

PRAYING WITH JAMES BALDWIN

IN AN AGE OF
#BLACKLIVESMATTER

A RESOURCE FOR PRAYER
AND REFLECTION

JAMIE MCGHEE &
ADAM HOLLOWELL

AUGUST 2017

Table of Contents

About James Baldwin

About Black Lives Matter

About Praying with James Baldwin

Day 1: Let us pray

Day 2: Last Words: Sandra Bland

Day 3: First Steps: Learn

Day 4: Last Words: John Crawford III

Day 5: First Steps: Attend

Day 6: Last Words: Natasha McKenna

Day 7: First Steps: Contact

Day 8: Last Words: Michael Brown

Day 9: First Steps: Mourn

Day 10: Last Words: Mya Hall

Day 11: First Steps: Listen

Day 12: Last Words: Oscar Grant III

Day 13: First Steps: Speak

Day 14: Last Words: Philando Castile

Day 15: First Steps: Watch

Day 16: Last Words: Kendrec McDade

Day 17: First Steps: Organize

Day 18: Last Words: Freddie Gray Jr.

Day 19: First Steps: Hold

Day 20: Last Words: Eric Garner

Day 21: First Steps: Visit

Day 22: Last Words: Blake Brockington

Day 23: First Steps: Find

Day 24: Last Words: Kalief Browder

Day 25: First Steps: Welcome

Day 26: Last Words: Trayvon Martin

Day 27: First Steps: Repay

Day 28: Last Words: Tamir Rice

Day 29: First Steps: Love

Day 30: Let us pray

Additional Resources

About the Authors

About the Illustrators

Acknowledgements



ABOUT JAMES BALDWIN

James Baldwin was born James Jones on August 2, 1924 in Harlem Hospital in New York City. He received his stepfather's surname three years later when his mother, Emma Berdis Jones, married the Rev. David Baldwin in 1927. Novelist, essayist, playwright, public speaker, and poet, James Baldwin would become one of the most iconic names in North American literature over the next 63 years, until his death in Saint Paul de Vence, France in 1987.

ABOUT JAMES BALDWIN

Baldwin's writing career began in earnest in the mid 1940s when he moved from Harlem to Greenwich Village, New York, and began writing essays, book reviews, and short stories. In 1948 he expatriated to Paris, France where he completed his first novel, *Go Tell It On the Mountain*, in 1953.

In 1955 Baldwin published a collection of non-fiction essays with Beacon Press, *Notes of a Native Son*, which was positively reviewed but did not rise to prominence until the paperback edition appeared in 1957. In 1956 he published *Giovanni's Room*, a novel set in Paris, and in fall of 1957 he returned to New York and traveled to the southern United States to write essays commissioned by the Partisan Review and Harper's Magazine. These essays display Baldwin's deep commitment to the movement for Civil Rights, and they were collected in 1961's *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son*. During this era Baldwin also began to experiment with writing in the voices of women, first in the short story "Come Out the Wilderness," and then in his next novel, *Another Country*, published in 1962.

"I tell you this because I love you, and please don't you ever forget it."

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 1963

The 1960s saw Baldwin catapulted into the national spotlight as an author, celebrity, and agitator. He wrote "Down at the Cross," an essay which would be published in the November 17, 1962 issue of *The New Yorker* and which comprised the bulk of his most famous and enduring work of non-fiction, 1963's *The Fire Next Time*.

ABOUT JAMES BALDWIN

The murders of Medgar Evers on June 12, 1963 and Malcolm X on February 21, 1965 had a tremendous impact on Baldwin. In 1964 he dedicated a play, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, to Evers' widow Myrlie Evers, and their children, as well as the four young girls killed at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama on September 15, 1963. Baldwin left the States for Istanbul, Turkey in late 1965 looking for a place to rest and recover his creative voice.

Beginning with a visit in 1961, Baldwin spent nearly a decade living on and off in Istanbul. These years saw the publication of his next novel, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, in 1968 and the script of a film biography of Malcolm X titled *One Day When I Was Lost* in 1972. As the late sixties became the early seventies, Baldwin wrestled with issues of race, masculinity, and sexuality in an essay collection, *No Name in the Street*, and he completed his first novel in six years, *If Beale Street Could Talk*.

Baldwin's 50th birthday arrived in August, 1974, and he wrote to his brother, David, "Pray for the Old Warrior ... weary, but not downcast." (Leeming, 330) Within the following year he would complete a children's book, *Little Boy, Little Boy*, with the artist Yoran Cazac, as well as a reminiscent book mixing film criticism and memoir, *The Devil Finds Work*. Both would be published in 1976. During this time he also began work on his last major novel, *Just Above My Head*, which he would complete in early 1979.

During the early 1980s Baldwin took several trips to the southern United States, writing a series of essays reporting from Atlanta that would eventually become *Evidence of Things Not Seen*, published in 1985.

ABOUT JAMES BALDWIN

By the summer of 1986 Baldwin's health had deteriorated significantly, and he retired to the small village of Saint-Paul de Vence in France, where he rented, then owned, a house. He wrote two deeply important essays on sexuality and androgyny for *Playboy* in these later years, "To Crush the Serpent," and "Here Be Dragons," both reprinted in a volume of his collected nonfiction titled *The Price of the Ticket*.

In 1986 Baldwin began experiencing symptoms of esophageal cancer, and it quickly spread to other areas of his body. By 1987 it had spread to his liver, which was then diseased. Baldwin granted his last interview to Quincy Troupe in October 1987, and he continued to work on two unpublished pieces, a memoir of his friends Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. titled *Remember This House*, and a fictional scene titled *The Welcome Table*.

Baldwin died on December 1, 1987, and upon his death his brother David played "Amazing Grace" on the record player, filling the house in France with song. A funeral was held one week later at New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine, a church who had a decade earlier honored Baldwin as a "prophet of the twentieth century." When James Baldwin died he was only 63 years old.

**"For Jimmy was God's Black revolutionary mouth
if there is a God,**

and revolution his righteous natural expression."

- Amiri Baraka, December 8, 1987

**Funeral for James Baldwin, Cathedral of St. John
the Divine, New York City**

ABOUT BLACK LIVES MATTER

Founded by three activists and organizers in Oakland, California – Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi – Black Lives Matter began as a direct response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman for second-degree murder. Zimmerman, a 28-year-old male, served as the neighborhood watch coordinator for his gated community in Sanford, Florida. On the night of February 26, 2012, Zimmerman shot and killed a 17-year-old high school student named Trayvon Martin. On the evening of July 13, 2013, a jury in Sanford, Florida, returned a verdict: not guilty.

That evening, Garza wrote a Facebook post that concluded with the words “Black Lives Matter.” Cullors shared Garza’s post and added a hashtag in front of those words, creating #blacklivesmatter. Since its inception, Black Lives Matter has been a call to action on social media in response to anti-Black racism and extrajudicial police killings. The movement has grown into a chapter-based national organization operating in the United States, with intentional centering of Black persons who are queer, trans, undocumented, and/or disabled.

For more information visit
www.blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/

To persuade black boys and girls, as we have for so many generations, that their lives are worth less than other lives, and that they can live only on terms dictated to them by other people, by people who despise them, is worse than a crime; it is the sin against the Holy Ghost.
James Baldwin, "Black Power," 1967

ABOUT PRAYING WITH JAMES BALDWIN

This project offers 30 days of prayers for an age of #BlackLivesMatter. It looks to author and artist James Baldwin as a guide. Over 30 days we pray with the "Last Words" of those who have been killed by racism and police violence, and we pray for the courage to take "First Steps" to change the world around us. You can download a free PDF of the full project or read prayers beginning August 2, 2017 at www.prayingwithjamesbaldwin.com

After the killing of teenager Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida in 2012, author Jesmyn Ward wrote, "In desperation, I sought James Baldwin." We, too, despair, and we, too, look to Baldwin as we lift our prayers to God. We turn to Baldwin as a witness, so that we might hear his words of truth on issues of race and violence. We turn to Baldwin as a prophet, so that we might see his vision of hope for our collective future. We turn to Baldwin as a teacher, so that he might teach us to pray when the words feel so difficult to find. We turn to his books, interviews, and stories to ask how we might pray in this time of #BlackLivesMatter.

