project. Class leaders are sub pastors in the AME Zion church with the responsibility to keep in contact with all of the members of their class in the local church which is St. Charles. Class leaders called their members during the weeks of the project to check on them and inform me of each member's conditions. Second, we took time after every worship service to unmute so that the congregation could say hello to one another. This took place before worship and after worship. Third, the church participated in driving by a member's home during the loss of their loved ones. Fourth, we took time after a Sunday morning worship service to stay on afterward to discuss as a church how the project impacted our lives. This meeting served as the class leader's meeting that was supposed to happen every week in person during the original plans.

### Music

During the first week of the project the praise and worship team along with musicians sang the song, "Make Room." The second week we spent the beginning of our worship service singing together. Usually after the praise and worship team sang we would move forward with the order of service in the bulletin. However, the second week for about thirty minutes of the service we just spent time singing together. After the

second week, the choir was unable to meet and rehearse music together during the project. Because of this, I went to YouTube and started a playlist called "Pastor's Playlist." On this playlist, I added songs that I wanted them to listen to during the project as well as other encouraging gospel songs for the season. I posted this list online and shared it with other members who did not have Facebook. The members were encouraged to listen to the playlist. During the online worship, we had the praise and worship time sing songs and the minister of music would play a hymn for the congregation to sing along with on mute.

#### Contextual Advisory Team

I first went over what the project was with my team during a zoom meeting before the project started to get ideas about survey and ways to implicate the project. We had another meeting the first night of lent to go over the survey and to prepare for the beginning of the project. I talked with members of the group off and on during the project to make sure that we were going in the right direction. Before the last two Bible studies, I had the last meeting with the group. During this meeting, it was expressed that some thought slowing down felt like procrastinating, and that I should do some more teaching about what it is and what it is not. I followed up this meeting by doing the Bible study lesson, "It's not about you."

#### Engagement

There were a lot of things that had to be moved around because of the pandemic. However, for the most part, the church was still able to engage meaningfully in the project. The church had most of our members online during worship. I believe that much

of the practices that we conducted were of great importance considering the environment we were challenged with during the implementation of this project with the pandemic.



## CHAPTER 5

### I'VE GOT A RIVER OF LIFE

#### “FLOWING OUT OF ME!”

After doing this project with the church, there were amazing results and lots of learning to examine. One of the things that enhanced the project was the pandemic happening in the beginning of the process. People were already dealing with different issues at the beginning of the project and the pandemic only added to the stress level of members of the congregation. That made this project even more important in the church because of the extra levels of stress on people who are already dealing with health complications from stress that could not be ignored. I have examined the outcomes of the different tools we used as a church to participate in the project. I have also examined the implications this project has for St. Charles AME Zion, myself, and the theme of the program pastoral identity and prophetic fire in fluid times.

#### Difficulty of Slowing Down

One of the things that this project uncovered was just how ingrained hurrying is in people's lives. A great portion of the project went to discussing slowing down more than contemplation and spiritual disciplines. Even when we were getting close to the end of the project, my committee spoke to me about giving further guidance about slowing down and its implications in the life of those who are living fast pace. I had to take time to teach a lesson that slowing down was not procrastination or running away; it was preparing to engage in the task that is ahead of the person. When the COVID-19 pandemic started, I first thought that people were going to be able to slow down easier

because of not being able to go out like they once could. I soon realized that it was not the case. In chapter 2, I give the data for people who suffer from burnout working from home. During the project, we did not realize the problem that people were going to be facing working from home. People started feeling like they were working harder from home than they had at their offices. What I thought was going to slow people down physically, sped them up mentally.

We learned during the project that slowing down to have contemplative practices is a physical and mental challenge. It was one thing for me to tell members to slow down in the morning and not check their phones before they spend some time with God; it was another thing for them to have the pandemic around them and in the news everyday causing greater levels of anxiety.

I also think that the addiction to hurry as Jones calls it is so prevalent in today's culture that this project is not something that you can do once and hope that people learn everything they need for the rest of their lives. This is a subject that needs attention every year. I realized how easy it is to jump right back into the regular routine of waking up and picking up the phone to see all the things that are going on. I have decided that every year during lent I'm going to have lessons and moments where we focus on slowing down and encountering God for the flow that will sustain for the week. I believe I learned that if churches are going to be able to help individuals who are struggling with the fast pace rhythm of the world, they are going to have to be intentional about the practice of slowing down.

### What the church has to offer

Just from the response and conversations that I had with people during the project I was able to see that people are dealing with so many things every day. Over half of the congregation that took part in a survey said that they were sometimes or often burned out and less than 25% of those who answered said it was seldom or never. This project showed that the church has something to offer those who are having a difficult time managing all that is going on in their lives. For those who were burned out and for those who felt that the busyness of life was getting in the way of their spiritual development, this project showed that Christianity still has something to offer them beyond just Sunday. We learned that God would show up anywhere we are; we just had to slow down for a moment to see Him. In the response that I received, members said that they found peace during their time of slowing down and stillness which calmed their anxieties and helped them get through the day. Thurman says, “The first step in the discovery of sources of strength and renewal is to develop the art of being still, physical and mental cessation from churning. This is not all, but it is the point at which we begin.”<sup>100</sup> We found that these moments of stillness worked best in the morning, but were also available to us any time.

Such periods may be snatched from the greedy demands of one’s day’s work; they may be islanded in a sea of other human beings; they may come only at the end of the day, or in the quiet hush of the early morning. We must, each one of us, find his own time and develop his own peculiar art of being quiet.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> Thurman, Howard. *Deep Is the Hunger*. (Ravenio Books, 2016), Loc 1874. Kindle Edition.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., Loc1868-1874

Thurman's words show that there are moments in the day that one develops quietness in which God can show up and renew the individual.

The church has to offer people a moment of rest. I recall during a Bible study lesson at the beginning of the project that there was a member who reflected on how it felt to set in class and listen to a song with their eyes closed in meditation before we started the teaching. At first, the member felt tense and in a rush for the teaching to get started. But then slowly realized that it was the first time that she had slowed down and rested or took a moment the entire day. The church has the ancient practice of contemplation to offer this project was a reminder that it needs to be reclaimed. In my context, quiet is not always the first thing that people might think about, but I have found that during this project, the church was able to feel God's presence during the loud shouts and the quiet moments because each were contemplative.

#### Diverse Contemplative Practices

One of the other discoveries during this project was the diversity of contemplative practices. There are so many different practices for someone to take part in that suits them and helps with their engaging God for the incarnational flow. It was so easy to say at the initial thought process of this project, "the church is going to pray, read scripture, and worship." What we found out was that there were so many other opportunities to encounter God during the day that gave us a flow of peace to continue engaging. One of the most interesting ways I saw the congregation connecting with God was during the Best Temple workouts on zoom. It went from planning the workout on Saturdays to actually having the workout Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. This was not a "normal"

spiritual discipline; however, it was a way where the congregation was encountering God and one another during the day. It was a form of withdrawal to engage. If anyone else is doing work, they are going to have an open world of possibilities for their congregation to encounter God and one another in contemplative practices.

One member shared a story about going outside and God speaking in nature. While on the way to visit family the person looked and saw one bird. Then after that looked up again and saw the same bird. The member took it as a sign and because we were doing the project slowed down and looked up what that type of bird represented. This particular bird was a reminder that you are not alone. Merton does discuss natural contemplation. This is when you are able to have contemplative encounters with God by gazing at nature.<sup>102</sup> Slowing down gave members the opportunity to see the many contemplative moments around them. This member that had the contemplative encounter with God and shared the flow from the experience with others on social media. The post was a reminder to all those who saw it that they were not alone during the pandemic. The post also challenged others to let people know that they were not alone. The member, who is not a preacher, seemed to be filled with a prophetic fire and it flowed to others. Other members also touched on moments that they were able to see God when gazing at nature. One member talked about walking outside and praying without the care of anyone seeing. There was another member who said the encounter with God took place every morning when the blinds were opened.

