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# THIS IS MY STORY. THIS IS MY SONG.

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**W**elcome to this Black History Month resource. The theme for 2023 is THIS IS MY STORY. THIS IS MY SONG.

Psalms 96:1-3, our scripture focus, declares it this way:

- “Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.  
<sup>2</sup> Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.  
<sup>3</sup> Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.”*

These ancient words may call to mind your own new song, a testimony to God’s everlasting love, protection, and enduring faithfulness.

Since 1976, Black History Month has been celebrated in February. Families, churches, individuals and communities are invited to explore more deeply Black American life and culture and to highlight the contributions made to many different areas of our society: literature, sports, religion, music, the arts, science and more. In the words of the song, Lift Every Voice and Sing, we are encouraged to:

*“Let our rejoicing rise, high as the listening skies.  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.” – James Weldon Johnson*

During the month, consider reading a book by an African American author, watch a movie with an African American theme, attend a talk in your community, a concert or a play as a way of hearing the voices and illuminating stories of African Americans. Listen to the stories around you, invite others to share theirs and share your own.

The passages of scripture, the occasional quote, the lyrics of songs, or the lines of a meditation are meant to be used as “prompts” for your own creative planning and story sharing. Some of our friends have shared their stories and their songs in these pages. Let this be an invitation to you, as well.

*“I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living. <sup>14</sup> Wait for the LORD; BE strong and take heart  
and wait for the LORD.” Psalm 27:13-14*

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## PROGRAM IDEAS

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### **UNITED CELEBRATION SERVICE**

Have members in your corps gather with others in your community for a united celebration service. Have participants highlight a historical figure or living individual that has made a unique contribution to the Black community. Share a quote, picture, or brief bio that describes the person's life and contributions. Share a meal of cultural dishes together.

### **YOUR CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Celebrate your cultural heritage together. Participants can bring an item that expresses their cultural heritage and share its meaning with another or in a small group. Items can include a picture, a poem, object, music, food, etc. Have participants share: What does the item say about your background and who you are today?

### **CULTURAL HERITAGE GROUP DISCUSSION**

(See SHARING YOUR CULTURAL HERITAGE Questions)

Have discussion based on the Cultural Heritage questions. This is an intercultural activity. Everyone within your community can take part in this activity.

### **GUEST SPEAKER / PANEL**

Invite a special guest to speak on a topic of interest and relevance to the Black community,. This can be a well-moderated panel discussion followed by questions from participants. Be intentional about creating a space to listen to diverse voices. Consider doing a volunteer service project that addresses a community need.

### **THE SALVATION ARMY "PERSPECTIVES"**

PERSPECTIVES exhibit at The Salvation Army USA Central Territory Museum celebrates the diversity of today's Salvation Army. It features the stories of dozens of officers, soldiers, and employees. The online version of the exhibit is <https://sacentralmuseum.org/perspectives/> .

### **WELLNESS HEALTH FAIR**

Host a Health Fair by partnering with local health and wellness organizations. Hold workshops for all ages on topics relevant to the mental, physical, and emotional health of the African American community. Provide basic wellness checks. Include healthy eating cooking demonstrations, and activities and games for children and adults.

### **TEDTALK CLUB**

View a TEDTalk and host a discussion. Your search can begin with TALKS TO CELEBRATE BLACK HISTORY MONTH. Suggestions to get you started include The Dangers of a Single Story (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie), and We Need to Talk About an Injustice (Bryan Stevenson). TED is dedicated to researching and sharing knowledge that matters through short talks and presentations. [https://www.ted.com/playlists/230/10\\_great\\_talks\\_to\\_celebrate\\_bl](https://www.ted.com/playlists/230/10_great_talks_to_celebrate_bl)

### **ARTS FESTIVAL**

Host a community ARTS FESTIVAL. This festival can showcase the creativity expressed through the arts in your community, including music, dance, art, poetry/spoken word, photography or other art forms. Be sure to include food competitions!

### **LEARN ABOUT YOUR LOCAL BLACK HISTORY THROUGH GOOGLE MAPS**

You don't have to be an expert on your town or city's Black history. Do a Black History google search on your community. You'd be surprised at the treasure you may discover!