These prayers mourn the loss of those who have died, and they call us to be faithful change-agents in a broken world. These are prayers of the heart, but also prayers that must take shape in the work of hands and the moving of feet.

With Baldwin as our guide, let us pray.

In this time of #BlackLivesMatter, let us pray.

For a world made new, let us pray.

Amen.

DAY 1: LET US PRAY



LET US PRAY

This project looks to James Baldwin to lead us in the ways and words of prayer. We return to his books, interviews, stories, and speeches to ask how we might pray in this age of #BlackLivesMatter.

I been praying...

Elisha in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* by James Baldwin, 1953

“I been praying, little brother,” Elisha said,
“and I sure ain’t going to stop praying now.”
“For me,” persisted John, his tears falling,
“for me.”

James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 1953

We turn to Baldwin as a witness, so that we might hear his words of truth on issues of race and violence. We turn to Baldwin as a prophet, so that we might see his vision of hope for our collective future. We turn to Baldwin as a teacher, so that he might teach us to pray when the words feel so difficult to find. After the killing of teenager Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida in 2012, author Jesmyn Ward wrote, "In desperation, I sought James Baldwin." We, too, despair, and we, too, look to Baldwin as we life our prayers to God.

God, teach me to look back, learning from history.

God, teach me to look out, facing the beautiful and terrible realities of contemporary life.

God, teach me to look forward, as Baldwin did, imagining a better future forged in honesty, laughter, and love.

In the name of God, we pray.

Amen.

DAY 2: LAST WORDS

The afternoon of July 10, 2015, Sandra Bland was stopped by officer Brian Encinia on University Drive in Prairie View, TX for failure to signal a lane change. After illegally asking Bland to put out her cigarette, which she refused, and ordering her to exit the car, Encinia pointed a taser at Bland and shouted, "I will light you up! Get out, now!"

"How did switching lanes with no signal turn into all of this?"
- Sandra Bland

Last known words of Sandra Bland, taken from a voicemail recording left for a friend on July 11, 2015 shortly after her initial court appearance.

Bland was arrested and taken to Waller County Jail. Police stated that at 6:30 a.m. on July 13, Bland refused breakfast and at 9:07a.m. a jailer discovered her hanging in her cell.

An autopsy conducted by the Harris County Institute of Forensic Science classified Bland's death as a suicide. In July 2016 the Houston Chronicle reported that, according to the lawyer for Sandra Bland's mother, a former Waller County Jail guard said under oath that he falsified entries on the jail log, indicating he checked on Bland in the hour before she was found dead when he did not.

A grand jury decided not to indict anyone associated with Bland's death at Waller County Jail. The arresting officer was placed on administrative leave for failure to follow proper traffic stop procedures, and he was later dismissed following indictment for perjury.

In September 2016 Waller County agreed to pay \$1.9 million to settle a lawsuit filed by the relatives of Sandra Bland.

Sources: New York Times, Houston Chronicle

"How did switching lanes with no signal turn into all of this?"

Sandra Bland, 1987-2015

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Report of: JAMES D. BRODY

Date: DEC 11 1963

Character: SECURITY MATTER - C

IV. STATEMENTS ATTRIBUTED TO JAMES BALDWIN

The June 3, 1963 issue of "The New York Times" contained another article on the subject in which he stated: "It was in Paris that I realized what my problem was. I was ashamed of being a Negro. I finally realized that I would remain what I was to the end of my time and lost my shame. I awoke from my nightmare."

To the FBI of 1963, a black body without shame was a threat to the state. We could say the same for Sandra Bland in 2015. When she refused to extinguish her cigarette, which she was not legally obligated to do, the officer threatened to "light her up." A black woman without shame, who knows her rights, who will not acquiesce to reckless white power, is a threat to the state that must be identified, intimidated, documented, and imprisoned.

God, you are the original artist: the creator and sculptor and perfecter of every body. Yet, the moment I look at my body and say, "It is good," I become a living weapon. Is it a crime to lose my shame? Is it a sin to thank you for the way you have created me?

Lord, free us from being ashamed of ourselves. Lord, free us from fear of others. Lord, free us to praise you for your creation.
Amen.

DAY 3: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: LEARN

Familiarize yourself with the origins of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Visit www.blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/ to read about founders Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi.

You mean it or you don't.

James Baldwin, 1984

Student: You said that the liberal façade and being a liberal is not enough. Well, what is? What is necessary?

Baldwin: Commitment. That is what is necessary. You mean it or you don't.

James Baldwin, speech at UMass Amherst on February 28, 1984

"A certain ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ... When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich."

Luke 18:18-23

God who sends rain on the just and the unjust, deliver us from these rhetorical games of question and answer. Deliver us from speeches, lectures, and interviews. Deliver us from the politics of this world, with its money and power, its conservatives, liberals, and independents. Instead, Lord, show us the way of commitment, and give us the courage to walk along that way. Rid us of all the things that stand in the way of your heavenly treasure. Send your Spirit to move our feet, so that when you say, "Come, follow me," that is exactly what we do.
Amen.

DAY 4: LAST WORDS

On August 5, 2014 Ronald Ritchie placed a 911 call from Wal-Mart in Beavercreek, Ohio to report “a gentleman walking around with a gun in the store ... He just pointed it at, like, two children.”

Two Beavercreek police officers arrived and Officer Sean Williams shot John Crawford III, then restrained him.

LeeCee Johnson, mother of Crawford’s two young children, was on the phone with him at the time and heard him say to police, “It’s not real.”

**“It's not real.”
- John Crawford III**

Last known words of John Crawford III, on August 5, 2014 according to LeeCee Johnson.

Crawford was transported to Miami Valley Hospital in Dayton, OH, where he was pronounced dead.

The 911 caller later stated that “At no point did [Crawford] shoulder the rifle and point it at somebody.”

Beavercreek police later stated that Crawford did not respond to verbal commands to drop the weapon and lie on the ground.

Surveillance tapes from the store show the officers shouting and shooting within the span of a few seconds.

The gun was an unloaded toy BB air rifle, which is sold in Wal-Mart stores nationwide.

Ohio is an “open carry” state, where open carry of firearms is legal with or without a license.

Sources: Washington Post, Democracy Now

"It's not real."

John Crawford III
1992-2014

Parnell: You loved him.

Juanita: Yes.

Parnell: I didn't know.

Juanita: Ah, you're so lucky, Parnell. I know you didn't know. Tell me, where do you live, Parnell? How can you not know all the things you do not know?

James Baldwin, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, 1964

What an effort it takes not to know: Not to know that Crawford's gun was a toy. Not to know that it was sold in the store. Not to know that Ohio is an open carry state. Not to know that the 911 caller lied. Not to know that you are calling in a lie. Not to know how long to wait before shooting. Not to know that the surveillance tapes will show just how trigger-happy you were. Not to know that you are restraining a man that you have already put on the road to death. Not to know that the mother of his children will hear him die. Not to know that we will hear him, too. How can we not know all the things we do not know?

God, open the eyes of those who claim not to see what is happening in front of them, because black lives are in their hands. Unstop the ears of those who claim they do not hear the sound of injustice ringing, because their bullets take black bodies down one by one. Unlock the minds of those who claim they do not know why black lives should matter, do not know what difference gun control will make, and do not know why police are so distrusted.

Open my eyes, unstop my ears, unlock my mind, that I may know your truth, and be set free. Amen.

DAY 5: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: ATTEND

Commit to attend one local government meeting to find out what is happening in your city or town. Where is racism impacting the lives of people in your neighborhood?

... *get off their knees and organize*

James Baldwin, 1963

“Therefore, when I faced a congregation, it began to take all the strength I had not to stammer, not to curse, not to tell them to throw away their Bibles and get off their knees and go home and organize, for example, a rent strike.”