---

<sup>102</sup> Merton, Thomas; Shannon, William H. *The Inner Experience*, (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012), 67. Kindle Edition.

There was another thing that we learned from slowing down and looking at nature. That was how the pollution went down when everything was slowed down in major cities. “The early days of the Covid-19 lockdowns were seen as an environmental marvel. With fewer commuters and empty highways, residents of cities from Los Angeles to New Delhi witnessed clear blue skies and mountain views that had long been obscured by smog.”<sup>103</sup> This occurrence in nature reminded me of something Thurman said in *Meditations of The Heart*, “Sometimes the quieting of one’s spirit in prayer exposes the area of sensitiveness to God’s spirit which is submerged by much traffic.”<sup>104</sup> I started to think if cities that were used to having smog over head every day were able to experience blue skies what would happen to believers who allow themselves to slow down. I will discuss it later in this chapter, but slowing down is what gave the church and me as a pastor clarity of our call. I believe it was covered by lots of traffic.

I believe the important lesson we learned was not to try to find a one size fits all glove for the contemplative process. People are dynamic and no one is the same. Some contemplative practices will engage them more and some less. What was great to learn was that what works for a person isn’t wrong. If it is walking in the park or dancing that helps to put someone in an encounter with God for an exchange of peace and flow for the day that is ok. It is just as valuable of a moment as someone sitting quietly in their home

---

<sup>103</sup> Jason Plautz, “Did Covid Lockdowns Really Clear the Air?”, 3/5/2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-21/what-covid-lockdowns-did-for-urban-air-pollution>.

<sup>104</sup> Thurman, Howard. *Meditations of the Heart*. (Boston: Beacon, 2014), 21. Kindle Edition.

listening for God to speak to them. The means by which we have the encounter with God is less important. What is important is if we have had an encounter at all.

I never thought that dancing was a contemplative practice. I have watched people dance in church for years and always thought about the emotional element of it but never the thought that after someone has gazed at God it has caused their body to want to testify about an encounter with the Lord. I was in the house one day during the project doing a dance workout to a gospel song that was playing. When the song started talking about victory I started dancing harder, and then I started to open my mouth and thank God. I was having a passive contemplative moment. In the middle of the day, The Holy Spirit took hold of me and I had to respond with my body. When the church slowed down for a moment, we were able to see some many contemplative moments to participate in and it has helped the congregation.

### African Spirituality

I also think from the Black church context that finding information about African spirituality and its relevance today in the church was important. Not many of the members of my congregation besides the clergy had any idea of the rich history of the desert fathers and mothers in north African and their impact on the monastic life. Looking into African spirituality also led to a clearer understanding of the communal aspect of the project. It gave way to looking for different contemplative practices that fit the context of the church. It was liberating to read Holmes discussing that the Black church has something to offer in the conversation of contemplation. Learning about communal contemplation was important because it gave definition to what can be seen in

many of the congregations of the Black church. I had one member of the congregation before the project get upset about me turning the church into a dancing church. Since the project and our discussions, I have seen the member's opinion on the matter change. For a long time, I thought that contemplative practices were about quiet and solitude. But because of the project we found that contemplative moments can be loud and be about community.

There are so many Black voices on slowing down, wellness, and contemplative practices. When I started this project, I was looking at authors who have great information to share about contemplative practices but do not share my context. During the project, I used their work, but it was eye opening to see the amount of authorship from Black writers on this subject and to be able to use their work. It was also interesting to see that even though they were authors of color, each of the writers I discussed in the work had different views. Looking at Thurman and Jones, they both share a focus on stillness of mind and body. Yet when I looked at the work of Holmes, she was interested in allowing the writer to see the gift of contemplative practices in communal context that is not as still in the body; incorporating dance, music, and other liturgical activities like the Lord's Supper and Baptism as contemplative practices. Again, this shows the wide range of possibilities for the church when it comes to contemplation.

### Power of Communal Contemplation

For all my years of being in the church, I had never heard of communal contemplation. When I was growing up, we talked about spiritual disciplines, but we did not even call them that. It was just conversations about going to your prayer closet,



fasting, and reading scripture. The conversation mostly focused on what you could do individually to make sure that you go to heaven one day. For anyone who looks into this work they will see what a huge powerful tool some churches have been missing in communal contemplation. I did not fully grasp that when I told the whole congregation to slow down that it would begin a communal contemplative practice for the next month and a half. The whole church was now participating in contemplation together and were seeing things and each other differently than before.

I found that during the pandemic when we were losing members and when anxiety was at a high level, the members were slowing down and encouraging one another. I had some people say since worship service is virtual that people would not be willing to be on for longer than an hour or even shorter than that. During this process, I had members that didn't want to get off and when we prepared the worship service we did not rush or cut things out. We continued to slow things down participating in the contemplative moments together.

We found how important we were to one another. With the pandemic closing the church doors, it slowed our pace enough for us to realize how much we mean to each other. One of the reflections I received from members was them expressing how they made it through the pandemic was the communication between church family members. Members were slowing down and taking the time to contact one another. One member indicated that she had never talked to as many members as she has now. The process of slowing and going through the pandemic together has made the church closer than when it was an in-person experience.

One of the major moments of seeing this in the project was on Palm Sunday. After losing our first member to COVID, the church had a contemplative moment during the worship service. Thurman, in his book *Disciplines of the Spirit*, discusses how it's raw life experience that brings us to encounters with God. One of the ways Thurman believes we have that encounter is suffering. The community was suffering from the loss. Contemplation allows you to slow down enough to feel others pain. It was because of that collective suffering that we had a collective encounter with God. After the sermon was preached, people began to unmute themselves and praise God. There were so many people unmuting I stopped trying to mute and let them participate in that moment of withdrawing together as a church to prepare to continue engaging the reality around us. This project uncovered the contemplative moments that our church had been overlooking all along.

More evidence of the power of communal contemplation was the board of trustees during the project. Every first Monday of the month the board of trustees meets to discuss the church. During the project the board was scheduled to have a meeting. However, before the meeting could take place that day the trustees started discussing in their group chat that they wanted to turn their business meeting into a prayer meeting that day because of the members who were sick with the virus and those who were in the hospital. The board wanted to take a moment to slow down and pray. They opened the prayer meeting to the congregation, and we had almost forty videos up that night with people attending the prayer meeting on zoom. To put it into context, prayer meeting was usually poorly attended but this was well attended by my congregation.

### Withdraw to Engage

We uncovered that there is no such thing as holy burnout. “Contrary to popular behavior, God does not need our exhaustion. There is nothing holy about running ourselves into the ground. There is nothing spiritual about being all things to all people as soon as possible.”<sup>105</sup> This was something that I also learned for myself. During the pandemic I couldn’t be all things to all people when they wanted it. I had to take my time and move at a pace that was sustainable. This practice was very important for those who work in the church who wear exhaustion like a badge of honor. Jesus showed that God does not need a person exhausted to use them. He just needs the person to be willing to spend some time with Him. It is not missing out on things when someone withdraws on the contrary it is gaining.