### **WHERE ARE YOU FROM?**

Everybody comes from somewhere. Everyone has a *migration* story. Where were your parents and your grandparents born? How did your family get to the place they eventually called home? Where is the place you call home? Place a map on a bulletin board and have participants identify their birthplaces and share their migration stories.

### **BOOK STUDY: THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS**

Speaking of migration stories, gather for a book study. Isabel Wilkerson's book, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, focuses on the black migration in the U.S. between 1915 -1970. There are book group guides available. Here is one.

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/190696/the-warmth-of-other-suns-by-isabel-wilkerson/9780679763888/readers-guide/>

“For there is always light if only we’re brave enough to see it,  
if only we’re brave enough to be it.” -- Amanda Gorman

### **ABCS OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH FOR KIDS**

Time to brush up on your Black History facts! This kid-friendly video uses colorful graphics, music and narration to showcase a Black history fact for each letter of the alphabet.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoIEH4qzBdE>

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## **INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT BLACK AMERICA**

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### **MOST BLACK ADULTS SAY RELIGION AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE GO HAND IN HAND**

Articles in Faith & Christianity ■ February 18, 2021

When Black History Month is observed each year, faith is a thread throughout many of the stories and celebrations of the Black community in the U.S. In fact, according to Black Americans, it's an essential part of the narrative.. . <https://www.barna.com/research/sobc-2/>

### **CHURCHPULSE WEEKLY CONVERSATIONS: BYAN LORITTS ON RACIAL RECONCILIATION**

Even after a year of increased conversations around race in the United States, Black History Month still offers leaders a unique chance to refocus on learning from the lived experiences of their Black brothers and sisters in America, as well as from Black Church traditions. <https://www.barna.com/research/cpw-bryan-loritts/>

### **A NATIONAL DAY OF RACIAL HEALING**

The National Day of Racial Healing is an opportunity to advance racial equity and build solidarity through community building, learning from each other to bridge differences, acknowledging the history and current realities of racism and taking actions towards racial healing. There are several resources in their action kits. Get started here: <http://wkkf.co/mms6>.

In West African culture, the griot (gre-o) is a tribal story keeper and storyteller. This individual is often an elder, and keeper of the culture and history of the people. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/griot>).

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## **MY STORY. MY SONG**

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*Do you have a favorite song? One that expresses your faith or that marks a significant life event? Perhaps it's a song that tells a story about overcoming hardship or one of life's difficulties. Maybe it's a song of celebration. Share your story and your song. Here are stories shared by a few of our friends.*

### **TAKE ME BACK**

Reflection: Major Katrina Matthews  
Associate Administrator  
KROC CENTER CHICAGO, IL

☞ While at a prior appointment, a Hispanic family came to The Indianapolis Harbor Light inquiring about Church. They shared that they had prior experience with the Army, and they wanted to renew those covenants with the Army. The parent came with her children to ask me if they could come to church there. The children's eyes were filled with excitement of returning to a place where they once worshiped God. My heart was even more excited because the soldiers had prayed for children and here they were knocking at our door. Those children renewed their covenants to be Sr. soldiers and Jr. soldiers. As they re-signed their covenants, it reminded me of the gospel song written by Andre Crouch:

*Take me back, take me back dear Lord  
To the place where I first received you  
Take me back, take me back dear Lord where I  
First believed.*

*I must confess, Lord I've been blessed  
But yet my soul's not satisfied  
Renew my faith, restore my joy  
And dry my weeping eyes.*

*Take me back, take me back dear Lord  
To the place where I first received you  
Take me back, take me back dear Lord where I  
First believed.*

They took me back to when I signed my covenant to be a Salvation Army Officer. God resealed my promise that day as they knelt and signed their covenant. I declared again in my spirit to live for him and even to die for Him as a servant of Jesus. God gave us this opportunity to convict me again of my calling and covenant as an African American Officer, that whosoever will, let him come.