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 1963

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. James 2:8-17

God of good works, we do not wish to be a people who pray on Sundays and go about our week, committing the same crimes. Liberate us from this cycle of hypocrisy. Shake us from the complacency of the church pew. Send your Spirit to lift us off of our knees and carry our feet into the march of justice. Open our eyes to the unity of faith and works, Sundays and Mondays, and scriptures and social protests. Enliven our faith, that we may do good works in your holy name. Amen.

DAY 6: LAST WORDS

Natasha McKenna was taken to the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center on January 26, 2015 on a charge of assaulting a police officer, stemming from an encounter in Alexandria, VA earlier that month. The Alexandria police did not act on requests to pick McKenna up from the Fairfax detention center, so county deputies decided to transfer her themselves on February 3.

The police noted McKenna's deteriorating mental health after one week in jail, and McKenna had previously been diagnosed with schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, and depression. Doctors who had been treating McKenna's schizophrenia warned law enforcement that she lacked the ability to process verbal orders or make decisions for herself.

In preparation for her transport to Alexandria, McKenna was restrained with handcuffs, arms behind her back, and police shackled her legs and placed a spit mask over her head. She resisted these restraints.

During a struggle that lasted over 45 minutes, Lieutenant Lucas Salzman used a stun gun to tase McKenna four times, insisting that she ignored repeated warnings to comply or be shocked.

"You promised you wouldn't kill me."

- Natasha McKenna

Last known words of Natasha McKenna on February 3, 2015, according to video released by the Virginia Sheriff's Department.

McKenna suffered cardiac arrest and lost consciousness. She died five days later. Her manner of death was ruled "accident" by the Virginia medical examiner's office.

Sources: Washington Post, Fairfax County Government

"You promised you wouldn't kill me."

Natasha McKenna
1978-2015

"Now, what you have to do with all that in order to free yourself from what I referred to as your history is, first of all, accept that history. Learn to accept, for example, that the American people never honored a single treaty that they made with Indians, not one. That means that you are the issue of a very dishonorable people."

James Baldwin, interview in *Stars and Stripes*, 1973

God, the doctors told the officers that she was ill. They told the officers that she couldn't process their commands, that her health was failing in this godforsaken jail. And they tased her, still. Again and again, until her heart seized, her consciousness left, and her spirit was extinguished. Save your people from such evil "accidents," Lord. Save us.

Lord, the bystanders called out to Christ on the cross, saying, "Save yourself!" They spectated your death and still believed themselves honorable people.

Save us all from the fiction that we are honorable people in an honorable nation.

Save us from believing that anyone can let injustices prevail and still boast an upright heart.

Let us see ourselves for what we really are.

Clear our minds, open our hearts, and hold our outstretched hands, so that we may begin the long process of bringing honor and justice where there is none. Amen.

DAY 7: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: CONTACT

Affordable housing is a significant obstacle to many people living in poverty. Contact a local representative in your area to voice your concern for more affordable housing.

They ain't gotta be afraid of me.

Peter in "Previous Condition"
James Baldwin, 1965

When I opened the door the landlady stood there, red-and-whitefaced and hysterical.

"Who are you? I didn't rent this room to you."

My mouth was dry. I started to say something.

"I can't have no colored people here," she said.

"All my tenants are compainin'. Women afraid to come home nights."

"They ain't gotta be afraid of me," I said.

I couldn't get my voice up; it rasped and rattled in my throat; and I began to be angry. ...

"My friend rented this room for me," I said.

"Well, I'm sorry, he didn't have no right to do that, I don't have nothin' against you, but you gotta get out."

Peter in "Previous Condition"

James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man*, 1965

Lord, why do I assume I know a homeless person's story just by looking at him or her? Why do I assume he or she should fix their poverty themselves? Maybe that's because the truth is too painful. The truth is that gentrification pushes families out of their apartments. The truth is that red-lining makes it nearly impossible for people of color to get much-needed loans. The truth is that mental illness is prevalent in the black community, and many people do not have the financial resources to treat it. The truth is that it's easier to refuse someone money than to accept these painful truths and then fight tirelessly to change them. Lord, I claim to love you and I claim to have a heart for your people, so turn my shame into love and my love into actions. Amen.

DAY 8: LAST WORDS

Shortly before noon, on August 9, 2014, Michael Brown and Dorian Johnson walked along the double yellow lines in the middle of Canfield Drive in Ferguson, Missouri. Officer Darren Wilson approached the two boys in his vehicle and ordered them to move out of the middle of the road.

There was a struggle between Brown and Wilson, during which Wilson's gun fired twice, striking Brown's right hand. Both boys fled, and Wilson got out of his car to pursue Brown. Wilson fired his gun, striking Brown's body at least six times.

“I don't have a gun. Stop shooting.”
- Michael Brown

Last known words of Michael Brown, according to his friend Dorian Johnson, Johnson recounted these words in an interview with MSNBC on August 11, 2014.

Brown's body remained in the street for over four hours. After his corpse was taken away, two weeks passed before his mother was able to see him.

In November 2014, a grand jury elected not to indict Officer Wilson.

In the months after shooting Brown, Wilson received nearly \$500,000 in online support.

In June 2017 St. Louis County agreed to pay \$1.5 million to settle a lawsuit filed by the relatives of Michael Brown.

In 2016 Lezley McSpadden published: *Tell the Truth & Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown*.

McSpadden is also founder of the Michael O. D. Brown We Love Our Sons & Daughters Foundation.

Sources: Washington Post, New York Times, MSNBC

"Stop shooting."

Michael Brown, 1996-2014

"Faulkner – among so many others! – is so plaintive concerning this “middle of the road” from which “extremist” elements of both races are driving him that it does not seem unfair to ask just what he has been doing there until now. ... Why – and how – does one move from the middle of the road where one was aiding Negroes into the streets – to shoot them?"
James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 1961

During debates in the 1950s and 60s, many white Southerners resisted integration by suggesting a milder, “middle of the road” approach to racial equity. Mississippi novelist William Faulkner famously suggested that, if pushed to move on integration, he would go with white Southerners “into the streets and shoot blacks.”

Baldwin knows that half-hearted, lukewarm movements for racial justice will turn into a bloodbath for the oppressed. In what is far too heartbreaking a reality, Michael Brown’s body bears the wounds of the white man who cannot walk the middle road. Brown’s body bears the bullets of the white man who cannot help but shoot black men in the very streets he claims to protect.

God our Father, send your Holy Spirit to those who say, “Go slow.” Keep us from walking the middle road of faith, hope, and love. Move our feet along the road of righteousness. Let the winds of change blow through our hearts, Holy God, that we might march in the parade of love toward your good future.

God our Mother, send your Holy Spirit to those who say, “Stop shooting.” Protect us from forces of wickedness. When our lives are in the crosshairs of those who carry lethal force, shelter us from the violence. Surround us with a shield of mercy. Let the winds of change give us life, Holy God, that we might march along the road of love that leads to your good future.

Amen.

DAY 9: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: MOURN

Mourn with those who mourn. Weep with those who weep. Attend a service of mourning or lament at a local church and pray for those whose hearts have been broken by racism and police violence.

For a litany of mourning written by the congregation at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, visit <https://prayingwithjamesbaldwin.com/trinityucc-lament>

... *if I began to weep, I would not be able to stop*

James Baldwin

"I did not want to weep for Martin; tears seemed futile. But I may also have been afraid, and I could not have been the only one, that if I began to weep, I would not be able to stop."

James Baldwin, from *I Am Not Your Negro: A Major Motion Picture*, Directed by Raoul Peck, 2016.

Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed— with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power— with no one to comfort them.

Ecclesiastes 4:1

Take my hand, Lord, and carry me to the place of righteous suffering, if that is your will. Take my hand, and carry me to the place of mourning with those who mourn, protesting with those who protest, and dancing with those who dance, even in the darkest hour. Release my captive heart, that I might accompany the broken-hearted. Open my clenched hands, that I might trade my violence for your gentle grace. Move my feet, that I might meet those who already march on the road to justice. Show me the way. Amen.

