



JUST *Love* MINISTRY PRESENTS

IF NOT FOR US:

Black Contributions
to the Body of Christ
& the American Story

WEEK 1: Faith & Culture – “Our Souls Would Have No Song”

Psalm 137:1–4

By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Luke 4:18–19

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

African American faith did not develop in safety. It was born in bondage, nurtured in secrecy, and sustained through generations of suffering. Enslaved Africans were often given a version of Christianity designed to make them obedient and resigned to injustice. Yet what emerged from slave quarters, hush harbors, and early Black congregations was something radically different: a faith that saw God as deliverer, not enforcer.

Sojourner Truth, born into slavery, became one of the most powerful Christian preachers in American history. She traveled the country declaring that God did not create people to be owned and that women, too, were made in God’s image. Her sermons connected Christian faith with human dignity.

Frederick Douglass distinguished between the “Christianity of Christ” and the “Christianity of this land.” He insisted that any faith that supported slavery was not of God. Using Scripture, he exposed hypocrisy and called the nation back to justice.

Alongside them were countless unnamed Black believers whose spirituals, prayers, and sermons kept hope alive. Their songs were theology, protest, and prayer in one. Without Black faith, American Christianity would have lost its moral soul.

Call to Worship

Leader: We come as people who have sung through suffering.
People: We come as people who still believe God hears our cry.
Leader: From slave ships to sanctuaries...
People: Our ancestors never stopped singing.
All: Let us worship the God who gives songs in the night.

Hymns (This Far by Faith)

- *Lift Every Voice and Sing* — TFF #123
- *We’ve Come This Far by Faith* — TFF #180
- *There Is a Balm in Gilead* — TFF #163

Prayer of the Day

God of deliverance, thank you for the faith of those who trusted you when freedom was denied. Through their songs and prayers, they kept hope alive. Let their faith still guide us today. Amen.

Additional Resources

- Sojourner Truth: National Park Service biography – <https://www.nps.gov/people/sojourner-truth.htm>
- Frederick Douglass on Christianity: “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” (Library of Congress) – <https://www.loc.gov/item/97501318>
- Spirituals & Black Faith: Smithsonian National Museum of African American History – “The Power of Spirituals” – <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/power-spirituals>
- PBS – “African American Spirituals” – <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/lincolns-spirituals/>



WEEK 2: Arts & Music – “Our Nation Would Have No Rhythm”

Psalm 150

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

African American music and artistic expression did not emerge from comfort or convenience; they were forged as acts of survival, community, and faith. Long before hymnals existed, **African drumming, rhythm, movement, and call-and-response** shaped worship practices that were communal rather than individual. These traditions carried theology through sound, teaching that faith is something lived together, not held alone.

As African people were displaced and enslaved, these sacred practices adapted rather than disappeared. They became **spirituals**, holding biblical hope alongside earthly suffering. Over time, spirituals gave birth to **gospel, blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, hip-hop, and neo-soul**—each generation translating faith, lament, joy, protest, and perseverance into the language of its time.

Mahalia Jackson carried gospel music into the heart of the Civil Rights Movement, strengthening marchers and leaders with songs rooted in trust in God’s deliverance. **Duke Ellington** and **John Coltrane** transformed jazz into a sacred language, revealing how improvisation itself can be a spiritual discipline. **Aretha Franklin** fused the sound of the Black church with popular music, ensuring that gospel truth reached beyond sanctuary walls. **Stevie Wonder** and **Marvin Gaye** confronted injustice and human suffering through music that called listeners to conscience and compassion. In more recent generations, artists such as **Lauryn Hill** and **Kendrick Lamar** continue this prophetic tradition, using music to name pain, affirm dignity, and imagine hope.

Black music has always been more than entertainment. It is **testimony rooted in lived experience, prayer offered in melody, and resistance voiced through**

rhythm. Through Black creativity, America learned how to lament honestly, hope boldly, and praise God even in the midst of struggle. Without this artistic and spiritual inheritance, the nation would have sound—but it would lack soul.

Call to Worship

Leader: God created rhythm before words.

People: God created beauty before rules.

Leader: God placed creativity in Black hands to bless the world.

All: Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

Hymns (This Far by Faith)

- *Oh, Freedom* — TFF #135
- *Precious Lord, Take My Hand* — TFF #165
- *Guide My Feet* — TFF #195

Additional Resources

- Smithsonian: *African American Music & Culture* — <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories>
- PBS – *Gospel Music History* — <https://www.pbs.org/black-culture/explore/gospel-music/>



WEEK 3: Leadership & Justice – “Our Democracy Would Lack Courage”

Micah 6:8 (NRSV)

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Luke 10:33–37 (NRSV)

**But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged.*

Black leadership in America has consistently functioned as a **prophetic conscience**, calling the nation and the church to live up to their deepest moral claims. When laws sanctioned injustice and silence offered safety, Black leaders chose truth, often at great personal cost. Their leadership was not driven by power or popularity, but by a faith-rooted conviction that all people are created in the image of God.

Frederick Douglass exposed the contradiction between the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a nation built on slavery, insisting that faith without justice was blasphemy. **Ida B. Wells** risked her life to confront racial terror and lynching, proclaiming that truth-telling itself was holy work. **Martin Luther King Jr.** framed civil rights as a spiritual struggle, reminding the church that injustice anywhere threatens the integrity of faith everywhere. **Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and John Lewis** embodied courageous discipleship, showing that ordinary people, grounded in faith, can bend history toward justice.