### We Were Missing Things

The contemplative moment helped us uncover the things that we had been missing when we were in a hurry during the day. It uncovered the ordinary places that God has been waiting to have an encounter with the church but we were moving too fast to see him. One example is when the congregation did the homework of finding the places that God has been that you have not noticed him. A member discussed with the church how she would go on a walk every day in the park. This day after we had the discussion about God being everywhere and looking for him in ordinary places she said that she realized the whole time she had been walking in the park that God had been

---

<sup>105</sup> Kirk Byron Jones. *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down*. (Valley Forge: Judson Press), 13. Kindle Edition.

trying to talk with her. This led to her even repenting for missing God all those times that she had walked. While this member realized that God was with her on the walks other members found that God was with them when they were preparing and cooking food, washing dishes, taking showers, brushing teeth, and even making the bed. In the routine of the day people were able to encounter God in ways that they had not before because of their slowing down to see God.

### Mental Health

This project also uncovered the connection between mental health and physical health. The congregation was able to realize the toll that hurrying had taken on their minds and their bodies. Our church had not had much conversation about the interconnectedness of the two before. The project uncovered the importance of our congregation not participating in spiritual bypassing which is "...the habit of using spiritual ideas and practices (i.e. the worship experience) to avoid facing unresolved emotional issues."<sup>106</sup> Our congregation realized that just like a doctor is needed for some sickness a therapist is needed for some mental health issues. Post project I have seen members get help from therapy. I believe that is one of the things that I could have taught better during the project: that slowing down and having contemplative moments can be aided by a therapist. There are some therapists who use the ancient practices that are not foreign to believers. I have found some Christian therapists who are excellent resources to aiding those who want to slow down, and provide the tools to be able to do so.

---

<sup>106</sup> Smith-Harris, Allashia; Middleton, Dominique. *HIDDEN: Mental Illness Hides Out in the Church*. (Seattle: Kindle Direct Publishing, 2020), Loc 445, Kindle Edition.

## Clarity of Our Call

One of the other things that slowing down did for the congregation was allow us to get clarity of what God was calling us to do in our community. With the pandemic happening during the project there were so many things up in the air about how the church would still be able to function during the pandemic. During the project, the congregation found out what space God wanted to carve out for us to be a part of. During the project, the pandemic did not cause us to become something that we were not. It was because of this project that there were different ministries that came about, along with existing ministries being rekindled. Chairpersons of different ministries that were not as active began to take the time to revisit their goals and make sure that they were centered around the church's mission. With everyone being home, it gave the ministries of the church an opportunity to collaborate and assist me with the needs of the church. A lot of reflection, brainstorming, and creativity sparked many of our ministry leaders. This brought new ways of teaching, engaging, and interaction between the members during different activities.

Because of the clarity the church had slowing down, and finding and incarnational flow different ministries were started following the project. The church started a "Let's Talk" Series. This series tackles the different issues that are affecting the world and contextually the things that are affecting people of color. The "Let's Talk" topics are chosen after slowing down enough to look at what is impacting the community. Other outcomes were our openness to discuss mental health in the church. Before the project I do not recall the congregation having any discussion about mental health but after the

project there has been intentional effort to make sure the church has teaching and having conversations about mental health.

### Jesus Behind Locked Doors

We realized what it was to be a church that gets behind locked doors. I had a senior member recently tell me that the church has been in my house more than ever. I was hoping that this project would invade the everyday life of the members of the congregation but didn't know that it would happen like it did. The practices that were discussed during Bible study for the second awakening were part of the way for the church to get into people's homes. That morning when you are taking time to speak to God, you are being renewed not just for yourself but for the community that you are a part of. Also, with the litany of the ordinary it was my hope that God would show up in all the different places of their life, especially in their homes. Then when the pandemic came the church now was in people's homes every day, we turned on our Zoom meeting. During the lockdown, I had to preach about the story of Jesus getting into the house when the door was locked, and it occurred to me that this is exactly what the church is supposed to do. The doors were locked but Jesus was still there. All the Zoom meetings, the telephone calls, and the encouraging text messages allowed our church to still be the church behind locked doors.

### You Do Not Find Flow

Flow is not something that you find; it is something that is lived. When I started this project, I was saying that we were going to find our flow. What we found out was

that flow was result of being in connection with the well of living water. Flow was streams of living water flowing out of us that we received during our time with the well of living water. The incarnation flow is something that you live into the rhythms God has around your life. It is a river that springs forth in the deserts of a person's life. Holmes claimed that maybe the desert is the place for renewal "If the desert is a place of renewal, transformation, and freedom, and if the heat and isolation served as a nurturing incubator for nascent monastic movements, one wonders if a desert experience is necessary to reclaim this legacy."<sup>107</sup> I believe she is correct people might not go into a physical desert but metaphorically there are still deserts for people to go into to receive a flow. I found that the flow we received from God during the project was water in the desert that brought vegetation to our community.

For my congregation, Zoom was the metaphorical desert. We would not have chosen to leave the building without the push from God during this season of the pandemic. I believe the push to Zoom was a push to the desert where the church reclaimed community. I stated previously how much the church connected during this project even without being in person. I saw so much growth in different members during this period. We had an agenda of what we were going to do during the project to try to manufacture a flow, but it was God slowing us down in His own way that we were able to live into the flow every day.

---

<sup>107</sup> Holmes, Barbara A. *Joy Unspeakable*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), Loc 462-463). Kindle Edition.

## What I Learned About Myself

This project showed me that I needed to do a better job of setting boundaries for time to withdraw in order to engage. I realized during the project that there had been a lot of church work I was doing for everyone else but was not taking enough time to get poured into by God. Thurman warns about making sure that commitment does not confused with idolatry.

If the commitment in itself becomes more important than what I am committed to—or, in other words, if the means become more important than the end—then I am prepared to be quite blind to the other consequences. It is possible for a man to make an idol of commitment.<sup>108</sup>

It was a helpful reminder to make sure that my commitment was in the right place. During this project I recommitted to God more than I committed to the work. It is the commitment to God that will help me engage, yet I have to keep my commitments in that order which is to love God and love people. There were times before and during the project that I would wake up to phone calls and text messages of the work of the church. I had become accustomed to waking up and looking at my phone first thing in the morning, but the project reminded me of the importance of seeking God early. If I was going to set the boundaries of time that was for God, I had to respect them myself. If I didn't, how could I expect others to respect that boundary.

During this project, I learned about my own need for extra help to slow down. I was already dealing with anxiety before the pandemic and when it first started, I had to manage my anxiety, along with dealing with the anxiety of those in my congregation. Seeing the reality of the connectedness between my mental health and my physical health

---

<sup>108</sup> Thurman, Howard, *Disciplines of the Spirit*. (Richmond: Friends united press, 1963), 35.



was a breakthrough for me. I finally realized it was OK for me to take time to see someone who can help me find tools to aid me in slowing down. This project allowed me to be able to see the areas in my life that I struggled with for a long time. It allowed me to be honest with myself in the fact that I needed help.

Slowing down helped me to see the things that were ahead of me. It is hard to explain in an academic paper, but when I was slowing down and being still with God in the mornings, I was able to see things before they happened. I was having dreams and visions of things that would take place. During the early stages of the pandemic, I had a vision of my phone ringing with someone calling me to discuss their anxiety. Before I could open my eyes from my sleep that morning, I had a phone call from a member who feared the pandemic and wanted to talk with me. This was one moment, but there were several others as well. I was prepared for what I was going to face during the day from the time that I had been intentionally slowing down.

I learned that I had been stubborn about the use of technology to provide spiritual care for the congregation. I have had a member ask for years about doing something online for Bible study and I would casually do it but never made a full effort to create a virtual space for Bible study. I was so accustomed to Bible study being thought of as members making the extra effort to come to the church during the week. Even when there were days that attendance was low, we just kept on speeding along saying that people had to make an extra commitment. Then when the pandemic happened, and we had to move Bible study online I saw an increase in both Bible study groups. I realized at that point I had been not taking time to evaluate what things are working for the ministry and what things could be done differently to enhance the ministry. I believe this is something that

is taking place in other churches as well. It is easy to get caught in the work and not taking time to think and evaluating what ministry can do to be better. When I slowed down and looked at what was ahead of us, we decided that Bible study would stay virtual even when the church goes back to in-person worship. Along with Bible study, I had the opportunity to slow down and reevaluate other aspects of the church.