DAY 10: LAST WORDS

The morning of March 30, 2016 transgender sex workers Mya Hall and Brittany Fleming were driving a stolen Ford Escape through Baltimore.

Hall made an errant turn that led to an entrance of the National Security Agency at Fort Meade. She drove the car through NSA gates as police officials began shooting into the vehicle.

The car accelerated and collided with a police cruiser. Fleming was wounded in the incident.

Mya Hall was killed. Her last words are unknown.

" ... "

- **Mya Hall**

Unknown last words of Mya Hall, killed March 30, 2016.

Sources: The Guardian US, Daily Dot, Washington Post

Mya Hall Unknown-2016

In the early 1970s Baldwin gave a speech in Britain to protest black children being put into “subnormal” schools. A woman from the crowd cried out, and Baldwin responded to the crowd with these words:

"Let me say one thing: that woman's voice, that woman's voice is what you have to hear."

James Baldwin, "Speech from the Soledad Rally,"
1971

God, our lives are so crowded with so many things. Even #BlackLivesMatter becomes crowded, and we cannot always hear the names of your precious children.

So many dead.
So much violence.

Silence in us the noise of the crowd. Help us to hear the voices of the ones who go unheard, even as they cry out.

Let us whisper their names on our lips.

Mya Hall, your beloved, dead too soon.

Have mercy on us, O Lord. Amen.

DAY 11: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: LISTEN

Listen to the words of black women who lead the Black Lives Matter movement today. Listen to the words of black women in your local community who work for justice and peace.

To listen to a discussion with the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement, Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza, and Patrisse Cullors, visit <https://youtu.be/tbicAmaXYtM>

I'm not backing off.

Fannie Lou Hamer, 1968

"I loved Medgar. I loved Martin and Malcolm. We all worked together and kept the faith together. Now they are all dead. ... I'm the last witness – everybody else is dead."

James Baldwin, conversation with Ida Lewis, 1970

Baldwin was wrong. He wasn't the last living witness. And the men hadn't done the work alone. When Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in 1968, Rosa Parks was organizing in Detroit. Septima Clark was still registering voters in the South. Fannie Lou Hamer said, "I'm not backing off." These women worked alongside so many others, some remembered and some forgotten.

"And I'm not going to say it's not anymore of us going to die, because I'm never sure when I leave home whether I'll get back home or not. But if I fall while I'm in Kentucky, I'll fall five feet and four inches forward for freedom and I'm not backing off."

Fannie Lou Hamer, "What Have We to Hail?", 1968

We give thanks for the all the women who lived the struggle: Betty Shabazz, Mamie Till-Mobley, Coretta Scott King, Nina Simone, Myrlie Evers, Jo Ann Robinson, Septima Clark, Rosa Parks, Dorothy Height, Fannie Lou Hamer, Mahalia Jackson, Diane Nash, Amelia Boynton, Daisy Bates, and so many others. We praise you, God of Mary, for their labor, the love that they shared and showed fighting for freedom and never backing away from the struggle, even as others failed to take record of their deeds and did not write their names in books of history. When it's my time to tell the story, fill my mind with the memories of these women, who gave so much. Whether it is my time to lead or my time to follow, send the Spirit of humility to guide me, that we might keep the faith together with all those who are so often ignored. And when it's my time to die, give me the grace to fall toward freedom, just like Fannie Lou Hamer. Amen.

DAY 12: LAST WORDS

In the early morning of January 1, 2009, after reports of a fight on a Bay Area Rapid Transit train, Officer Johannes Mehserle restrained Oscar Grant on the platform of the Fruitvale Station in Oakland, California.

While attempting to restrain Grant, Mehserle said, "I'm going to taze him. I'm going to taze him." He stood up, unholstered his gun, and shot Grant in the back.

**"You shot me.
You shot me."
- Oscar Grant III**

Last known words of Oscar Grant III on January 1, 2009, according to a witness statement.

Oscar Grant died the following day at Highland Hospital in Oakland.

At the officer's bail hearing, his attorney claimed that Mehserle shot Grant because he mistakenly deployed his gun instead of his taser. In the preliminary hearing Judge C. Don Clay concluded that the officer had not drawn his gun by mistake.

At trial, the jury found Mehserle guilty of involuntary manslaughter and not-guilty of second-degree murder and voluntary manslaughter charges.

In January 2010 and June 2011 Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) agreed to pay a total of \$2.8 million to settle lawsuits filed by relatives of Oscar Grant.

In 2013 director Ryan Coogler released a film based on the events leading to the death of Oscar Grant III titled Fruitvale Station.

Sources: San Francisco Chronicle, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury News

"You shot me."

Oscar Grant III
1982-2009

"What happened to the civil rights movement is an indictment of America and Americans, and an enduring monument ... to the breathtaking cowardice of this sovereign people."

James Baldwin, "Black Power" 1968

*Baldwin said,
Breathtaking cowardice.*

*Breath-taking:
the officer who shot Oscar Grant
took away his ability to breathe.*

*Taking:
the officer couldn't take a second to
check that his taser wasn't his gun.*

*King:
not Malcolm. King.*

*Baldwin said,
Breathtaking cowardice of this
sovereign people.*

*Sovereign:
adj. possessing supreme and
boundless power. n. monarch.*

Lord, I have broken the words apart again and again on my tongue and in my head, but I cannot understand. Why have the kings become the cowards? Why do those with the most power fear those with the least? Why do the sovereign, who have everything, take from those who have nothing? Help me to trust you when I do not understand. But more than that: Help the cowards to understand what they fear, so the bullets will stop. Amen.

DAY 13: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: SPEAK

Speak up the next time you witness words or actions that are racist. This doesn't mean you have to be boisterous or overly confrontational - bystander intervention can take many different forms.

For six tips on how to interrupt racist attacks in public, watch this video from the Barnard Center for Research on Women: <https://youtu.be/krgcbiRu0ys>

You can't hide your voice, Mr. Joel.

**Louise Little, in *One Day When I Was Lost*
by James Baldwin, 1972**

"You can veil your face, but you can't hide your voice, Mr. Joel. I know every one of you."
(A rider laughs. His horse rears.)

Louise Little in *One Day When I Was Lost*,
written by James Baldwin, 1972

I will tear off your veils, and save my people from
your hands.

Ezekiel 13:21

After the death of Malcolm X, Baldwin was commissioned to write a screenplay based on The Autobiography of Malcolm X. Baldwin eventually abandoned the film project, though the screenplay was published in 1972. In this scene, Baldwin portrays a story that X's mother, Louise Little, told him of an evening when she was pregnant. A group of hooded Ku Klux Klan riders appeared at their house in Omaha, Nebraska, and demanded to see her husband, Earl Little, who happened to be away preaching in Milwaukee. She confronted those who threatened her family, calling them by name.

Holy God, where the oppressors cover themselves in veils, uncover them. Hold their faces in the light, and let them know that you see their evil deeds.

Holy Son, when I try cover my sin, help me to remember that there is no hiding from you. Liberate me and bring my sin into the light, that I may repent.

Holy Spirit, give me the courage of Malcolm's mother, Louise, to stand bravely against the cowardice of evil. Cover me with your grace like a womb, and use my life to cover others in that same grace. Help me to remember that the truth I tell in my life echoes in the lives of those little ones who live and grow into your good future. Amen.

DAY 14: LAST WORDS

The evening of July 6, 2016, Philando Castile was pulled over by Officer Jeronimo Yanez and his partner, Joseph Kausner, with the stated reason of a broken brake light in Falcon Heights, Minnesota.

According to video from a police dashboard camera, Castile was calm and compliant in following instructions from Officer Yanez. Castile provided his proof of insurance card and said, "Sir, I have to tell you that I do have a firearm on me."

Yanez placed his right hand on his holstered weapon and said, "Okay, don't reach for it, then." Castile responded, "I'm not pulling it out." Castile's girlfriend Diamond Reynolds, who was riding in the car along with her four year-old daughter, also said, "He's not pulling it out." Yanez yelled, "Don't pull it out!" and quickly pulled his gun from the holster. Yanez fired seven shots at Castile and Reynolds yelled, "You just killed my boyfriend!" Philando Castile's last words were, "I wasn't reaching for it."

