

EXCERPT



Soul Care in African American Practice

May 5, 2020 | \$17, 184 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4671-9

In the midst of our hectic, overscheduled lives, caring for the soul is imperative. Now, more than ever, we need to pause—intentionally—and encounter the Divine. Soul care director Barbara Peacock illustrates a journey of prayer, along with spiritual direction and soul care from an African American perspective. She reflects on how these disciplines, with prayer as significant element of the book, are woven into the African American culture and lived out in the rich heritage of its faith community. Using the examples of ten significant men and women, Barbara helps us engage in practices of soul care as we learn from these spiritual leaders.

Rosa Parks Models Meditation and Contemplation

There she was, sitting on a bus in a seat that she was not supposed to sit in. She was not sitting in the section designated “Colored Only.” She had made a conscientious decision to speak silently for her civil rights. This meditation and contemplation came with intention. I call it consecrated intentionality.

Meditation is a discipline in which a person’s focus is turned inward. During meditation, one’s mind is fixed on an object, a thing, a word, an event, or something similar. As Mrs. Parks sat on the Alabama bus, her mind was definitely fixed. She had set her mind “like flint” (Isaiah 50:7). She sat with a tenacity and strength that can come only from God Almighty. She sat and she contemplated.

Contemplation is a form of personal devotion, and Mrs. Parks spent private time contemplating her God. This form of devotion reinforced her resolve to implement change. This was her “reasonable service” (Romans 12:1 NKJV). She was truly presenting her body as a “living sacrifice” (NIV).

Regardless of how long she ruminated on her decision to resist, it was done with careful and precise thought. Her transformative act of justice was instituted without words. For is it not true that actions speak louder than words? Is it not true that I can show you better than I can tell you? Mrs. Parks painted a picture of justice that would be etched on the minds and hearts of millions for years to come. Her act of meditation and contemplation was a stage setter that launched ideas and actions with one result in mind: freedom.

As I reflect on the life and journey of the great Rosa Parks, I am mesmerized by her humble tenacity to endure persecution, degradation, and blatant segregation. Like numerous other women of African descent, she had strong ethical values. She had insight beyond her natural cognitive faculties. For sure, she was not cognizant of the impact one meditative and demonstrative act would have on her generation as well as generations to come.

I cannot help but reflect on the cost Mrs. Parks paid for freedom and admire her instinctive belief that God would see her through all her trials, tribulations, and persecution.

Let’s now turn our attention to the practices of meditation and contemplation that Mrs. Parks so powerfully modeled for us.

In this day and time, there are numerous religions that define *contemplation and meditation* different from the Christian tradition. So before I begin to define either, let me say I am doing it from a christocentric and trinitarian theological stance. I have no desire or need to mix any other religion in my discussion. I know it may be common today to be inclusive with other faiths; however, that is not my intent here. So when I refer to these terms, I am doing so solely from a Christian perspective.



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Barbara L. Peacock (DMin, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary) is a spiritual director, author, teacher, and preacher. She is the founder of Barbara L. Peacock Ministries, a ministry committed to developing disciples through prayer, spiritual direction, soul care, mentoring, and teaching.

One of my favorite verses in Scripture is Joshua 1:8, which reads: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (NKJV). *Meditate*. In this passage is the Hebrew word *hagah*, meaning to ponder and deeply connect. The disciplines of prayerful meditation and contemplation lead men and women of God to a place where they can ponder and deeply connect.

Unlike the word *meditate*, *contemplate* appears in Scripture only once or twice, depending on the translation. However, in our study and teachings of spiritual disciplines of twenty-first-century Christendom, both terms are widely used. Sometimes they are used independently of each other and sometimes they are used interchangeably. Nonetheless the call remains the same from the Spirit of God: come aside and be with God to ponder and connect with him by any means necessary. Meditation and contemplation are excellent tools to use when doing this.