### Pastoral Identity and Prophetic Fire in Fluid Times

I believe that this project has everything to do with pastoral identity and prophetic fire. In regard to pastoral identity, I found that one can get so engrossed in the “doing” and not “being” that he or she loses who they are and will eventually have to slow down to find their identity. During this project I was able to sit down and think about who I am first before I am pastor and what does the person I am outside of my pastoral identity have to offer that portion of my life. In slowing down, I was able to fully understand the reason God placed me in this community. It was during the moments of me being still that all of the challenges of trying to please everyone as a pastor were released. I was able to sit in the bed and realized before I’m a pastor and I’m loved by God.

I divided pastoral identity into three different views in chapter 1 - prophet, priest, and sage. From the prophetic point of view, in regards to pastoral identity, this project was not only about slowing down but finding the incarnational flow that was needed to engage in the world. It was about slowing down enough to see what God’s desired action for the pastor was and the congregation. From the priestly point of view, I feel this project of slowing down has helped me better prepare for the congregation’s spiritual life. I have realized during this project it is not just about having a great Sunday for the

members, but it is about preparing a great spiritual foundation for them to cling to everyday of their lives. This project for pastoral identity allows pastors to make sure the church has something for the spiritual walk everyday and not just on Sunday. From a sagely perspective, the project was important because during the process of slowing down and spending time with seniors on phone calls, Zoom meetings, and prayer meetings, I was able to hear the stories of our congregation.

In the call of Isaiah, found in Isaiah chapter six it seems like he knows that God is calling him and when he is in God's presence, he says "I'm a man of unclean lips and I live with a people of unclean lips." God takes his guilt away and picks him to give His word to Israel. One of the things Isiah thought would disqualify him was being around the people. I believe it was this very thing that qualified him. Prophetic fire and pastoral identity for that matter are not found in a vacuum, but they are forged in community. Slowing down helps you be able to see those who God loves. This project was all about being able to engage the community with a divine flow from God. In order to have prophetic fire, there must be withdrawal time with God and also engaging time with the people He gives you the fire for. The two terms, Pastoral Identity and Prophetic Fire seem to be asking the questions: Who am I? and what do I do? These answers are found in the contemplative moments with God. Not just the individual still moments, but the communal contemplative moments with those God has called the pastor to engage.

The project is important as well to the concept of fluid times. As the rhythms of this world continue to play, the pastor will need to continue their ability to flow. I believe the pandemic has caused some pastors to be afraid of what is next for the church. I have seen some worried if people will come back or not. This project was all about being able

to flow regardless of what happens next. The time with God and different contemplative practices are all in preparation for living the incarnational flow for whatever is next in a person's life. "The Holy Spirit is in charge of liturgical preparation and homiletical proclamation. We are called to prepare diligently. But we must be open to risk leaving what we have prepared."<sup>109</sup> These are words from Otis Moss discussing improvisation in his book, *Blue Note Preaching*. This project showed just what he is talking about. One can prepare, but the Holy Spirit is in charge. Slowing down and taking that time with God everyday prepares you to be able to flow when fluid times change. The pandemic has changed some things about the church that we are still waiting to fully understand, but contemplative practices give us a peace needed for the days ahead to be able to take the risk of improvisation.

---

<sup>109</sup> Moss III, Otis. *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World*. (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2015), 58. Kindle Edition.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson Bernard E. "State of Black America. "Off Track: How COVID-19 Derailed Black Employment Gains." *State of Black America*. Accessed February 05, 2021. <https://soba.iamempowered.com/track-how-covid-19-derailed-black-employment-gains>.
- Altschul, Paisius. 1998. *An Unbroken Circle: Linking Ancient African Christianity to the African-American Experience*. St. Louis: Brotherhood of St. Moses Black.
- Brown, Jessica Young. 2020. *Making SPACE at the Well: Mental Health and the Church*. Valley Forge: Judson Press.
- Bryant-Davis Thema. 2020 "The Therapeutic Role of Contemplative Practice: Christian Mindfulness and Embodied Healing," (2020 integration symposium Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, CA, February 19, 2020).
- Carter, Shawn. 2010 2011. *Decoded*. New York: Spiegel & Grau.
- Casselmann, Ben. Cohen, Patricia. Hsu, Tiffany. 2020. "It's a Wreck': 3.3 Million File Unemployment Claims as Economy Comes Apart," *New York Times*. April 3. November 17, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/business/economy/coronavirus-unemployment-claims.html>.
- Charlamagne the God. 2019. *Shook One: Anxiety Playing Tricks on Me*. New York: Atria Books.
- Charles, H.B. Jr. 2014. *On Preaching: Personal & Pastoral Insights for the Preparation & Practice of Preaching*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.
- Cooper Lisa. "The Silver Lining in COVID-19's Dark Clouds." *State of Black America* February 5, 2021. <https://soba.iamempowered.com/silver-lining-covid-19%E2%80%99s-dark-clouds>.
- Cutler, Nancy. 2020. "East Ramapo: Majority of public school students considered chronically absent or at risk." *Lohud* October 22. November 17, 2020. <https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/rockland/2020/10/22/east-ramapo-students-often-absent-thousands-dont-have-chromebooks/6003324002/>.
- Cutler, Nancy. 2020. "Falco's Facebook controversy: Rockland Democrats weigh vote to demand sheriff resign." *Lohud*. August 3. February 15, 2021. <https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/rockland/2020/08/03/rockland-democratic-committee-weighs-demanding-sheriff-resign/3288284001/>.
- Dash, Michael. Jackson, Jonathan. Stephen, Rasor. 1997. *Hidden Wholeness*. Cleveland: United Church Press.
- Garen Staglin. 2020 "When Home Becomes the Workplace: Mental Health and Remote Work." *Forbes*. March 17. Accessed February 5, 2021.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/onemind/2020/03/17/when-home-becomes-the-workplace-mental-health-and-remote-work/?sh=66b0cd2e1760>.

- Gilbert, Kenyatta R. 2020. *Journey & Promise of African American Preach (Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling)*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Greene, Travis. Be Still. Provident Label Group LLC, 2017, Accessed 2017.  
<https://www.metrolyrics.com/be-still-lyrics-travis-greene.html>
- Greene, Travis. Respond. Provident Label Group LLC, 2019, Accessed March 30, 2021.  
<https://genius.com/Travis-greene-respond-lyrics>.
- Grosserode, Sophie. 2020. "East Ramapo teachers union calls for all schools to close until COVID numbers drop." *Lohud*. October 9. November 17, 2020.  
<https://www.lohud.com/story/news/education/2020/10/09/east-ramapo-union-calls-all-schools-close-during-covid-cluster/5936865002/>.
- Harrel, S. (2018). Soulfulness as an orientation to contemplative practices: Culture, Liberation, and Mindful Awareness. *The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry*.
- Henri J. M. Nouwen. 2013. *Discernment*. New York: HarperOne.
- Heschel, Abraham Joshua. 2005. *The Sabbath (FSG Classics)*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Holmes, Barbara A. 2004. *Joy Unspeakable*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Jones, Barry D. 2014. *Dwell*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- Jones, Kirk Byron. 2003. *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down*. Valley Forge: Judson Press.
- Jones, Kirk Byron. 2005. *Morning B.R.E.W. : A Divine Power Drink For Your Soul*. Minneapolis: Augsburg.
- Machon, E.J. 2020. "NY's job base is wrecked." *Rockland times*. May 25. November 17, 2020. <https://www.rocklandtimes.com/2020/05/25/nys-job-base-is-wrecked/>.
- McMickle, Marvin A. 2006. *Where Have All The Prophets Gone?: Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press.
- McReynolds, Jonathan. Make Room. Entertainment One US LP, 2018, Accessed March 30, 2021. <https://www.metrolyrics.com/make-room-lyrics-jonathan-mcreynolds.html>.
- Merton, Thomas; Shannon, William H. 2012. *The Inner Experience*. San Francisco: HarperOne.
- Moore, Chandler. Built for This. MoWorks, 2020, Accessed March 30, 2021.  
<https://muslyrics.com/lyrics/built-for-this-chandler-moore-ft-brian-moore-lyrics/>.
- Moss III, Otis. 2015. *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World*. Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.