"I wasn't reaching for it."

- Philando Castile

Last known words of Philando Castile, according to video live-streamed on Facebook by his girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds on July 6, 2016.

Diamond Reynolds was handcuffed and placed in the back of Officer Kausner's car along with her daughter. Audio from the car recorded the four year-old girl saying, "Mom, please stop cussing and screaming 'cause I don't want you to get shot."

Under Minnesota law, individuals must obtain a permit to carry a handgun in public, and Castile had obtained a permit to carry the handgun.

In June 2017 the city of St. Anthony, Minnesota agreed to pay \$3 million to settle a lawsuit filed by the relatives of Philando Castile.

Sources: Washington Post, Minnesota Star Tribune

"I wasn't reaching for it."

Philando Castile
1983-2016

"We must talk about something even more difficult to put one's finger on, which for the moment we will call morale, and the assumption on which I am speaking is this: that whether or not we like it, we have reached a point, black and white in this country, where all of the previous systems of communication, negotiation, accommodation, have become unusable. "

James Baldwin, speech delivered at New York Community Church, September 25, 1963

They always say, "When you encounter police, be respectful, de-escalate, no sudden moves, keep calm." Yet here is Philando Castile, respectful, following orders, permits in order, keeping calm. 40 seconds after the conversation starts, he is dead. Respectability isn't enough to stop the bullets from piercing his heart. No communication, no negotiation, no accommodation can stop the bullets.

Christ Jesus, one of the first things we learn as children is to "do the right thing." But here is Philando Castile, dead. Murdered. All while doing the right thing and following the rules.

I seem to remember that you broke the law. Jesus, you healed on the Sabbath, ate with sinners, violated the customs. When the system was broken, you could not adhere to it. You ended up dead. Murdered.

Lord, show me which rules I need to break in the name of your holy law. Show me which rules I need to follow in the name of your law-breaking love. Empower us to tear the whole broken system down and build it again on the foundation of your love.

Amen.

DAY 15: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: WATCH

Watch your local police, and let them know that you care about equity and justice in your community. Call your local department to ask about serving on a civilian oversight committee or joining neighborhood meetings with police.

For more information on the importance of civilian oversight of police, visit <https://www.joincampaignzero.org/oversight>

I don't have any reason of believing...

James Baldwin, 1965

"We have a civil rights bill now. We had an amendment, the fifteenth amendment, nearly a hundred years ago. I hate to sound like an Old Testament prophet, but if the amendment was not honored then, I don't have any reason of believing that the civil rights bill will be honored now."

James Baldwin, debate with William F. Buckley at Cambridge University, 1965

Baldwin knew that having laws on the books, bills passed, or amendments added to the Constitution will not be enough to guarantee equality and equity under the law. The legacy of racism in this country demands that we push for accountability, oversight, and limitation on those who would wield the gun in the name of justice and peace.

God of justice, give me eyes to see where injustice is happening around me.

God of courage, give me a spirit of boldness to stand up for what is right, even if it is difficult.

God of victory, give me lips to speak words that demand accountability and responsibility from the powers of this world.

Show me paths of participation in the peace of my city, that I may be a messenger of your good word.
Amen.

DAY 16: LAST WORDS

Just before 11pm, on March 24, 2012, a 911 caller in Pasadena, CA reported the theft of a backpack and a laptop, falsely claiming that he had been help up at gunpoint.

Kendrec McDade was on Orange Grove Boulevard around the time of the theft.

Two Pasadena police officers, Jeffrey Newlen and Mathew Griffin, saw McDade and believed they had a suspect.

McDade ran from the police and they pursued him in their car. They pursued him into a darkened alleyway. Officer Newlen exited the car on foot. Officer Griffin claimed he saw the suspect reach for a weapon, and he shot McDade four times in close range. Officer Newlen fired another three times, thinking that the suspect had opened fire.

When paramedics arrived, McDade asked the ambulance driver, "Why did they shoot me?"

"Why did they shoot me?" - Kendrec McDade

Last known words of Kendrec McDade, according to the ambulance driver who arrived at the scene of the shooting on March 24, 2012.

McDade died five minutes past midnight on March 25, 2012.

As the officers pursued Kendrec McDade, they chose not to switch on their emergency lights or sirens. They did not use the loudspeaker to tell McDade to stop. They did not call for backup and they did not radio in their pursuit. A report issued by the Office of Independent Review (OIR), a civilian oversight group, indicates that the two officers made "at least ten tactical decisions that were not congruent with principles of officer safety."

In June 2014 the city of Pasadena, California agreed to pay \$1 million to settle a lawsuit filed by the relatives of Kendrec McDade.

Sources: The Guardian US, Pasadena Star News

"Why did they shoot me?"

Kendrec McDade
1992-2012

If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength being small;
if you hold back from rescuing those taken away to death, those who go staggering to the slaughter;
if you say, "Look, we did not know this" – does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it? And will he not repay all according to their deeds?
Proverbs 24: 10-12

"People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster."

James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village," 1953

It's so easy to act based on hearsay - the officers heard there was a gun, the officers assumed the suspect was reaching for that gun, one officer opened fire and the other assumed the suspect was the one shooting - but it's much harder to find out the facts for ourselves. To challenge conventional thinking. To learn the truth, especially when it's the ugly truth. Guide us in our search for truth, open our eyes to the hard facts, give us the words to educate others. But most of all, open our stubborn hearts and minds to realize when we're wrong, and to accept the truth and to change our behaviors. Amen.

DAY 17: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: ORGANIZE

Organize for racial justice in your local community. Lead your church to become a member of an Industrial Areas Foundation organization. Join a local chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) or the Black Lives Matter network.

Visit: <http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/>
<http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/>
<http://blacklivesmatter.com/find-chapters/>

... *only that they
be spineless...*

James Baldwin, 1963

"A civilization is not destroyed by wicked people: it is not necessary that people be wicked but only that they be spineless."

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 1963

How little courage we have. How tightly we cling to our security. Baldwin knew this. In an essay titled "From Nationalism, Colonialism, and the United States" in 1961 he wrote, "The tragedy of this country now is that most of the people who say they care about it do not care. What they care about is their safety and their profits." Will we follow the command of Christ to walk the road that leads to danger? Will we give away the things that hold us back - money, security, safety, power. Will we stand up with a straight spine to follow the call to discipleship?

Demanding God, I do not feel brave.

I feel afraid.

Cast out my fears.

Give me the spine of Christ - strong enough
to resist the powerful, yet gentle enough to
embrace the sinner.

Whatever I lack in being your faithful
disciple, give to me.

I am desperate, Lord.

Amen.

DAY 18: LAST WORDS

The morning of April 12, 2015, three Baltimore police officers, Lieutenant Brian W. Rice, Officer Edward Nero, and Officer Garrett E. Miller, were patrolling near the Gilmore Homes housing project when they “made eye contact” with Freddie Gray.

Gray fled on foot and the officers gave chase, later arresting him for possession of a spring-assisted switch blade knife. Gray was apprehended and, according to Miller, was taken into custody without the use of force.

Two bystanders captured Gray's arrest with video recordings, which show Gray screaming in pain and being dragged to a police van by the officers. The van, driven by Officer Caesar Goodson Jr. stopped six times before the officers called paramedics to take Gray to the hospital.

On the fourth stop Gray said to Officer William G. Porter, “I can't breathe.”

Gray lapsed into a coma with three fractured vertebrae, injuries to his voice box and his spine 80% severed around his neck. During the following week Gray never regained consciousness. He died on April 19, 2015.

"I can't breathe. "
- Freddie Gray Jr.

Last words of Freddie Gray, Jr., according to Officer William C. Porter. Gray died on April 19, 2015.

In September 2015 the city of Baltimore agreed to pay \$6.4 million to settle a lawsuit filed by the relatives of Freddie Gray.

Sources: Baltimore Sun, Washington Post

"I can't breathe."

