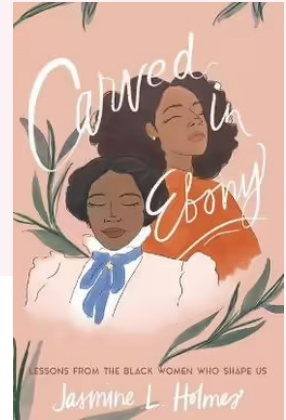




LEADER'S GUIDE

CARVED IN EBONY
BY JASMINE L. HOLMES



"What if... we told the story of America as the story of God's faithfulness – and not our own?... It is from this perspective that I seek to tell you the story of ten incredible Black women."

JASMINE L. HOLMES

THEMES

Slavery

Racism

History

Christian Mission

Freedom

Hope

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

America's Corporate Sin of Chattel Slavery

BOOK SUMMARY

'Carved in Ebony' is a beautiful collection of stories from the lives of Black women throughout history. Women who have stood firm in their faith and declared their worth, beauty, and inherent value as image-bearers of our great God. Despite living in a time when Black women were among one of the most oppressed people groups of the world, the Lord called them to liberate their fellow enslaved people.

Jasmine powerfully weaves together, through biography and memoir, a new and much-needed perspective of history. As Jasmine introduces us to this topic, she doesn't forget the past or seek to hide one of America's biggest shames – yet presents the stories of these women through the lens of God's faithfulness to His word. Through this perspective, she shares with us lessons we can learn from the lives of ten incredibly faithful Black women, and she dedicates one chapter to each woman. As she presents us with the details of these women's lives, who were often born into slavery themselves and subjugated to immeasurable cruelty and injustices, she reminds us that they were also human and not without faults, yet God equipped them for this mighty task despite their circumstances. The Lord was not limited by the cruelty of America's chattel slavery and, through His grace, moved mightily among Black women during this time.

As our journey through history wraps up, we're reminded that it's easy to bury the past, but instead of forgetting, we can use our mistakes and transgressions to inform our future decision-making. Through remembering, we can all seek to become more like Jesus as we allow ourselves to be taught by the women history books have forgotten. These women played an essential role in setting the captives free; working tirelessly to build schools, change laws and preach the gospel. Their actions and faithfulness shaped the landscape of American history and faith as it is seen today.

At the conclusion of the book, Jasmine includes helpful appendixes on 'The founding Fathers and Slavery' and 'The African American Jeremiad.'



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. 'Carved in Ebony' is a much-needed biographical contribution to help us remember the Black women who faithfully served God through brave, bold and lasting kingdom deeds. Which woman's life touched your heart the most? Why?

TALKING POINTS

- Elizabeth Freeman (Midwife and motherhood advocate, freed from slavery by holding her slave master accountable to the Declaration of Independence).
- Sara Griffith Stanley (Founder of the Stanley School dedicated to educating freed Black children in North Carolina, teacher and public speaker).
- Nannie Helen Burroughs (Cultural commentator and preacher to white and black communities).
- Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (School teacher, lecturer, artist and poet).
- Amanda Berry Smith (Political activist and Evangelist).
- Maria Fearing (Missionary to the Congo and mentor to girls at Pantops Home).
- Maria Stewart (Speechmaker and Jeremiad)
- Lucy Craft Laney (Founder of the Haines Normal and Industrial Institute dedicated to teaching both vocational and liberal arts education to Black men and women).
- Charlotte Forten Grimke (Raised in an abolitionist family, classically homeschooled, poet and writer, missionary to Sea Islands).
- Sarah Mapps Douglass (Writer for 'The Liberator' and accountability advocate for the church).

2

Q. In the Introduction, Jasmine poses the question, "Is it unpatriotic to shine a light on America's unfaithfulness to God's word?" (p15). How did reading this book help you understand the importance of remembering the past accurately?

TALKING POINTS

Important reasons for remembering history;

- We learn from our mistakes; if we ignore the past, we refuse to be taught and risk committing the same sins again.
- Remembering the horrors of chattel slavery from the perspective of God's faithfulness, reminds us of God's goodness, sovereignty, faithfulness and hope for every circumstance.
- Racism is part of the "advancement of Satan's kingdom" (p47). We must remember and hate sin; we cannot do this while hiding, forgetting, or reducing sin.

- Racist Christians need to learn the "ABC of Christianity" (p47), that we are ALL created in the image of God. Believing anything less is unbiblical.
- If we cover up or downplay the injustices of this period of history, we can become apathetic towards it. Generational trauma ought to be recognised and compassionately addressed to the best of our ability.

3

Q. "Where they imitated their Savior, they imitated him well. Where they fell short, his grace was sufficient for them, as it is for us" (p22). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

We all fall short of the glory of God. Not one of us is perfect and sinless (Romans 3:23);

- Becoming holy and Christ-like is a lifelong journey of sanctification and obedience; we will not be fully restored until eternity.
- The only perfect human was Jesus. We are so flawed and tragically sinful. Despite popular cultural ideologies such as "you are enough" and "you're perfect the way you are", the harsh reality is that we have a savior who needed to die on a cross for our transgressions because we are NOT enough. We are so far from perfect in every area of our lives. Jesus takes our "not enough" and justifies us through our faith in Him.
- It can be easy to observe others in their humanness and judge or condemn them for having different theology or doctrine from our own. But we must remember even our understanding of God, the Bible and theology are affected by our sin; not one of us has a pure and perfect understanding of the Bible. We ALL make errors in our interpretations because of our sinful nature.
- Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:7).