- Plautz, Jason. 2020. "Did Covid Lockdowns Really Clear the Air?." *Bloomberg*. December 12. Accessed March 5 2021. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-21/what-covid-lockdowns-did-for-urban-air-pollution>.
- Peacock, Barbara L. 2020. *Soul Care in African American Practice*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- Shigematsu, Ken. 2013. *God in My Everything*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Simpson, Amy. 2014. "High Anxiety." *Christianity Today*. October 1. Accessed November 18, 2019. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2014/fall/simpson-high-anxiety.html>.
- Smith-Harris, Allashia; Middleton, Dominique. 2020. *HIDDEN: Mental Illness Hides Out in the Church*. Seattle: Kindle Direct Publishing.
- Sparkill New York. (n.d.). Retrieved from City Data : <http://www.city-data.com/city/Sparkill-New-York.html>
- Swan, Laura. 2001. *Forgotten Desert Mothers, The: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women*. New York/Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press.
- Sweet, Leonard. 2012. *I Am A Follower*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Sweet, Leonard. 2009. *So Beautiful*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook.
- Thurman, Howard. 2016. *Deep Is the Hunger*. Ravenio Books.
- Thurman, Howard, 1963. *Disciplines of the Spirit*. Richmond: Friends united press.
- Thurman, Howard. 2012. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Warren, Tish Harrison. 2016. *Liturgy of the Ordinary*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- Watikin, Ali. 2020 "Top E.R. Doctor Who Treated Virus Patients Dies by Suicide," *New York Times* April 29, 2020. Accessed December 1, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/27/nyregion/new-york-city-doctor-suicide-coronavirus.html>
- Weems, Rita. 1999. *Listening for God*. New York: Touchstone.
- Wimberly, Anne E. Streaty; Parker, Evelyn. 2002. *In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- (2020, June 12). Retrieved from New York State : <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/no-203-new-york-state-police-reform-and-reinvention-collaborative>

## APPENDIX A

### SERMONS

#### **Slow Down! You're Moving Too Fast!** **Sermon – Week 1**

##### **Intro – Let's Talk About Slowing Down**

- A car without gas
- Physically and mentally exhausted
- God wants to speak to you
- Slow down to prepare for where you are going
- It's hard to talk to someone who is in a rush
- People need God to use you but you are spiritually bankrupt

##### **Constant “Hurry” is destroying your spirit**

- Mary and Martha – Two women (One is burned out, the other at Jesus' feet)
- Martha is everywhere doing everything for everyone and hasn't been at the feet of Jesus for herself
- Martha let Jesus into her home, but not her heart.
- I want to slow down so I'm not in the house without God speaking to my heart
- I want to be “caught up” in God every day of the week
- Martha's work has become more important than her spiritual relationship with Jesus
- Martha asks Jesus a question and doesn't let him answer
- Martha is in such a hurry that she tells Jesus what to do instead of letting him tell her what she needs to do
- Don't put your work above Jesus

##### **Choose what cannot be taken from you**

- Marth was distracted by many things, but Mary chose what could not be taken from her
- How many times have we chosen the things that can be taken over things that cannot be taken from us
- Slow down when you wake up and thank God
- Mary prepares for the work
- Don't stop your day without getting fuel



## **Be Still** **Sermon – Week 2**

### **Intro**

- Chronic hurry is a sickness
- There's not one bible text that talks about "Holy Burnout"
- There is not one text that says you have to be all things for all people at all times
- The devil wants you to drive a speed limit of 90 in a 45 so that you miss the signs
- Example: In a hurry rushing, I dropped my food in the grocery store
- When you wake up – Be still and realize it as grace that woke you up
- Remember how much God loves you
- You miss these things when you rush
- The job of media is to scare you to click on the news

### **Matthew 6:24**

- Speed becomes an idol if you are not careful
- You know more news in one morning than pilgrim would have known in 1 year
- You can't serve two masters – you must give God the first of your days
- Your body responds physically of what goes on in your mind
- What is happening to your body when you are rushing?
- Your body responds to what goes on in your mind

### **Don't Worry**

- If you add worry to your life, it will subtract from your life
- Seek God first and ALL of these shall be added to you

### **Closing:**

- Be still and slow down
- Seek God first when you get to your job
- Seek God first with your children
- Seek God first with your finances
- Seek God first with your health

## God is Everywhere Sermon Week 3

### Introduction:

- People who are not satisfied with their relationship with God even with all the technology that we have today to connect to bible and other spiritual encouragement.
- Why? We aren't slowing down and getting a flow from God before we enter into the world.
- God has to slow us down to spend time with him.
- God wants to use us, but we have to slow down.
- Jay Z: There is a beat and there is a flow. If beat is time than flow is how we interact with the time around us. There is a beat all around us.
  - In the winter my flow changes I have to go from shorts to coats.

### Ephesians 5:15-17

- Make the most of the time that God has given you.
  - Showing
  - Cooking
  - Preparation
  - Drive
  - Walking in park
  - Landry
  - Dishes
- Ex. Phone calls... took my time to talk with God before I answered the phone.
- The days are evil so we must be prepared before we go out.
  - God needs people who are filled with his spirit to bless the areas they are in.

### Revelation 3:20

- God is knocking at your door every day you wake up and everywhere you go. If you hear God's voice answer the door.
- We are like Martha all over the place, so we have difficulty hearing God.
- God wants fellowship with you everyday everywhere.
- The sad reality is that we have big churches with people who cannot hear God.

### Establish a flow with God

- Set up moments with God that no one can interrupt
- Ex. Grandmother having a fluid flow with God every morning when she work up and prayed.
- Be a person who brings peace to the places that you go because of the flow of peace that is coming from you.

- Ex. God showed me migraine and someone calling me. Two people called me about the virus but because I had showed down I was able to engage them.

## What is Flowing from You? Sermon Week 4

### Introduction:

- James 3:9-11
- What has been flowing out of your heart? Fresh water of life that springs forth or is it the bitter water.
- We need to make sure that what is coming out of us has life giving power.
- Words of life to encourage brothers and sisters.
- You have the power to speak and change lives
- When you open up your mouth you are sowing seeds into your finances, health, family, home, even social media.
- When speak you sow seeds, and you are going to have to eat what you have sown.