**Freddie Gray Jr.
1989-2015**

"It is, briefly, an insult to my intelligence, and to the intelligence of any black person, to ask me to believe that the most powerful nation in the world is unable to do anything to make the lives of its black citizens less appalling. ... It is not unable to do it; it is only unwilling to do it."

James Baldwin, "Black Power," 1968

I was told that America is a great and powerful nation. I do not doubt it, but "great" and "powerful" are not always good traits. After all, Pharaoh was both of those things, once. Will this country go on witnessing the fragile lives of its black citizens? Will we continue in our unwillingness to act? Will we continue in our unwillingness to put our power and greatness into the betterment of our most vulnerable people?

Lord, start at the lowest level. Make the residents and citizens of this country a people of common power who give orders for the release of the captives and the liberation of the oppressed.

Lord, occupy the oft-overlooked middle. Make the city, county, and state representatives of this county a people of shared commitment to the humanity of all people and the care of all your creation.

Lord, leave no stone unturned. Make the most powerful leaders of this country a people of vision who enact laws, policies, and customs that protect the lives of its black citizens.

We pray all of these things, in the name of the one whose power is made perfect in weakness, and whose glory is the way of the cross. Amen.

DAY 19: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: HOLD

Hold someone close to you. Wrap them in loving arms. When you see someone who is subject to attack, slander, or criticism, ask God to show you the way that leads to love.

To read about the role of love in the Black Lives Matter movement, visit http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alta-starr/to-love-black-lives_b_6744778.html

Baldwin doesn't impress...

**"A top Harlem Negro leader,"
to Loye Mille, 1963**

"The Negroes are influenced by the lecturers, the compelling speakers, the men like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. And Baldwin can't be effective as a lecturer. When you see him as a lecturer, you see an effeminate, and that ruins him even with those who have read him. He's a f*****, a fairy. And we as Negroes have much greater animosity toward lesbians and homosexuals than does the white man, because this is weakness, and there is already too much weakness among Negroes without that. So Baldwin doesn't impress most Negroes, even among the few that really know about him, and if he doesn't impress, he can't influence."

Loye Mille, Washington correspondent, reporting the words of "a top Harlem Negro leader," 1963.

Lord, the attacks on your beloved are so cruel, so personal - "you see an effeminate, and that ruins him." Be with those who are told that they cannot possibly have dignity and worth - draw them into your loving embrace.

Be with all those whose bodies are an affront to the status quo - hold them in your love.

Be with all those who change the world, as Baldwin did, while others go blue in the face declaring their ruin. Let them know just how much we need them.

We pray also, Lord, for those who do not know what they do. Be with those who want to be leaders, but hide behind anonymous quotations - shine your light on them. Be with those who think weakness is a character flaw - show them the way of your Son.

Amen.

DAY 20: LAST WORDS

In 2007 Eric Garner filed a handwritten complaint in federal court accusing a New York police officer of conducting a cavity search of him on the street, in public, while people passed by.

On July 17, 2014 he had just broken up a fight and was approached by a plainclothes officer, Daniel Pantaleo. A friend recorded their interaction, and Garner said, “Every time you see me you want to mess with me. I’m tired of it. ... I’m minding my business, officer. I’m minding my business. Please leave me alone.”

Pantaleo tried to handcuff Garner, who swatted away his arms. Pantaleo then put Garner in a “chokehold,” which is prohibited by NYPD regulations.

The arrest was supervised by an NYPD sergeant, Kizzy Adoni, who did not intervene in the illegal use of the chokehold.

**“I can’t breathe.
I can’t breathe.
I can’t breathe.
I can’t breathe.
I can’t breathe.
I can’t breathe.
I can’t breathe.
I can’t breathe.”
- Eric Garner**

Last known words of Eric Garner, according to a video recording taken by a friend on July 17, 2014.

Officer Pantaleo pushed Garner to the ground, where he lay motionless, handcuffed, and unresponsive for several minutes.

On August 1, 2014, the New York City Medical Examiner’s Office ruled Garner’s death a homicide.

On December 3, a grand jury decided not to indict Officer Pantaleo.

In June 2015 the city of New York agreed to pay \$5.9 million to settle a lawsuit filed by the relatives of Eric Garner.

Sources: New York Times, Washington Post

"I can't breathe."

Eric Garner
1970-2014

Richard: You know I don't believe in God, Grandmama.

Mother Henry: You don't know what you're talking about. Ain't no way possible for you not to believe in God. It ain't up to you.

Richard: Who's it up to, then?

Mother Henry: It's up to the life in you - the life in you. That knows where it comes from, that believes in God. You doubt me, you just try holding your breath long enough to die.

James Baldwin, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, 1964

Merciful Lord, you created us with breath in our lungs. We cannot hold our breath long enough to die. And yet, breath can be taken away by the life of another of your children. And so often it is the breath of the black body that is smothered, choked, and extinguished. It is not a desire to die that keeps Eric Garner from breathing, but the police officer's arm around his neck. It is the arms around all of our necks that keep us from breathing. It is the fear that our breath will be considered "aggressive behavior" and that if we open our mouths, an officer will fill it with bullets. We are out of breath from running with our hands up. Mother Henry says that there is life in all of us - let us find this life and clutch it so tightly that it cannot be torn away from us. Amen.

DAY 21: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: VISIT

Visit someone in a prison in your local area, or commit to write letters to prisoners in your state.

To begin visiting persons in prison, visit <https://www.prisonervisitation.org/> or search prison visitation programs in your local area.

I take my cue from Jesus Christ...

James Baldwin, 1986

"Well. ... I take my cue from Jesus Christ, really, who told me and told all of us to love each other, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and visit those in prison. If we can't do that, you're not a believer, I don't care what church you go to."

James Baldwin, interview with Mavis Nicholson, 1986

... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

Matthew 25:35-36

God of Daniel, who was thrown in the lion's den, give me the foolishness to confront the deadly powers of imprisonment and captivity.

God of Lydia, who received Paul and Silas after they came out of prison, give me a spirit of grace to trust and welcome any who know the indignities of incarceration.

God of Jesus Christ, who calls disciples to treat one another as you have treated us, take me by the hand and walk me behind prison walls, so that I might visit your people there, and in so doing, visit you.

Amen.

DAY 22: LAST WORDS

Blake Brockington was crowned homecoming king of East Mecklenburg High School in Charlotte, NC on February 7, 2014, after transitioning from female to male two years earlier.

Rejected by his family and living in foster care, Brockington was an LGBTQ activist and participant in the Transgender Faith and Action Network. He received national attention for his advocacy, as well as vicious online harassment.

Brockington told the Charlotte Observer “That was single-handedly the hardest part of my trans journey. Really hateful things were said on the internet.”

In March 2015 Brockington wrote on his Tumblr page, “I am so exhausted.”

“ ... ”

- **Blake Brockington**

Unknown last words of Blake Brockington, killed on March 23, 2015.

The next day he walked onto Interstate 485 and was struck by several cars.

Blake Brockington's death was ruled a suicide.

Sources: Charlotte Observer

Blake Brockington 1996-2015

Interviewer: What happens to people like [James] Meredith who put themselves in the front lines?

James Baldwin: Aha. You can hold yourself together during all the action, but inevitably there's a great reaction somewhere. Some of them go to mental institutions. It's very hard to take. I got a taste of this only once. ... I was having lunch with a friend ... and suddenly I began to shake. And I stayed at his house for two days. I was afraid to be alone. And that taught me something about how much greater the pressure must be for those kids now. The reaction has to come, it has to come.

"Disturber of the Peace: James Baldwin," 1969

God of all hope,
be with those who despair
be with those who are exhausted
be with those who cannot bear another
day.

God of all love,
be with the caregivers
be with those who work in the shadows
be with family and friends who worry.

God of all faith,
be with the chewed up and spit out
be with any who feel ashamed
be with those fighting hidden battles.

Be with us when we cannot be with
ourselves. Be with us when the fear feels
like too much to bear. Be with us when we
wonder if we are truly alone. Amen.