### **SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER**

Reflection: Major Kim Kendall Matthews  
Senior Kroc Center Officer  
KROC CENTER CHICAGO, IL

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, that calls me from a world of care,  
And bids me at my Father's throne, make all my wants and wishes known;  
In seasons of distress and grief, my soul has often found relief,  
And oft escaped the tempter's snare, By Thy return, sweet hour of prayer.*

☞ One night, my son, Kim Jr. confessed to me a childish wrong. Kneeling, he prayed, "Dear Jesus, make me a man, like daddy — 'the Major' — wise and strong. I know you can!" As he slept, I knelt beside his bed, confessed my sins and with a bowed head prayed, "O God, make me a child like my little Kim here ... pure, genuine, trusting God with faith sincere." This is a thoughtful reminder for us during Black History Month to take the same stand and pray with childlike faith. His prayer was sweet, short, and straight to the point, and transformed his bedroom with the mighty power of God's Spirit.

Kim taught me, we too can reach our Lord through talking directly to him and experience a wonderful exchange that leads us to the heart of God. For many people of color, prayer has indeed captured the intimacy that God desires to have with our people when personal circumstances overtake us; such as depression, injustice, stress, and fear. I've come to know that a spiritual dialogue with God is more than simply the saying of words or thinking of thoughts. You see, prayer has the power to be more than a reaction to God. It's a true

uninterrupted connection with Him that moves my heart. What about you during this Black History Month?

While growing up, I was taught to “speak when I was spoken to.” My kids will tell you that this is true. My parents expected and strongly encouraged me to give an appropriate reply when I was spoken to verbally, but also when the message was in the nonverbal form as of an act of kindheartedness. Either way, it called for a thoughtful response. For me, praying exercises my faith that teaches me to build Godly habits of being proactive in responding frequently to God who longs to hear from us. Like little Kim Jr., our requests become pure and genuine, trusting God with faith sincere; and, as we seek God in prayer, we put our faith into action.

Please be reminded during this Black History Month that a vital prayer life can keep us connected to God. Never forget that God has the power to change all situations as we go to Him in prayer, without reservation, but with spiritual resolve. Kim Jr. reminded me that there is power in prayer, and God has not changed. His ear is just as quick to hear the voice of a real prayer and His arms are just as long and strong to save as they ever were.

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, Thy wings shall my petition bear,  
To Him whose truth and faithfulness, Engage the waiting soul to bless  
And since He bids me seek His face, Believe His word, and trust His grace,  
I'll cast on Him my every care, And wait for Thee, sweet hour of prayer.*

--William W. Walford (1772-1850)

### **THE WILL OF GOD**

Reflection: Captain Lennard Cossey  
Business Officer  
USA CENTRAL, COLLEGE FOR OFFICER TRAINING

☞ My story started early in the city of East Chicago, IN. I grew up being the youngest of nine children. I would never have thought I would be where I am today, serving in this Salvation Army years ago. I'm reminded of a particular neighborhood I stayed in. We needed a safe place for recreation; however, on the other side of town, there was The Salvation Army. I remember following my brothers and sisters at an early age to where we found refuge and a lot of fun, not knowing that this place was a church. The officers at the time welcomed us with warm hearts and took us in as a family. Although my entire life story does not begin with The Salvation Army, still, I'm thankful for the time and period that God lead me and how he loves me. The safest place is in the will of God.

Karen Clark Sheard wrote a song called "The Will of God," and the first part of the song says:

*The safest place in the whole wide world  
Is in the will of God  
Though trials be great And the way seems hard  
It's in the will of God  
It may be on a mountain peak, Or in the valley low  
But wherever, Wherever, Wherever, Wherever it may be,  
If God says GO! Then GO!*

It's a blessing to know that there is safety in the will of God. As my story continues, I am reminded of this passage of scripture: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:2)

### **WE ARE ONE**

REFLECTION: Captain Lorna Cossey  
Field Training Officer  
USA CENTRAL, COLLEGE FOR OFFICER TRAINING

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."  
John 13:35 (NIV)