### Life should be flowing from you

- Proverbs 4:23
- If you are not watching your heart, springs of life will not flow from it.
- Proverbs 10:11
- The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life – you are a fountain life
- The world needs people to help bring peace to storms that are raging
- The world needs rivers of life to flow, and that can only come from you
- Let God work on you so much so, that out of you will flow rivers

### Speak Life

- Speak life to everything the devil wants to die
- Speak life to every area of your life
- Speak blessings in the atmosphere
- God will cause you to eat what you speak
- Continue to speak blessings over people that were fired from jobs, the sick, the government
- Speak that God is in control
- Speak that God has the power to fix every situation and broken place

## **Breathe** **Sermon Week 5**

### **Genesis 2:7**

7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

#### **Introduction:**

- It is not social distance it is physical we still have to interact with people
- Not knowing what is next and the problems of life take out breath away.
- Breathe

When you inhale & exhale you are:

1. Experiencing a connection with God
2. God has and is giving me life
3. I am never alone
4. He is the God of overflow

## **He's Still the King** **Sermon Week 6**

### Introduction:

- Palm Sunday is different – we are not in our building
- We do not have physical palms to hold on to, or have each other look at in person.
- This Sunday is tough because it feels like there is defeat is around
- Fear of catching the virus only just by walking outside of our home
- This Palm Sunday is hard to shout Hosanna when you are struggling in this season.
- Even through difficulties – God will NOT lose his power – and he is still the king
- There is nothing that you are facing right now; there's no tear that you are crying right now that God does not have the power to wipe away
- The virus cannot defeat God
- Even with everyone going on around us – God is still the king
- In Revelations, the 24 elders throw their crowns because God is still King
- The angels cry “Holy, Holy, Holy” because he is still the King

### Victory

- The palm is a symbol of triumph
- The people shouted Hosanna because they knew that even though things were not okay with their present situation, God has the power to make it alright in the future.
- It may not look or feel-good right now, but still shout Hosanna!
- God is in control
- You present does not determine your future

### Crying Hosanna is my praise

- Hosanna is a cry of happiness in the mist of sorrow
- Hosanna s my praise in the mist of tears
- Hosanna is my praise in the mist of fear and anxiety
- Hosanna is my praise in the mist of this pandemic
- You do not have to understand how things will work out
- Your “Hosanna” praise is knowing God can work everything out
- I don't understand how or when, but I do know God will work it out
- He has the power and ability to work it out
- My situation does not affect my belief in God
- He will cause you to overcome your present sadness

### New Peace/Claim Victory

- Time does not heal all wounds, but God will give us peace

- You will never fully recover from the death of loved ones we lost these few weeks
- God will give you peace that you have not known before
- My shout of joy is because God will give me peace
- Claim victory over everything that has you bound
- Even in quarantine – still shout Hosanna to make room for him to be on the throne of your life

APPENDIX B  
BIBLE STUDY LESSONS

# Slow Down

---

## What Is Hurry?

Hurry is not an innocent and inevitable consequence of modern life. Chronic hurry is a serious malady of mind, heart, and soul putting at risk our relationship with God, each other, and ourselves.

Kirk Byron Jones. *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down*. Judson Press. Kindle Edition.



# God Doesn't Want You Exhausted

Contrary to popular behavior, God does not need our exhaustion. There is nothing holy about running ourselves into the ground. There is nothing spiritual about being all things to all people as soon as possible.

Kirk Byron Jones. Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down (p. 13). Judson Press. Kindle Edition.

## The Idol Speed



Omnipresence- Speed is everywhere around us.



Omnipotence- Everything is powered by speed.




Omniscience- We know things quicker today more than ever.

## Sacrifices for Speed

---

I have in mind seven serious unnecessary sacrifices because of our addiction to speed: patience, judgment, depth, joy, dialogue, personhood, and spirituality.

Kirk Byron Jones. Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down (p. 8). Judson Press. Kindle Edition.




## Something is Missing

---

Hurry is a desensitizer, snuffing out moments of intimacy with life to the point that we get used to living day after day with little deep feeling or passion.

Kirk Byron Jones. Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down (p. 44). Judson Press. Kindle Edition.



# Learn The Truth

---

For example, turn off the belief switch that says you are what you do. Substitute for it the truth that your worth comes from who you are and not what you do. Turn off the belief switch that says committed living demands your exhaustion. Put in its place an understanding that you can live a life of commitment to family, vocation, and society without inflicting violence on yourself.

Kirk Byron Jones. Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down (pp. 63 -64). Judson Press. Kindle Edition.



Matthew 11:28

1 John 2:17

1 Peter 5:7

Psalms 46:10

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Scriptures




GOD EVERYWHERE



SOMETHING IS MISSING

- The sentiment among black people abounds that the current fastpaced, knowledge-rich, technological age has not satisfied deep hungers for wholeness or positive relatedness to God, self, others, and the environment.
- Wimberly, Anne E. Streaty. In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church . Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

- 
- In the midst of life's ambiguities—trials on one hand and triumphs on the other—the fervent quest of black Christians is for wisdom necessary for choosing and acting in ways that produce wholeness.

- Wimberly, Anne E. Streaty. In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church . Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.



## BORN ANEW

- Christian wisdom formation refers to our ongoing journey of imagining, gaining insights, and deciding how to live as faithful and responsible Christians. As a life journey, wisdom formation relies on our recognizing that each moment opens before us anew and presents us with opportunities to see, feel, discover, and allow the life of Jesus Christ to be constantly born anew within us.
- Wimberly, Anne E. Streaty. In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church . Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.



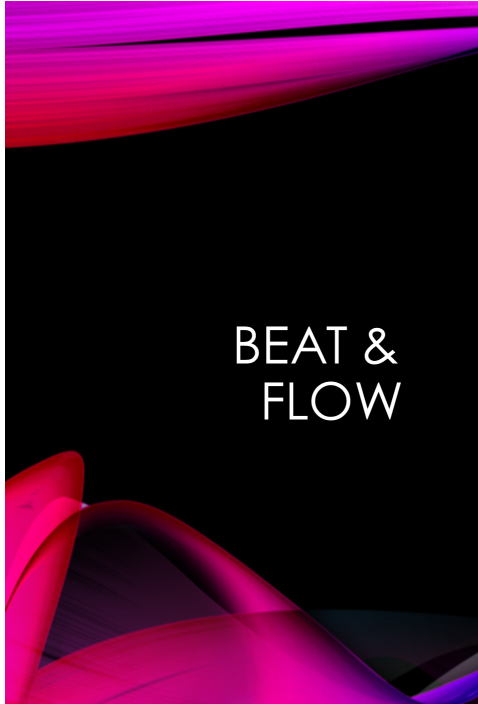
## SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

- Christian wisdom formation has its source in God. It relies on our faith in God, openness to God, discernment of God's desire for our lives, and a commitment or sense of duty to sojourn toward the good and true that comes from our engagement in personal and corporate spiritual disciplines.
- Wimberly, Anne E. Streaty. In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church . Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.



## THE VILLAGE

- Christian wisdom formation proceeds through the undertaking of a whole "village" in which village members commit to really be and relate with one another.
- Wimberly, Anne E. Streaty. In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church . Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.



## BEAT & FLOW

When you think about it like that, you realize the beat is everywhere, you just have to tap into it.

But the beat is only one half of a rap song's rhythm. The other is the flow. When a rapper jumps on a beat, he adds his own rhythm.

Jay-Z. Decoded . Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.



## BEAT & FLOW CONT.

- The flow isn't like time, it's like life. It's like a heartbeat or the way you breathe, it can jump, speed up, slow down, stop, or pound right through like a machine. If the beat is time, flow is what we do with that time, how we live through it. The beat is everywhere, but every life has to find its own flow.
- Jay-Z. Decoded . Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.