This prophetic tradition did not end with the Civil Rights Movement. It continues today through movements such as **Black Lives Matter**, advocacy for immigrants and refugees, and resistance to mass incarceration, voter suppression, and systems that criminalize poverty. These movements echo the biblical mandate to remember that God’s people were once strangers in a foreign land and are therefore commanded to love the stranger, defend the vulnerable, and pursue justice without compromise.

Black leadership reminds the church that justice is not an optional social concern—it is a **core expression of faithful discipleship**. When the church listens to these voices, it rediscovers that faith divorced from justice is hollow, but faith lived through justice becomes a powerful witness to the Gospel.

Call to Worship

Leader: When injustice tried to rule...

People: God raised Black prophets.

Leader: When hatred tried to win...

People: God sent voices for justice.

All: Let justice roll like mighty waters!

Hymns (This Far by Faith)

- *Lift Every Voice for Justice* — TFF #111
- *I Want Jesus to Walk With Me* — TFF #170
- *God of Our Weary Years* — TFF #179

Prayer of the Day

God of justice, thank you for the brave witnesses who would not be silent. Give us courage to keep walking in their footsteps. Amen.

Additional Resources

- Book - John Lewis – *March* (Civil Rights Memoir)
- Video - John Lewis’ Pivotal “This Is It” Moment at the March on Washington https://youtu.be/QV_8zSA3pyU?si=d_-DgDCy-whiBSqp
- ELCA Advocacy – Immigration & Racial Justice – <https://elca.org/advocacy>



WEEK 4: Sports & Innovation – “Our Story Would Be Incomplete”

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

Proverbs 31:29

“Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”

Black excellence in sports and innovation is not accidental—it is the fruit of perseverance, courage, and calling in the face of barriers deliberately designed to exclude. For generations, African Americans were denied access to education, professional opportunities, funding, and recognition. Yet even within systems of restriction, Black athletes and innovators ran their race with determination and faith.

Scripture speaks of a “cloud of witnesses,” reminding us that perseverance is never an individual act alone. Each stride forward is carried by those who cleared the path before. In this way, Black athletes and innovators are not simply achievers; they are witnesses—testifying.

In innovation and science, Black brilliance quietly reshaped everyday life.

- **George Washington Carver** transformed agriculture through sustainable practices that uplifted poor farmers.
- **Garrett Morgan’s** traffic signal made modern transportation safer.
- **Madam C.J. Walker** modeled entrepreneurship as empowerment and community uplift.
- **Katherine Johnson’s** mathematical genius carried astronauts safely into space.
- **Marie Van Brittan Brown’s** invention of the home security system reshaped personal safety.
- **Mark Dean’s** work on personal computing opened technological access for millions.

These men and women remind us that excellence is not about personal glory alone. It is about service, stewardship, and expanding the circle of possibility for those

who follow. Without Black perseverance in sports and innovation, America would not only be less accomplished—it would be less humane. Their perseverance reflects the Christian journey: running even when the course is unfair.

Call to Worship

Leader: God gifts every generation with pioneers.

People: God gifted ours with Black excellence.

Leader: From science to sports...

All: We run the race because they cleared the path

Hymns (This Far by Faith)

- *I’m So Glad Jesus Lifted Me* — TFF #181
- *Guide My Feet* — TFF #195
- *Great Is Thy Faithfulness* — TFF #178

Prayer of the Day

God of perseverance, thank you for those who ran when the track was unfair. Help us finish the race they began. Amen.

Series Benediction (Each Sunday)

May the God of our weary years,
the God of our silent tears,
bless you to honor the past,
live justly in the present,
and build a future where all are free. Amen.

Additional Resources

Sports Figures Who Changed the Nation

- **Jackie Robinson (breaking MLB’s color barrier)** — National Baseball Hall of Fame profile.
- **Jackie Robinson’s broader civil rights impact** — Jackie Robinson Foundation biography.

WEEK 4: Sports & Innovation – “Our Story Would Be Incomplete”

Additional Resources Continued

Sports Figures Who Changed the Nation

- (Optional for worship leader prep) Jackie Robinson Museum “About Jackie Robinson.”

Innovation & STEM: Past to Present

- **Katherine Johnson (NASA mathematician; Hidden Figures)** — NASA official biography.
- **Garrett Morgan (three-way traffic signal + safety hood; inventor story)** — Smithsonian Lemelson Center story.
- **Garrett Morgan traffic signal legacy (historical deep dive)** — U.S. DOT Federal Highway Administration feature.
- **African-American Invention & Innovation (1619–1930) exhibit page** — Smithsonian (includes Garrett Morgan + other inventors).
- **Marie Van Brittan Brown (home security system / CCTV foundations)** — MIT Lemelson program resource.
- (Optional background reading) BlackPast biography of Marie Van Brittan Brown.

Suggested Videos

- Hidden Figures – Katherine Johnson background (NASA learning materials) (start from NASA bio page and follow related links).
- Garrett Morgan (Smithsonian inventor features often include multimedia/related content)
- Jackie Robinson legacy (Hall of Fame + Foundation pages link to further media/resources)