DAY 23: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: FIND

Find one thing you can do at your workplace, home, or church to make the space more welcoming to transgender people who visit, worship, or work there. This could include changing the gender signs on bathrooms or encouraging your employer to implement new hiring practices.

For resources for trans people, as well as tips on being an ally, visit www.glaad.org/transgender/resources or www.glaad.org/transgender/allies

There are lots of people here.

James Baldwin, 1969

Interviewer: But out of that an identity emerged.

Baldwin: Yes, all those strangers called Jimmy Baldwin.

Interviewer: Who are some of them?

Baldwin: There's the older brother with all the egotism and rigidity that implies. That tone will always be there, and there's nothing I can do about it except know that it's there and laugh at it. I grew up telling people what to do and spanking them, so that in some ways I always will be doing that. Then there's the self-pitying little boy. You know, "I can't do it, because I'm ugly." He's still in there some place.

Interviewer: Who else?

Baldwin: Lot's of people. Some of them are unmentionable. There's a man. There's a woman, too. There are lots of people here.

"Disturber of the Peace: James Baldwin," 1969

There are new words, God, that Baldwin did not have: transgender, intersex, gender non-conforming, pansexual, and others. There are things, God, that Baldwin could not say: some of his identities were "unmentionable." There are feelings, God, that Baldwin could not hide: "I can't do it, because I'm ugly."

Whatever I cannot hide, let me know
that you do not fear it.

Whatever I cannot say, let me know
that you are listening.

Whoever I am, let me know
that you love me.

Amen.

DAY 24: LAST WORDS

Kalief Browder was stopped by New York City police while walking to his home on Arthur Avenue in May 2010. He was arrested and charged with second degree robbery, a crime that he insisted he did not commit.

Browder remained imprisoned at Rikers Island in New York for three years, serving almost two of those years in solitary confinement. He refused on multiple occasions plea bargains that would have release him in exchange for an admission of guilt.

Throughout his incarceration Browder continued to insist on his innocence and right to a trial.

The New Yorker later obtained videos of an officer assaulting Browder and a large group of inmates pummeling and kicking him.

His case was eventually dismissed and he was released in June 2013.

“ ... ”

- Kalief Browder

Unknown last words of Kalief Browder, who died June 6, 2015.

Browder attempted to end his life several times while incarcerated and again after he was released from prison.

On June 6, 2015 Browder committed suicide at his family's home in the Bronx.

Sources: The New Yorker, New York Times

Kalief Browder 1993-2015

"I think that one can make the absolutely blanket statement that no black man has ever been tried by a jury of his peers in America. And if that is so, and I know that is so, no black man has ever received a fair trial in this country. Therefore, I'm under no illusions about the reason why many black people are in prison. I'm not saying there are no black criminals. Still, I believe that all black prisoners should be released and then retried according to principles more honorable and more just."

James Baldwin, *A Rap on Race*, 1971

Baldwin wonders how long it will be before a black man will be tried by a jury of his peers. The life of Kalief Browder reminds us just how far we have to go. Year after year in prison, all to what end? To force him to admit guilt for a crime he didn't commit? To keep him out of the courtroom – the very courtroom where a biased jury awaits? Baldwin's complaint that the jury is unfair is almost unspeakably naive in light of Browder's struggle for justice. You ask for a jury, James? Hell, we'd settle for any trial at all – especially when what we have now is three years in prison with beatings, abuse, and solitary confinement. For what? Second degree robbery? That he didn't even commit?

God, there is nothing but despair on our lips. Justice? Snatch the very word from our mouths if we cannot do better than this. Erase it from every Bible, wipe it away from every courthouse wall, and purge it from our fairytale movies. Where is your justice, God? Because it is not here – we are not under any illusions. We wait for you, O God, and for your justice. Come quickly. Our patience grows thin and in the meantime your sons and daughters are dying.

DAY 25: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: WELCOME

Rebuilding your life after time in prison can feel lonely and overwhelming. Assist with ex-prisoner re-entry programs in your area. Join a re-entry support team or donate to a local program that provides employment services to formerly incarcerated persons.

For a list of re-entry programs in your state, visit <http://www.helpforfelons.org/reentry-programs-ex-offenders-state/>

There are two people you always find in prison...

James Baldwin, 1964

"There are two people you always find in prison: the man in the prison and the man who is keeping him there."

James Baldwin, "What Price Freedom?," 1964

Those who see you will stare at you,
and ponder over you:

'Is this the man who made the earth tremble,
who shook kingdoms,
who made the world like a desert
and overthrew its cities,
who would not let his prisoners go home?'

Isaiah 14:16-17

The prophet Isaiah declares the downfall of the King of Babylon. Among the king's acts of oppression is that he would not let the prisoners go home. What would it mean for us to let the prisoners go home? Baldwin helps us see that this is not just about freedom of the captives, but also the freedom of the captors. He challenges us to ask why we are so attached to locking people up and throwing away the key. He dares us to confront our fear, our judgment, and our need for power.

God, we pray for those who are in prison, on probation, or on parole. We pray for those who keep others in prison, including guards and wardens, sentencing judges, and employees and shareholders in the business of for-profit prisons. As for me, Lord, I do not wish to be like the King of Babylon. I do not want to destroy your land and kill your people. But I am so afraid. Afraid of the very people you love. Let your perfect love drive out my fear. Where I am a prisoner, God, set me free. And where I am the keeper of the prison, God, break my chains. Show us, King of Kings, the way that leads to release of the captives. Show us the way to freedom for all of your people. Amen.

DAY 26: LAST WORDS

On the evening of February 26, 2012, 17 year-old Trayvon Martin and his father were visiting his father's fiancé at her townhouse in Sanford, Florida. Martin walked to a convenience store to purchase Skittles and an AriZona juice drink.

As he walked home, a neighborhood watch member named George Zimmerman called the Sanford Police to report suspicious behavior.

In reply to the police dispatcher's question, "Are you following him?" Zimmerman responds, "Yes." The dispatcher says, "OK, we don't need you to do that."

Zimmerman continued pursuing Martin and there was an altercation, during which Zimmerman shot and killed Martin.

**"What are you following me for?"
- Trayvon Martin**

Last known words of Trayvon Martin, according to Rachel Jeantel, who was on the phone with Martin just before he was fatally shot on February 26, 2012.

In April 2012 Zimmerman was charged with second-degree murder.

On July 13, 2013, Zimmerman was found not guilty.

In May 2016, Zimmerman sold the gun he used to kill Martin for \$250,000 on the auction website United Gun Group.

In April 2013, Trayvon Martin's parents settled a wrongful-death claim against the homeowners association of the Sanford subdivision. The homeowners association did not admit any wrongdoing or liability.

Sources: Orlando Sentinel, CNN, Washington Post

"What are you following me for?"

**Trayvon Martin
1995-2012**

"In this country – this is one of the things that it means to be an American. It is one of the great dangers of being an American. – In this country there has always been something not to think about. And what that was, was me. Sometimes called Sambo. Sometimes called Uncle Tom. Sometimes a rapist. Sometimes a saint. These are your inventions, not mine. The effort the republic has expended in not thinking about me has weakened its grasp of reality to a very sinister extent."

James Baldwin, "100 Years of Freedom," 1963

What George Zimmerman thought Trayvon Martin was, he was not. Zimmerman's grasp of reality weakened, in Baldwin's words, "to a sinister extent." He thought a child wearing a hoodie and carrying Skittles was suspicious. He continued his pursuit, thinking he knew better than the police dispatcher who told him explicitly not to follow Martin. His grasp of reality was so weak that he shot and killed a child of God.

God, help all of us to see what it means to be black in the United States. Help all of us to see the danger of living in a world where men with guns and their false impressions can so easily take life from your children.

To the people who wear hoodies, send your angels to protect and keep them.

To the people who carry guns, send your angels to muzzle them in the name of peace.

To the people who watch from afar, send your angels to open their eyes, that they might see just how close to their door these deaths really are. Amen.

