

EMBODIED FAITH GUIDE

Embodied Faith Communities with Black Campus Ministries

About the Resource:

The Embodied Faith resource exists as an aid for BCM staff, students, and volunteers as we develop extraordinary Black leaders and establish Embodied Faith communities on community college campuses, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). The Gospel of Jesus Christ is compelling to Black students when it is visible and attends to their everyday lived experiences as people of African descent. An embodied faith is core to the integrity of the Gospel we are sharing in our communities, with our words, our actions, our love, and our whole lives. The Embodied Faith Wheel (EFW) articulates the DNA of Black Campus Ministries as we seek to plant, build and grow Embodied Faith Communities of Black students.

We will share four contextualized and integral elements of Embodied Faith that we have discerned in most Black students' faith journeys and in the culture of our Black Campus Ministries. The resource serves as a guide for building culture in your BCM and as a compass for adopting the best fit BCM resources for your context. There is no singular Black experience. Our hope is that the EFW will provide both a contextualized, yet encompassing course for you to best serve your Black students from the dynamic and versatile experiences that emerge from the African diaspora.

What is Embodied Faith?

To Embody faith is to commit to the practice and working out of our faith and transformation in our lived experiences. It is to take seriously the life, death and resurrection of Jesus' body as a poor, brown man living under empire rule, as a tangible expression of God's love and salvation for all peoples, especially those who experience oppression in a society that threatens their bodies. Embodied faith is an integration of mind, body, soul, and community on a journey of liberation that comes in relationship with a God who loves, comforts, heals, and sets free.

The Embodied Faith Wheel

Embodied Faith is the DNA of BCM ministry and the Embodied Faith Wheel is the accompanying practical tool. As one BCM staff described it, the Embodied Faith Wheel creates a return pathway to a "spiritual homeland" that has sustained Black ancestors and communities through trials, tribulations, joys, and celebrations for centuries. This resource seeks to address not only the spiritual, but the social and cultural dimensions of experiences of faith in the African diaspora. As a resource, it offers two main functions: (1) a grid for students to engage in a self-inventory of their faith journeys; (2) a communal/structural diagnostic tool for the culture of BCM small groups and chapters and the implementation of resources and programming.

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4 Elements of Embodied Faith

Belonging:

Black students are invited and welcomed into an **authentic** community where they are **seen** and **heard** in the fullness of their identity. We are defining identity as a student's sense of who they are based on social group membership; i.e. "Black" is a racialized social group identity, "Nigerian" is an ethnic social group identity, "Woman" is a gender social group identity, etc. Intentionality regarding the intersecting social identities a student carries in their being is important for this generation of students. They are not ONLY black and are often made to hierarchize their identities (i.e. having to choose which part of their identity is most valuable or important, being black or being a woman). Students often need space to reflect on what it means to be black and a woman, black and a man, black and low income or first generation college student, black and queer/SSA, etc. because this impacts their day to day experiences. It's important to create spaces of belonging that embrace the versatility of blackness.

In use:

Personal Inventory - I am looking for **authentic** community to explore what it looks like to be fully who I am with no judgment. I want to be seen and heard as a person of African descent, though that's not all of who I am.

Structural/Communal Diagnostic - Black students are invited and welcomed into an **authentic** community where they are seen and heard.

Intimacy/Relationship:

Proclaiming and embodying a true historical Jesus who Black students can identify with is really powerful and healing for Black students. An invitation to **see themselves in Jesus** and **the divine in themselves** creates an openness, trust and relatability of Jesus to their experiences which has historically been lost in depictions of white Jesus and through the influence of White American Christianity, even in historically Black congregations. It may be helpful to invite students into the perspectives of Black Liberation theologians and womanist theologians (James Cone, Dolores Williams, Howard Thurman, Renita Weems, etc.) alongside their deeper dives into scripture to guide the process of integrating scripture into their lived experiences as people of African descent. The Church is a cultural institution and artifact within the Black community, so it's important to create space for students to reflect on their relationship with the Church, good or bad, as an invitation into healing and a deeper relationship with Jesus. Students need to hear and feel that the Christian God is big enough to hold their questions and that the community they're a part of will not give them easy, Sunday school answers.

In use:

Personal Inventory - I need a safe space to be **known** and **vulnerable**, to ask questions about faith, my identity, and the world. How can I know Jesus is **FOR** me and my people?

Structural/Communal Diagnostic - Our community creates spaces where Black students can **see themselves in Jesus** and **the divine in themselves** as they study the Word, ask questions, and grow

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with other believers.

Belief:

Students come to understand an Embodied Faith is not only cultural or nominal Christianity, but an invitation to **life transformation and intimacy with God and community**. Black communities are often communities where belief has been necessary for survival. Yet, amidst the faith that sustains, there are internalized beliefs that can create distance between black students and Jesus. We create spaces for these beliefs to be **unlearned, redirected or unpacked**. Beliefs such as “God is distant,” “Jesus is white,” arbitrary secular/sacred distinctions, legalism, etc. Prayer is also often regarded as cultural. Even if students do not consider themselves to be believers, they often have someone in their life who has prayed for them or is praying for them. Students need to **experience God for themselves** through prayer and other embodied spiritual practices, as well as be able to reflect on their experiences and identify God at work.

In use:

Personal Inventory - I believe Jesus is real and a **tangible agent** in the transformation of my life and community.

Communal/Structural Diagnostic - We explicitly consider what belief and transformation looks like in our lives and in our communities, and we provide invitations for tangible experiences of God in our lives.

Practice:

There are many black students who are living a life that is close to the heart of God in their activism and the way they care for their communities, but do not know Jesus. Our hope is to show them that Jesus is in those places with them. Students are empowered to consider, “Who else in my community needs this Good News? And what does it mean specifically for our context?” Caring for the world, our communities and seeking justice have always been paramount to the Black faith and the Black Church. Black students are often looking for faith communities that fully embody the Gospel in their activism and service to the world. We are inviting students to Co-Create and Co-Author their story and that of their community with God in ways that enable them to experience life abundantly as a Black person, break generational cycles and patterns, and invite them to discern how to use their gifts for the Kingdom of God and restoration of Creation. This happens through invitations to provide leadership in the community as well as vocational discernment.

In use:

Personal Inventory - My decision to follow Jesus has impacted my relationships, life decisions, and habits as I seek to **participate with God in the renewal of all things**, including me and my community.

Communal/Structural Diagnostic - We embody the Gospel in our **care for the renewal of the campus** and the world through **service** and **active participation** with God in the renewal of all things.

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Faith in the Black context is non-linear, versatile, dynamic, holistic and embodied. Our hope is that on a personal and communal level these four elements are fully engaged to empower, equip and enable Black students to live an Embodied Faith and for this to be reflected in BCM communities.

What do Embodied Faith Communities look like practically?

- A community where people experience love, healing and truth.
- A community of mutuality and mutual transformation as we learn from one another and learn to hold the stories of others as sacred
- A community that is nonviolent in our interactions with one another and committed to repair and restoration in our own community and in society around us.
- An Activated Body where students, staff and volunteers are living into their gifts and addressing needs in our community and context.
- A community that can laugh and celebrate together as much as they may grieve and mourn.
- A community that embraces and encourages rest as an act of love and resistance.
- A community that disrupts the status quo for the advancement of the Kingdom of Heaven, renewal of all things, and liberation of all peoples.



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