

Lift Every Voice Book Club
Contemplative Writers of Color
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Embodied Spirits: Stories of Spiritual Directors of Color

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Questions to help guide your reflection

- ❖ What is spiritual direction? It is a contemplative prayer practice. It is holy listening. It is attending to God's leading with another person. It is companioning another on the journey. It is offering hospitality to the stranger. It is making space for another to reflect and discern God's leading in their life. (Therese Taylor-Stinson, page xiv)

How do you define 'spiritual direction'?

- ❖ In particular, hope has been essential for African Americans as a survival mechanism against racism and oppression. It is my belief that African Americans consciously or unconsciously draw from the unfathomable spiritual resilience of their ancestors, who struggled, yet survived, the evils of slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and contemporary disenfranchisement. It is my conviction that this life-sustaining fortitude or resilience is rooted in an innate spiritual capacity to "hope against hope." (Maurice J. Nutt, page 14)

What role does hope play in your spiritual journey?

- ❖ Inherent in the contemplative dimension of black spirituality is the sense that prayer is spontaneous and pervasive. Any place is a place for prayer because God's presence is heard and felt in every place. (Maurice J. Nutt, page 16)

How might your prayer be more spontaneous and pervasive?

- ❖ God is everywhere. Therefore, drawing from the "invisible churches" of their horrific past, African Americans feel enabled and called to prayer just where they are. It could be on a city bus, while cooking dinner, or at work in a noisy factory. Black spirituality senses the awe of God's transcendence and the vital intimacy of God's closeness. (Maurice J. Nutt, pages 16-17)

Where do you find "invisible churches" in your own life?

- ❖ African Americans believe that a personal relationship with God is absolutely necessary. God has to be known at this level, so that the supportive sense of God's presence can provide a lift for life's burdens and unpleasant encounters. (Maurice J. Nutt, page 19)

How do you nurture a personal relationship with God?

- ❖ African Americans' sense of God is essentially gained through experience. God is not the God of speculation. God is the One who acts in life. (Maurice J. Nutt, page 19)

How is your sense of God active or concrete?

- ❖ Hope can be learned with practice. Certain attitudes support it. One is patience, an ability to tolerate delays, a willingness to let events unfold in their own time. The other is courage, an attitude of confidence even when facing the unknown. A third is persistence, the determination to keep going no matter what happens. (Maurice J. Nutt, pages 19-20)

Which of these three attitudes is most supportive to your sense of hope?

- ❖ In my own silence, I pray, releasing to Jesus anything that interferes with my listening – fear is the big one, but also my desire to be a heroine, whatever busyness that occupied me before the directee came, question marks about my own life, feelings of inadequacy, and any stumbling blocks associated with this particular person. (Sherry Bryant-Johnson, page 30)

What interferes with your ability to truly listening to others and to God?

- ❖ I encourage people to trust the voice within, to be still, listen, and pay attention. (Lakesha S. Bradshaw, page 38)

What would help you trust your inner voice more?

- ❖ My physical challenges with heart and kidney transplants illustrate how one can pray *through* ordeals while not expecting them to go away. It is tough to experience God's loving Presence when illness, death, and job loss cause us all to question the role God plays in our lives. (Lerita Coleman Brown, page 45)

How has prayer helped you through an ordeal and yet remain in the moment?

- ❖ Devoting myself to obeying the still, quiet Voice within results in a peace and joy beyond anything fathomable. These are the fruits of my contemplative prayer practice. (Lerita Coleman Brown, page 48)

What spiritual practices bring you peace and joy?

- ❖ I frantically asked difficult questions, "Where is my God that is supposed to take care of me? What have I done to deserve these illnesses? How do I have a fulfilling life that includes happiness, peace, and physical wellbeing? What is my purpose, how do I fulfil it with these illnesses? How do I continue to be God's child?" (Cynthia Bailey Manns, page 54)

What are some of your difficult questions?

- ❖ Spiritual growth challenges students, directees, and me to step into the mystery of Sacred Presence with a willingness to journey on a path that is without a clear roadmap. (Cynthia Bailey Manns, page 58)

What was an early step in your spiritual journey?

- ❖ Together, we take tentative steps forward, fall down, get up, and continue on the winding path that takes us through dark and joyful memories and experiences, side trips of self-discovery, the fog of mystery, and encounters with others along the way who give us hope and encouragement when we feel we can't lift our legs to take another step. (Cynthia Bailey Manns, page 58)

What are some of the twists and turns of your spiritual journey?

- ❖ What is the Sacred for you? How do you experience your Sacred in your daily life experiences? Your joys? Your sorrows? How would you describe your spiritual practices that keep you connected to your sacred? (Cynthia Bailey Mann, page 63)

What is the Sacred for you?

- ❖ We will know we are going in the right direction by the signs we see along the way. Are there changes in our behaviour that lead to a deeper connection to God's love for us? Does our behaviour reflect our love for others in a compassionate, forgiving way? Are we willing to embrace mystery in our relationships with God and others? Are we willing to be healed? Transformed? Do we have experiences of awe, wonder, or joy that cannot be described? Do we experience God's presence in the depths of our deepest sorrows? (Cynthia Bailey Mann, page 64)

What have been some of the signs that you're on the right path?

- ❖ Contemplative living can be a spiritual way of being that helps to connect us to the Holy Spirit within. Intentional acts of contemplation must not always be silent or still, but can also be embodied in dance, song, and shout. (Ineda P. Adesanya, page 73)

What are your contemplative practices?