EPHESIANS 5:15-17  
TIME

- 15 Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

- 20 Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me



REVELATION  
3:20  
GOD IS  
KNOCKING





## EXODUS 3

- 3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

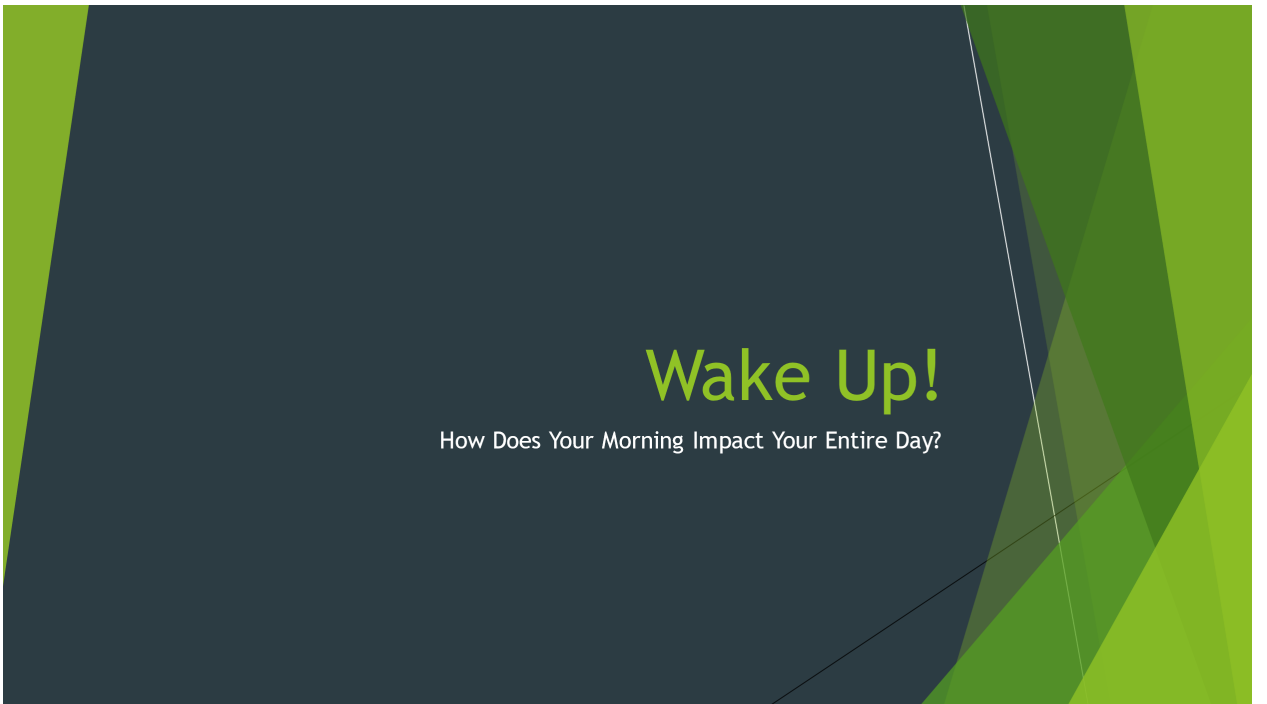


## EXODUS 3

- 5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.



- They ate together, traveled together and shared in all facets of life. Centered as they were on Jesus, these seemingly mundane activities took on religious significance.
- Smith, C. Christopher. *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus* (p. 31). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.



## Overview

In today's lesson we will examine how we wake up. To examine this we will talk about our "second awakening," what the bible says about the morning, and the things that we speak into our day.

## A Few Questions To Think About?



How do you wake up?



What are your first thoughts?



What are you feeding your mind for breakfast?



How do you think these thoughts influence your day?

## Survey

Which word best characterizes your mood at the beginning of an average day?

- a. Excited - 57%
- b. Burdened - 31%
- c. Depressed - 5%

Did not answer the question - 7%

## Survey Cont.

Which word best describes your emotional state at the end of an average day?

- a. Content - 29%
- b. Fatigued - 57%
- c. Stressed - 10%

Did not answer the question - 3%

## Survey Cont.

How often do you feel like you're burned out?

- a. Often - 34%
- b. Sometimes - 38%
- c. Seldom - 17%
- d. Never - 5%

Did not answer the question - 5%

## Survey Cont.

How often do you hurry one activity to get to the next activity?

- a. Often - 41%
- b. Sometimes - 43%
- c. Seldom - 10%
- d. Never - 3%

Did not answer the question - 2%

## What Happens?

We might wake up excited, but we are ending the day fatigued and many feel burned out.

From your own experience what do you think leads to these response in the survey?

## What Can We Do?

Along with slowing down our lives we must slow down and be intentional about how we wake up in the morning.

## You Wake Up Twice

“This first awakening is an involuntary response to bodily stimuli.” The Second awakening is your response to the first.

Kirk Byron Jones. Morning B.R.E.W. : A Divine Power Drink For Your Soul (Kindle Locations 39-40). Kindle Edition.

## Second Awakening

“Learning that we all wake up twice was a revelation for me; discovering that I had the God-given power to determine how I woke up the second time was liberation!”

Kirk Byron Jones. Morning B.R.E.W. : A Divine Power Drink For Your Soul (Kindle Locations 63-64). Kindle Edition.

## Second Awakening

“The peace and energy established in the early morning hours were portable, facilitating peaceful inspirations at various intervals throughout the day.”

Kirk Byron Jones. Morning B.R.E.W. : A Divine Power Drink For Your Soul (Kindle Locations 72-73). Kindle Edition.

## Psalm 5:3

3 O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.





Psalm 90:14

14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.



Psalm 63:1

1 O God, You are my God;  
Early will I seek You;  
My soul thirsts for You;  
My flesh longs for You  
In a dry and thirsty land  
Where there is no water.



## What are you going after first?

The writer says in a “dry land where there is no water.” the first thing that he or she looks for is God.



## God first?

Why do you think the writer isn't seeking after water first?

## ▶ Mark 1:35

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

## What Are You Speaking Over Your Day?

Benjamin Disraeli says,  
"Nurture your mind with  
great thoughts, for you will  
never go any higher than  
you think."

Proverbs 18:21

Romans 4:17

## Proverbs 18:21

21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

## What Are You Speaking Over Your Day?

Benjamin Disraeli says,  
"Nurture your mind with  
great thoughts, for you will  
never go any higher than  
you think."

Proverbs 18:21

Romans 4:17



## B. R. E. W.

A Practice For A Great Rising

### Overview

Today we will discuss the morning practice of **B. R. E. W.** from the book Morning B. R. E. W. By Kirk Byron Jones. This will be in effort to help us wake up properly for the work of the day.



## Meaning of B. R. E. W.

- B. Being Still
- R. Receiving God's Love
- E. Embracing Personhood
- W. Welcoming The Day



## BE STILL...

- Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth."

# HOW DO YOU BE STILL?

---

## BE STILL

Be

Be Limp: Release any physical tension from your body.

Be

Be Empty: Free your mind of everything.

Be

Be Vulnerable: Open yourself up to God.

# RECEIVE GOD'S LOVE

WHY?

“You cannot give what you do not have. Receiving is the unsung gift of the spirit... Endless giving without the ability to receive leads to bitterness.”

Kirk Byron Jones. Morning B.R.E.W. : A Divine Power Drink For Your Soul (Kindle Location 415417). Kindle Edition.



## KNOWING VS. RECEIVING

You can know that God loves you without receiving the love that he has for you. Think back on an old relationship where love might not have been received.

## YOUR FIRST CALLING!

Often, we act as if our first calling is to get to others, but our first calling is to receive the love of God. Once we have received that love we can extend it to others.

# EMBRACING PERSONHOOD

## SAY SOMETHING GOOD

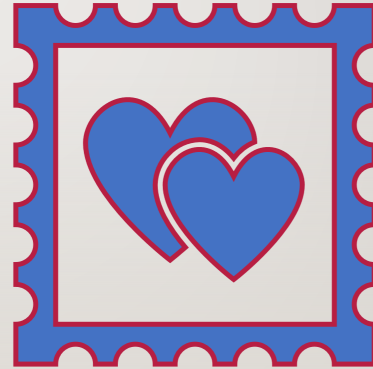
---

WHEN IS THE LAST TIME YOU SAID  
SOMETHING GOOD ABOUT YOURSELF?