☞ There was a gospel song that the Walt Whitman and the Soul Children Choir of Chicago sang called "**We are One**". This group performed in front of many intercultural churches and the room filled up with so many emotions. The song reflected John 13:34-35, where genuine display of love for one another is a true mark of discipleship. The choir released this song in 1988 when racial tension was high. There were movies made about the crack epidemic in the Black community, and the war on drugs was putting our Black males in prison. During this time the church was scrambling to make sense of it all. Also, there were a lot of new multi-cultural churches being led by White pastors. They were the sending churches who sent evangelism teams into the crack ridden communities. However, what seemed like a good idea was still met with tension and pushback. Black ministers felt that they were responsible and capable of evangelizing their own community. The Black Ministerial Alliance in these areas felt that it was not evangelism that was only needed but resources. The years from 86-90 were met with heavy racial tension which created splits between the White and Black evangelical churches.

Now to move forward, the song "**We Are One**" is still my favorite song; and as I reminisce on the 80's, I see today that the church still needs to be reminded "**We Are One**".

I am in a different place and time, but the heavy racial tension has come again for the evangelical church. As I look at the walls in the Railton building, filled with pictures of officers

and cadets, I am made aware of how much the racial tension over time even affected us at The Salvation Army. However, I am reminded by the image of Commissioner George Scott Railton that his heart resonated “We are One”. I was reading an old history book on Commissioner Railton and saw this statement:

***“He was a missionary, not for a province, a land, or a people – he was a missionary for the world. All men and all peoples could have found in him a champion of their race. The Salvation of souls was his passion.”***

It was noted that many Blacks attended Commissioner Railton’s evangelism meetings. The Commissioner was concerned about the conditions for Blacks in America. He became grieved because more Blacks did not respond to the Army’s proclamations and invitations. He was not just looking to serve the Black Americans but to serve with them.

The song “We are one” has been sung by many artists; however, we must not let the words fall to the ground but live them because the song is rooted in the words of Christ. I celebrate Black History by remembering, embracing, and living out my favorite song.



*“All praise to the Father from whom all blessings come and all praise to Jesus Christ, God’s only son. And all praise to the spirit that makes us all one.”  
And they will know we are Christians by our love, our love.  
Yes, they will know we are Christians by our love.”*

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## MEDITATION: THE JORDAN RIVER

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### \*THE JORDAN RIVER

“Today [WE] join the people of Israel at a watershed moment in their story. After forty years of wilderness wandering, God has stopped the flow of the Jordan River to allow Joshua and the Israelites to cross safely into the land God had promised to their ancestors...



*“On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. He said to the Israelites, ‘in the future when your descendants ask their parents, “What do these stones mean?” tell them, “Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.” For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD YOUR God.’ Joshua 4:19-24 (NIVUK)*



I have a short memory. I can recall the things I’m asking God to help me with right now without a moment’s thought, but when asked for specific examples of how God has answered my prayers, I’d probably need a moment to think. I can become so preoccupied by my present that I forget God’s goodness in my past. That’s what I love in this story: God takes the time to not only perform a miracle, but to give His people something tangible to help them remember it as well.

**Question: What are the most significant answers to prayer or moments when God has intervened in your life? Share your story.**

PAUSE: What word or phrase jumped out at you from these verses?

I was struck by the simple command, ‘Tell them’... God wanted this story to be shared because it tells those who listen something about who God is, what God is like, and what God is willing and able to do for His people.

**Question: God, who can I tell my story to this week?**

PRAYER: Lord, stories of Your loving action heal my heart and ignite my faith. I’m sorry that I sometimes forget what You’ve done. Today, I choose to remember. Give me the courage to share my story with others.

\*This meditation is from Lectio 365, for Oct. 24, Carla Harding.

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## ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES FOR REFLECTION

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*The scriptures that follow are meant to be prompts for you to tell your story and to share your song. Read. Listen. All of our stories are necessary to bring wholeness to our history and to enrich our life together.*

**TEACH YOUR CHILDREN (Deuteronomy 11:19-21)**

<sup>19</sup> Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>20</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, <sup>21</sup> so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

<sup>22</sup> If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow—to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him and to hold fast to him— <sup>23</sup> then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and stronger than you. <sup>24</sup> Every place where you set your foot will be yours: Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea.