The disciplines of meditation and contemplation open us to the teaching of the Holy Spirit as we seek to draw closer to God through his Word. Joshua 1:8 emphatically informs us of the key to prosperity: it is not based on the systems of the world but on the spiritual condition of the heart and soul. Thus we understand that meditation on God’s Word is the key to a successful life in Christ. Contemplation can be understood as taking the discipline of meditation to a deeper level. Contemplative spirituality draws us into a more focused being and knowing as we open ourselves up to the intimacy of God’s totality.

See your time of contemplation as a sacred solo space with an audience of One. Respond to his call to be with you, to sup with you, and to dance with you in the Spirit as he serenades you. Come aside and just be. No agenda. Just rest. Bathe in his holy presence. Receive his holiness. Embrace his unconditional love. Saturate. Soak in silence. Be.

—Adapted from chapter three, “Mrs. Rosa Parks: Meditation and Contemplation”

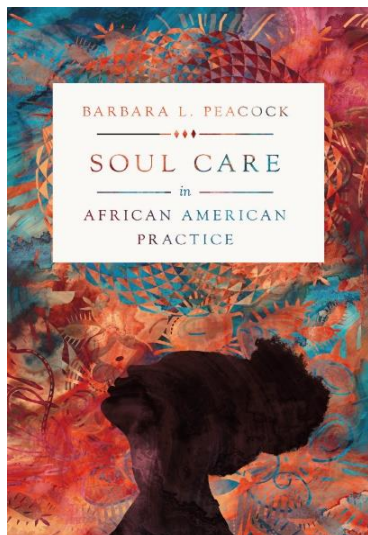


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The powerful list of ten influential men and women referenced by Peacock in *Soul Care in African American Practice* includes Frederick Douglass, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Darrell Griffin, Renita Weems, Harold Carter, Jessica Ingram, Coretta Scott King, James Washington, and Howard Thurman.

Be Inspired

“Dr. Barbara Peacock has crafted a book that reflects her own passions, principles, and practices as a preeminent person of prayer. Drawing upon the spiritual lives of ten African Americans—historical and contemporary—she unpacks the distinctive soul-shaping dynamics of their shared experience of the triune God in the midst of oppression. However, she doesn’t simply write about their experience, she invites her readers to share in it through reflective and contemplative exercises at the end of each chapter. I encourage you to accompany this wise guide in exploring the African American soul . . . and your own.”

—**David A. Currie**, dean of the doctor of ministry program and the Ockenga Institute, professor of pastoral theology, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“As Barbara Peacock writes, through spiritual disciplines we can hear from God as he responds to the humble cry from the intentionally consecrated heart. This is a book about the nourishment of the soul—drinking from his fountain, soaking in his presence—that results in his rest. Barbara has shared her accumulated depth of spiritual maturity that comes from a lifelong and generational journey, even through the dark night of the soul. As she describes the legacy of slavery’s Middle Passage for all of us, her words resonate to the national spiritual foundation of prayer, the impact of bended knees on the very breath we breathe, who we are, and who we are becoming. Never have we needed this more.”

—**Tom Phillips**, vice president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

“Having been blessed by the teaching and intercessory prayer ministry of Dr. Barbara Peacock, I am so excited about *Soul Care in African American Practice*. As a spiritual director and a scholar, she gives voice and vision to the rich Christian spiritual tradition that has undergirded the sustenance, liberation, and transcendence of African Americans. In so doing, she calls us once again to the fountain of living water that never runs dry.”

—**Bishop Claude Alexander**, pastor of The Park Ministries, Charlotte, North Carolina

“Barbara Peacock has lovingly offered a much-needed contribution to the modern spiritual formation movement. Her gentle teaching on soul care topics and suggestions for practicing them, enveloped by the feel and flavor of the African American experience while introducing the reader to some incredible heroes of the faith, combine to create a truly transformational text.”