4

Q. The ten women featured in this book, "staked their claim to the dignity that all of us who have been made in the image of God are due" (p17). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

"Black women are made in the image of God. They are that image carved in ebony hues, wrought with a purpose, for his glory" (p19);

- "let the Darwinism of the day make ludicrous arguments about the scientific inferiority of Black people – arguments used to defend and excuse the slave trade in all of its brutality – but history will show what we know to be true: that Black men and women are made in God's image" (p43).
- "I find that human nature is the same in Black men, even in Africa, as in white men in America. It is the same old story everywhere: None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good" (p86).
- Bible verses were (and still are) often taken out of context to be used as 'proof' that slavery was acceptable (p97).
- "God made man to serve Him alone, and that man shall have no other Lord or Lords but Himself...", David Walker (p111).
- "...admit that we are men...and believe that we feel for our fathers, mothers, wives and children as well as the whites do for theirs.", David Walker (p111).
- God is the Master and Creator of the whole human family.
- "Many thinks, because your skins are tinged with a sable hue, that you are an inferior race of beings; but God does not consider you as such", Maria Stewart (p115).

5

Q. "If you're going to be a Christian, you've got to do something weekdays as well as talk and feel about it on Sundays" (quote from Nannie Helen Burroughs, p60). Why is it so important to live out our faith?

TALKING POINTS

Important reasons for living out our Christian faith;

- We should 'practise what we preach' so not to become hypocritical.
- Actions speak louder than words – people will pay attention when we act as Christ did because it is counter-cultural.
- If we're going to critique something or someone, are we invested in working to fix it (p63)?
- If we point out a problem, are we willing to provide a solution or invest time and energy to fix it (p63)?

6

Q. Motherhood has often been described as the 'crowning glory' of womanhood. Jasmine points out that although motherhood is a wonderful gift, many of these inspirational women were not mothers but still served God and led incredibly fruitful lives. Why is it so important to remember that motherhood should not define a woman's worth in the kingdom of God?

TALKING POINTS

Primarily, once we have declared Jesus is Lord, our only identity that is eternal is 'Child of God';

- Our earthly titles, such as mother, wife, sister, missionary, teacher, CEO, doctor and so on, will ALL fade away.
- We are made in the image of God and therefore have inherent value and His creation.
- We are not what we do, and we are not the titles we, or others, give ourselves.
- God has proven time again that He can and will use people for His glory, despite their earthly titles (for example, Rahab the prostitute).
- Motherhood comes with a huge responsibility that limits our time, energy, and ability to serve the Lord and others as we care for our families – a mother's time is not her own. Singleness is a gift that allows us to serve the Lord much more freely, as does remaining childless.
- No matter our situation; married with children, single with children, married without children or single, the Lord's sovereign and good plans for our lives will come to fruition. All faithful and obedient persons will be sanctified by following the Holy Spirit. Although motherhood can sanctify women in unique ways, it is not the only path to leading a fruitful, holy and pleasing life in the Lord's sight.

7

Q. "Amanda described sanctification as God's 'enduring grace' and prayed that her sufferings would help to sanctify her" (p89). What lessons can we learn from her perspective on suffering and hardship?

TALKING POINTS

Trials and suffering can strengthen our character and confident hope of salvation (Romans 5: 3- 5);

- God's supernatural peace and joy comes and fills our heavy hearts during suffering and grief.
- Praying relevant scripture passages can help us experience peace and draw nearer to the Lord.
- We may be blessed through help and support from others (Christian love and community are often demonstrated when a church family is suffering hardship).

- We must first think of God's perfect love for us, then consider our circumstances so we do not begin to question His perfect love.
- God is worthy to be praised in all circumstances, not for all circumstances, but in them.
- Our suffering may encourage others, shine Christ's light and role model the Christian faith and endurance to others.
- On the other side of our suffering, we may have some perspective and understanding we did not have during the suffering.
- When we get to heaven, we will find the things we did, and the lessons we learned along the road we walked were unmistakably the best path for us.
- What has happened to us may have helped advance the gospel and save one (or many) for Christ.
- Our pain and trials in life can indeed bless and help others overcome their suffering through shared experience, advice, and comfort.
- We can offer to mentor another going through a trial we have walked through ourselves.
- God works all things together for the good of those who love Him.

Sanctification is positional (we are justified through Christ) and progressive (already but not yet);

- Because of Christ's finished work on the cross, those who believe are in a position as holy, blameless, and righteous before God; made right through confessing our sins and believing that God raised Jesus from the dead, that Jesus' blood cleanses us and the cross completely covers us. We are justified through faith alone, by grace.
- We have been made holy because of Jesus yet are called to strive after holiness. We do this by intentionally uprooting the weeds and sinfulness in our souls with the ever-present help of the Spirit.
- We will be made perfect, sinless, and whole in eternity.

*Notes adapted from Gretchen Saffles book 'The Well-Watered Woman'.

8

Q. Lucy Craft Laney dedicated her life to forming schools that provide Black Americans with both a liberal arts education and vocational education in a time when it was common to offer one or the other. Why was it important to offer both?

TALKING POINTS

It's important to educate the whole person. We are not simply a brain to stimulate with good books and knowledge. We are also physical beings that have very real physical needs;

- We require practical skills for life, for ourselves, our families, employment opportunities and serving God.
- We also need the knowledge to thrive. In this case, Black men and women were educated so that they could seek their freedom and liberties (p129).
- "In one generation, Black Americans went from a largely enslaved caste to being active citizens of the country that enslaved them. We had to overcome generations of legislated illiteracy, not just at the most basic level, but in hopes of participating in the marketplace of ideas and being taken seriously in spite of the color of our skin." (p133).