- ❖ A contemplative act is an act of deliberate consideration with the intent of seeing God. Seeing God is not only the ability to recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit, but to acknowledge and follow her lead. Whatever act, gesture, thought, song, or word brings you into the presence and experience of the Holy Spirit is an act of contemplation. (Ineda P. Adesanya, page 73)

What practice helps bring you into the presence of the Holy Spirit?

- ❖ "Birth-quakes" is a term that I use to define the reconciling and renewing growth spurts that I have experienced along my spiritual journey. I believe that God, our Creator, has a plan for each of us, which is waiting to break forth from the depth of our souls. (Rosalie Norman-McNaney, page 82)

Tell us one of your "birth-quake" moments?

- ❖ With each ending, there is a new beginning and a birthing of a new way to be in relationship with God vertically to reflect God's reconciling love and horizontally within the world symbolized by the Cross. (Rosalie Norman-McNaney, page 83)

When did an ending become a new beginning for you?

- ❖ I assessed my intense and long work schedule and realized that my choices impacted my stress level. They need for self-care became evident. I prepared for another birth-quake when I heard a voice urging me to slow down so that I could truly be available to do God's will and hear God's call. (Rosalie Norman-McNaney, page 89)

What assessments/adjustments do you need to make more room for God?

- ❖ My role as a spiritual director is being a midwife and one who supports another through the labor of their unfolding feelings, thoughts, and stories into a new expression of being and of listening to God. It is serving as an incubator in a birthing role to other souls so that just as I was supported, I can walk with others as they find their way. (Rosalie Norman-McNaney, page 93)

How can you be a midwife for other's spiritual journey?

- ❖ May we all be open to the birth-quakes of our souls, knowing that we are pearls in varied stages of refinement. (Rosalie Norman-McNaney, page 95)

How do you honour and nurture your unique stage of spiritual refinement?

- ❖ Striving in a contemplative sense does not mean making something happen but nurturing and supporting the relationship with God that already exists by staying open and attentive to the center and letting go of anything that turns you away from the center. (Gigi Ross, page 101)

How do you stay open and attentive to God?

- ❖ I pray to remain authentic and true to a way of living that is freeing. My rule is to take what is given that resonates with me. (Gigi Ross, page 105)

What is your purpose or goal of prayer?

- ❖ When we feed others without nourishing our own souls, the Great Commission can become the Great Affliction. (Maisie Sparks, page 108)

How do you feed or nourish yourself spiritually?

- ❖ From the time God first met with Adam and Even in the cool of the evening, to Jesus' early morning prayers with his Father, resting in God's presence was to be a normal part of the rhythm of life. (Maisie Sparks, page 108)

When do you make time to rest in God's presence?

- ❖ A quiet retreat is one way we rest. It's a contemplative practice that encourages us to bask in God's presence for no other reason than desire. (Maisie Sparks, page 112)

Do you take regular time for quiet retreats?

- ❖ The gift I received was in the silence of my quiet retreats. I followed Jesus' pattern when I went away to a solidarity place. I continue to walk in his footsteps when I return with love, grace, and humility. (Maisie Sparks, page 116)

What gifts do silence and solitude bring you?

- ❖ We are to take God's peaceful presence back with us to fragrance our homes, our places of work, and our communities. In the days that follow a time away, our sense of loving service is heightened. (Maisie Sparks, page 117)

How do you bring God's peaceful presence to others?

- ❖ In most African cultures, you express joy by singing, drumming, and dancing. (Gibbon Bogatsu, page 124)

How do you express your joy?

- ❖ It is very common in African American culture for a grandmother or some other matriarch to be the spiritual mentor in the family. (Therese Taylor-Stinson, page 144)

Who is/was the spiritual mentor in your family?

- ❖ Although the African American "race" is a sociological construct and not a genetic one, we do possess a culture and spirituality that comes out of our journey from Africa, through the Middle Passage and into slavery, to our connection with the Native American, through Jim Crow, and the continued oppression and discrimination that remain alive today. (Therese Taylor-Stinson, page 144)

How have the events of history shaped your spirituality?

- ❖ Identity is a major loss for African Americans, and my own struggle in this area has led me deeper into contemplation to recover what was lost and reclaim my authentic self. (Therese Taylor-Stinson, page 148)

How has your own family's history shaped your spirituality?

- ❖ A spiritual director should understand that African Americans, the children of Africans brought to the United States and sold into slavery, and in some cases mixed with those who had their identities taken from them in their homeland, all suffer a kind of identity crisis, where there are no long and deep connections to traditions from the past that help give stability through the generations. (Therese Taylor-Stinson, page 148)

How do you educate yourself to be more empathetic towards others?

- ❖ The practice of spiritual direction began in the deserts of Africa and the Near East, by people of color, the Desert Mothers and Fathers (Ammas and Abbas). Those in the early church left it because of its corruption and headed to the desert where they formed monastic communities. They are also known as the first psychologists. Those who remained in the churches would travel to the desert to receive guidance from these wise and strange people, who would endure mortification to explore the limits of their spiritual and human selves. They were African; they were people of color. (Therese Taylor-Stinson, page 150)

Who are some of the people who inspire and inform your spirituality?

- ❖ I cried and I nodded as I read the thoughts in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, written by an anonymous fourteenth-century monk. I recognized myself in the words, and I say my own journey written there. (Therese Taylor-Stinson, page 151)

What book have you resonated with spirituality?

- ❖ As a spiritual director, I am called to be present with the wounded and those struggling with their spiritual identities, to be midwife to their births, their understandings of God, their relationships with others, and the healing that follows. (Therese Taylor-Stinson, pages 151-152)

How can you be more present to the woundedness and struggles of others?