**Question: What reminders do you have in place of God’s goodness to your family and to your community so that you do not forget?**

**TO THE NEXT GENERATION (Joel 1:1-3)**

Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land.  
Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors?

<sup>3</sup> Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.



**Question: What is something God has given you that is important for you to pass on?**

**SINGING GOD’S SONG (PSALM 137:1-4)**

<sup>1</sup> By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.

<sup>2</sup> There on the poplars we hung our harps, <sup>3</sup> for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy;  
they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

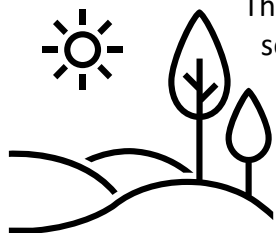
<sup>4</sup> How can we sing the songs of the LORD  
while in a foreign land?

**Question: Are there any circumstances that make your story too hard to share or your song too hard to sing?**

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## SHARING YOUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

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These questions are provided to encourage interaction among all people in your setting. All of us have a culture and a cultural heritage. These questions begin to “tease” out our cultural heritage –our ways of living in a community, the faith traditions we hold dear, the things we value and want to pass on.

Discussions can take place before or after a meal, while having coffee, in a small group or with one other person. You may choose to initiate conversations with family members and friends who can share the

contributions made by people within the African American community. There may be history makers in your church, your school, your neighborhood and even your home.

### **QUESTIONS:**

What is one of the first things that come to mind when you think about your cultural heritage?

If you could choose one item (song, poem, food, clothing, item, etc.) that represented your cultural heritage, what would it be?

What “life lessons” were passed on to you from your parents, teachers, or community leaders when you were growing up?

What historical events are unique to your cultural heritage?

### **FAITH AND HOLIDAYS:**

What role did religion/faith have in your cultural heritage?

What is your favorite family holiday? How would it be celebrated?

What would your family consider to be a “rite-of-passage”?

Describe the traditional ways that people in your culture dressed for regular and special occasions.

What games were a regular part of your family gatherings?

### **MUSIC:**

What do you consider to be the traditional music of your cultural heritage?

Were there special songs for different occasions?

**WHERE ARE YOU FROM:**

Where were your parents born? Where were your grandparents born? Were there stories about how people moved from place to place?

Were there stories of family members who lived in other countries?

**FAMILY TRADITIONS:**

Did anyone in your family or community speak another language? If so, how was that accepted?

What types of foods were cooked for special occasions when you were growing up?

Describe the traditional ways that people in your culture dressed for regular and special occasions.

What do you consider to be the traditional music of your cultural heritage?

What types of foods were cooked for special occasions when you were growing up?

What is a favorite family holiday?

What would your family consider to be a “rite-of-passage”?

Did anyone in your family or community speak another language? How was that accepted?

What story did the elders in your life tell you about how to “get along” in the world?

**THE WORLD AROUND YOU:**

What was your first encounter with a culture that was different than your own?

What is a unique belief that people from your cultural heritage share?

Where did people go when they travelled when you were younger?

What lessons from your cultural heritage would you like to pass on? Are there lessons from your cultural heritage you don't want to pass on to others?

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## SONGS

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Most of the songs listed here are found in “THIS IS MY STORY. THIS IS MY SONG.”

Goodness of God (Church of the City)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1nOZh3Wg7M>

Believe for It (Live) [Official Video] (CeCe Winans)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fd24fpsF1Qw>

The Story I’ll Tell (feat. Naomi Raine) | Maverick City Music | TRIBL

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjY26wzFm2U>

I Love to Tell the Story - A Cappella - Chris Rupp (Official Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPTzKT-JLw0>

Andrae Crouch – Take Me Back

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg4UdrNFuEg>

Alan Jackson – Sweet Hour of Prayer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zNuYcplBmk>

They Will Know We Are Christians

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGD\\_BFSf90c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGD_BFSf90c)

The Will of God, Karen Clark Sheard

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUhK9c8cjB4>

Blessed Assurance Jesus is Mine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDeiy9-t2GE>