Stephen A. Macchia, founder and president of Leadership Transformations, Inc., author of *Crafting a Rule of Life* and *Broken and Whole*

“The story of African American faith forged in the bellies of slave ships, midnight stints in the forest, prayer closets, and prison cells needs to be spread to every corner of creation where greed seeks to crush the image of God in humanity. The power of Jesus subverts the power of imperialism, pushes against the false gospel of racial hierarchy, and gives physical and spiritual freedom to all who desire communion with the Holy One. This book is a gift to every nation from the people whose faith comes from a sustained refusal to be slaves to a god invented in the United States.”

—**Jonathan P. Walton**, author of *Twelve Lies that Hold America Captive* and creator of the *Emotionally Healthy Activist* podcast and course

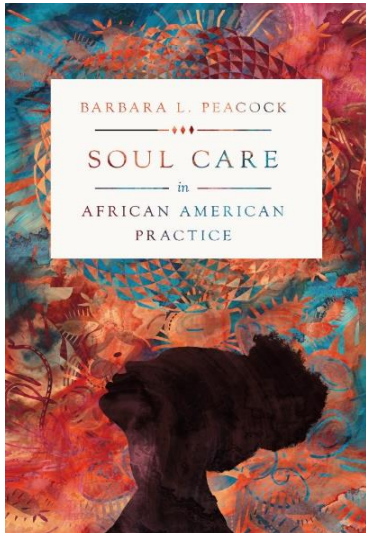


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“Reverend Peacock provides an opportunity for an in-depth relationship with Christ by sharing insights on how historical and present-day African Americans engage in soul care. This is a must-read for anyone interested in developing a more holistic daily spiritual practice, which is the foundation for a vibrant prayer life. *Soul Care* is ideal for small groups as well as individual study. Reverend Peacock expertly demonstrates how spiritual direction and soul care are at the root of African American theological practices and their application for everyday life.”

—**Nadia E. Brown**, associate professor and university scholar at Purdue University, author of *Sisters in the Statehouse: Black Women and Legislative Decision Making*

“The temptation of Western theological thought and spiritual formation is to ignore or deny the historical contributions of African Americans. Dr. Peacock does a wonderful job of introducing to some and reminding others of the role African American spiritual mothers and fathers have played in shaping the hearts of God’s people and a nation.”

—**Natasha Sistrunk Robinson**, author of *A Sojourner’s Truth: Choosing Freedom and Courage in a Divided World*

“For the souls who look back and wonder how we made it over, the answer lies in this book. With rich historical context and practical application for the future, Dr. Peacock does a marvelous job of contextualizing spiritual practices to transform lives.”

—**Nicole Martin**, director of US Ministry for the American Bible Society, author of *Made to Lead: Empowering Women for Ministry*

“As a white person and advocate of the Christian contemplative tradition, I was deeply moved to learn how the essence of contemplative practice is inextricably woven into the fabric of African American spirituality. Barbara Peacock tells of how prayer, spiritual companionship, meditation, and lament were vital spiritual disciplines of some of the most prominent black leaders in history and were forged in the fires of racism, brutality, and slavery. This book signals a new day dawning when African American spirituality’s unique features will include the distinctives of the contemplative way. I’m honored to commend it to you. Read it and be inspired!”

—**Beth A. Booram**, spiritual director and cofounder/director of Fall Creek Abbey, coauthor of *When Faith Becomes Sight*

“I have known Dr. Barbara Peacock for three decades. From the moment we met, she has displayed a passionate interest in and commitment to spiritual wellness for people of all backgrounds. She has demonstrated a unique sensitivity for holistic wellness among African Americans whose experiences and exposures create urgent needs for care. The transitions in black America through the various stages and types of social and political struggles often function separately and apart from both clinical and pastoral analysis and practice. Dr. Peacock offers a synthesis that creates opportunities for individual and group care that can be transformative and agency for healing. Black churches especially will benefit from this practical and insightful resource, but all believers and churches can be informed by the responses recommended by Dr. Peacock for the African American context.”

—**DeForest B. Soaries Jr.**, senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, New Jersey



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