## DO YOU LOVE WHO GOD LOVES?

---

When we hear this question, we think about other people we meet. I want you to think about loving yourself. Do you love the you that God loves?



## LOVE OTHERS

Once you have embraced your own personhood then you will be able to full embrace others.

## YOU ARE NOT YOUR PAST

---

John 8:36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

2 Corinthians 5:17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

WELCOME THE DAY

A GIFT!

The day is a gift! Welcome it because there has never been a day like it before and there will never be a day like it again.

## PSALM 118:24

24 THIS IS THE DAY THAT THE LORD HAS MADE; LET US  
REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN IT.

# IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU!

THE PURPOSE OF SLOWING DOWN

## OVERVIEW

In this lesson we will review the purpose of slowing down. By examining the ~~life~~ <sup>goals</sup> we want to learn what slowing down is and what it is not. We will talk about the flow of withdrawing and engaging. Lastly, we will introduce tools of engagement for further discussion next week.

# PURPOSE OF SLOWING DOWN?

**WITHDRAW  
TO ENGAGE**

Mark 1:12-13 New Revised Standard Version  
(NRSV)

The Temptation of Jesus

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him

## WITHDRAW TO ENGAGE CONT.

Luke 5:15-17

15 But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. 16 But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray. 17 One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting near by (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

Jesus has a rhythm of withdraw to engage

## WITHDRAW TO ENGAGE CONT.

Mark 1:29-39

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." 39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.



# PREPARATION NOT PROCRASTINATION

Slowing down is not a get out of your free work card. Slowing down is an intentional way of living to prepare you for the work of your day. It is and intentional way of living to prepare you for the community you are engaged in.

# ENGAGEMENT



Myself



My Family



My Work



My Community

## **ENGAGEMENT CONT.**

Engaging life can take a lot out of you and leave you with a variety of feelings. (exhausted burned out stressed) You need tools to engage.

# **SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES**

# WHAT IS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE?

It is any practice that brings us into the presence of God.

An open door that allows God to come into our lives and transform us.

“But, and here is the key, the Spiritual Disciplines are actions of body and heart and mind and soul that we actually do. Not just admire. Not just study. Not just debate. But practice.” Foster, Richard J.. Celebration of Discipline, Special Anniversary Edition (p. 14). HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

# TYPES OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Prayer

Fasting

Meditation

Contemplation

Scripture Reading

Worship

# CONTEMPLATION

(in Christian spirituality) a form of prayer or meditation in which a person seeks to pass beyond mental images and concepts to a direct experience of the divine.

The New Oxford American Dictionary (Kindle Locations 11216112162). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.

# DANCE

Dance—more than any other form of worship—is bodily prayer, the beginning of pilgrimage from ordinary to sacred space. Dance—more than any other form of worship—is bodily prayer, the beginning of pilgrimage from ordinary to sacred space.

Barbara A. Holmes. Joy Unspeakable (Kindle Location 1209). Kindle Edition.



# **SINGING**

Spirit filled singing blurs the lines between heaven and earth.

## APPENDIX C

### SURVEY

1. You are behind a driver who has not noticed that the light has turned green. How do you respond?
  - a. Give the person a moment to notice the light has changed – 81%
  - b. Blow your horn immediately -- 17%
  - c. Blow your horn and express your irritation verbally – 0%Did not answer the question – 2%
  
2. You are in a slow-moving grocery line with time to spare. What are you most likely to do?
  - a. Engage in a conversation with someone else – 41%
  - b. Look repeatedly at the person at the register to see how fast things are going – 52%
  - c. Become irritated – 3%Did not answer the question – 3%
  
3. In conversing with others, how often do you interrupt them in mid-sentence?
  - a. Not very often- -- 41%
  - b. Some of the time – 52%
  - c. Very often – 7%
  
4. How much time during the day do you devote to prayer, pondering, meditation, and/or just taking it easy?
  - a. At least an hour – 29%
  - b. At least half an hour – 33%
  - c. Less than half an hour – 38%
  
5. Someone/thing has interrupted your planned activity. Select the word that best describes your gut feeling:
  - a. Interested – 22%
  - b. Disturbed – 41%
  - c. Aggravated – 34%

Did not answer the question – 2%

6. Which word best characterizes your mood at the beginning of an average day?

a. Excited – 57%

b. Burdened – 31%

c. Depressed – 5%

Did not answer the question – 7%

7. Which word best describes your emotional state at the end of an average day?

a. Content – 29%

b. Fatigued – 57%

c. Stressed – 10%

Did not answer the question – 3%

8. How often do you feel joy in your work?

a. Often – 36%

b. Sometimes – 43%

c. Seldom – 14%

d. Never – 3%

Did not answer the question – 3%

9. How often do you hurry one activity to get to the next activity?

a. Often – 41%

b. Sometimes – 43%

c. Seldom – 10%

d. Never – 3%

Did not answer the question – 2%

10. How often do you move fast when there is no reason to?

a. Often – 34%

b. Sometimes – 38%

c. Seldom -- 19%

d. Never – 3%

Did not answer the question – 5%

Kirk Byron Jones. Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down (p. 19). Judson Press. Kindle Edition.

11. How often do you hear God during the week at your job or recreational events?

a. Often – 28%

b. Sometimes – 45%

c. Seldom – 17%

d. Never – 10%

12. Do you look to see God in the everyday activities of your life? (Showering, Cooking, Making the Bed)

a. Often – 40%

b. Sometimes – 36%

c. Seldom – 10%

d. Never – 14%

13. Do you practice spiritual disciplines daily?

a. Often – 33%

b. Sometimes – 50%

c. Seldom – 5%

d. Never – 10%

Did not answer the question – 2%

14. How often do you bring peace to your environment?

a. Often – 52%



b. Sometimes – 43%

c. Seldom – 3%

d. Never – 0%

Did not answer the question – 2%

15. How often do you see opportunities to show kindness to others?

a. Often – 74%

b. Sometimes -19%

c. Seldom - 2%

d. Never – 0%

Did not answer the question – 5%

16. Do you have difficulty discerning the voice of God for your life?

a. Often – 12%

b. Sometimes – 41%

c. Seldom – 19%

d. Never – 21%

Did not answer the question – 7%

17. How often do you help others see what God is doing in their life?

a. Often – 29%

b. Sometimes -47%

c. Seldom – 9%

d. Never – 10%

Did not answer the question – 5%

18. How often do you feel the busyness of life getting in the way of your spiritual growth?

a. Often – 31%

b. Sometimes – 40%

c. Seldom -16%

d. Never – 9%

Did not answer the question – 5%

19. How often do you feel like you're burned out?

a. Often – 34%

b. Sometimes – 38%

c. Seldom – 17%

d. Never – 5%

Did not answer the question – 5%

20. How often do you think about the consequences of what you say before you speak?

a. Often – 48%

b. Sometimes – 40%

c. Seldom – 10%

d. Never – 0%

Did not answer the question – 2%

21. How often do you lose track of time and space in God's presence?

a. Often – 14%

b. Sometimes – 57%

c. Seldom – 21%

d. Never – 7%

Did not answer the question – 2%

## APPENDIX D

### PLAYLIST

Built for This by Chandler Moore featuring Bishop Brian Moore

A Great Work by Brian Courtney Wilson

Make Room by Jonathan McReynolds

Respond by Travis Green featuring D’Nar Young

Not in a Hurry by Will Reagan & United Pursuit

You’ll Never Leave Me by Will McMillian

Our Prayer by Anthony Brown & group therapy

Winds of Change by Lawrence Flowers & Intercession

He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother by Donny Hathaway

Be Still by Travis Greene