DAY 27: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: REPAY

If I have stolen something, Lord, open my eyes that I might see the way to pay it back. Look for concrete steps that you can take, like Zacchaeus, to pay back what you or your people have stolen from others.

Visit <https://policy.m4bl.org/reparations/> to learn more about reparations efforts supported by the Movement for Black Lives.

This is your bill ... and you are going to have to pay it.

James Baldwin, 1971

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.'

Luke 19:8-9

"What this generation is reacting to, what it is saying, is they realize that you, the white people, the white Americans, have always attempted to murder them. Not merely by burning them or castrating them or hanging them from trees, but murdering them in the mind, in the heart. ... They are refusing this entire frame of reference and they are saying to the Republic: This is your bill, this is your bloody bill written in my blood, and you are going to have to pay it."

James Baldwin, *Rap on Race*, 1971

God, I thought you said there was freedom in Christ. Do I really have to pay back what I stole? What if my ancestors owned slaves - how could I ever repay that debt four times as much, like Zacchaeus? Give me the courage to face the plunder of my past and my present. Free me from the empty promises of starting "tomorrow." Give me a heart for repaying what I owe, like Zacchaeus. Let salvation comes to my house, by your Spirit, that I might find true freedom in Christ - freedom to share, freedom to give, and freedom to repay what my people stole, four times over. Amen.

DAY 29: LAST WORDS

Tamir Rice, age 12, played with an Airsoft toy gun on a swing in a city park in Cleveland, OH on the afternoon of November 22, 2014. A caller sitting in a nearby gazebo alerted police that a black male was pointing a “pistol” at people, saying that the gun was “probably fake.”

Two officers, Timothy Loehmann and Frank Garmback, arrived on the scene and, within two seconds, Loehmann fired two shots.

Rice was hit in the torso, but the officers did not administer first aid.

" . . . "

- Tamir Rice

Unknown last words of Tamir Rice, killed on November 22, 2014.

Seven minutes later paramedics arrived and took him to MetroHealth Medical Center, where Rice died the following day.

On December 28, 2015, a grand jury decided not to indict the officers.

The police held Rice's body for six months after his death.

Ohio is an “open carry” state, where open carry of firearms is legal with or without a license.

In April 2015 the city of Cleveland agreed to pay \$6 million to settle a lawsuit filed by the relatives of Tamir Rice.

When it's something so messed up, it's like a million pieces of a puzzle scattered out in front of you. How are you supposed to put that together?

- Lezley McSpadden

Lezley McSpadden is the mother of Michael Brown, killed by police in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014. She is the author of Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil.

Sources: Washington Post, Cleveland Pain Dealer, New York Times

Tamir Rice 2002-2014

"I don't know what I could say which would make any sense to them, because in fact this does not make any sense."

James Baldwin, *Take This Hammer*, 1963

"I been praying, little brother," Elisha said, "and I sure ain't going to stop praying now."

"For me," persisted John, his tears falling, "for me."

James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 1953

God, death after death after death. And now Tamir Rice, a child, aged twelve. We cannot make sense of it, Lord, like a puzzle of a million pieces that we cannot put back together. We cannot make sense of it because it does not make any sense. Keep us from making sense of violence. Keep the strangeness of a dead child ever-strange, so that we do not become comfortable with such death. Still, let the violence end. Stop the bullets, we pray. Let the hearts of the children still beat, from Emmett Till to Tamir Rice. Amen.

DAY 29: FIRST STEPS



FIRST STEPS: LOVE

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

*My love will never
change.*

**James Baldwin,
letter to Edgin Cezzar**

I can't write any more now.
Please understand, my love will never change.
Your brother,
Jimmy.

James Baldwin, letter to Edgin Cezzar, read in
James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket, a film by
Karen Thorsen, 1989

Gracious God, we give you thanks that
James Baldwin loved your beloved children,
and that he lovingly shared his life with us
in word, action, and song.

Stir our spirits toward your righteousness.
Move our feet along the road of justice.
Open our hearts to love
as you have loved us.

Amen.

DAY 30: LET US PRAY



LET US PRAY

We look back, learning from history.

We look out, facing the beautiful and terrible realities of contemporary life.

We look forward, as Baldwin did, imagining a better future forged in honesty, laughter, and love.

In the name of God, we pray.

The reality of his seeing caused me to begin to see.

**James Baldwin, 1965,
on the painter Beauford Delaney**

"The reality of his seeing caused me to begin to see."

James Baldwin, "On the Painter Beauford Delaney," 1965

Baldwin wrote that his beloved friend and mentor Beauford Delaney taught him to begin to see. That same is true of Baldwin and us - we begin to see because he teaches us to see. In this time of #BlackLivesMatter, we must learn to train our eyes onto the things Baldwin teaches us to see.

For a list of works by James Baldwin and recommendations on further reading, consult the pages at the end of this document.

Give us new voices
like Baldwin's
to call for revolution.

Give us new hearts
like Baldwin's
to love with holy passion.

Give us new spirits
like Baldwin's
to pray without ceasing.

Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Organizations Supporting Black Lives Matter

- Black Lives Matter: www.blacklivesmatter.com/find-chapters
- Southern Poverty Law Center: www.splc.org
- NAACP: www.naacp.org/find-local-unit
- National Urban League: www.iamempowered.com/programs-and-initiatives
- Showing Up for Racial Justice: www.surj.org

Poetry

- Donika Kelly, *Bestiary: Poems* (Graywolf Press, 2016)
- Tony Medina, ed., *Resisting Arrest: Poems to Stretch the Sky* (Jacar Press, 2016)
- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Graywolf Press, 2015)
- Clint Smith, *Counting Descent: Poems* (Write Bloody Publishing, 2016)

Theology

- Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Orbis Books, 2015)
- Soong Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (IVP Books, 2015)
- M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Fortress Press, 2009)
- Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Eerdmans, 2014)

Contemporary Non-Fiction

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (Spiegel & Grau, 2015)
- Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Haymarket Books, 2016)
- Eddie Glaude, Jr., *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul* (Crown, 2016)
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Haymarket Books, 2016)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

By James Baldwin

- *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 1953
- *Notes of a Native Son*, 1955
- *Giovanni's Room*, 1956
- *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son*, 1961
- *Another Country*, 1962
- *The Fire Next Time*, 1963
- *Blues for Mister Charlie*, 1964
- *Going to Meet the Man: Stories*, 1965
- *The Amen Corner*, 1968
- *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, 1968
- *Rap on Race*. With Margaret Mead, 1971
- *No Name in the Street*, 1972
- *One Day When I Was Lost: A Scenario Based on Alex Haley's The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 1972
- *A Dialogue*. With Nikki Giovanni, 1973
- *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 1974
- *The Devil Finds Work: An Essay*, 1976
- *Little Man, Little Man: A Story of Childhood*, 1976
- *Just Above My Head*, 1979
- *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, 1985
- *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, 2010
- *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, 2014

On James Baldwin

- Douglas Field, *All Those Strangers: The Art and Lives of James Baldwin* (Oxford University Press, 2015)
- David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (Arcade Publishing, 2015)
- Ed Pavlic, *Who Can Afford to Improvise?: James Baldwin and Black Music, Lyric and the Listeners* (Fordham University Press, 2015)
- Raoul Peck, *I Am Not Your Negro: A Companion Edition to the Documentary Film* (Vintage, 2017)
- Jesmyn Ward, ed., *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks about Race* (Scribner, 2016)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Adam Hollowell is a teacher, author, and preacher. He is previously the author of *Power and Purpose: Paul Ramsey and Contemporary Christian Political Theology* with Eerdmans Publishing Co.



Jamie McGhee is a poet, playwright, and short fiction author. She is previously a contributor to *Outside the XY: Queer, Black and Brown Masculinity*, edited by Morgan Mann Willis.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATORS



Lindsey Bailey is an artist and illustrator based in Memphis, TN. Her work ranges from children's books to character design. You can find her work at www.lindseyswop.com



Janna Morton is a Baltimore based Illustrator and a graduate of the Maryland Institute College of Art. You can find her work at www.jannamorton.com

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to the following

For vision, prayers, and encouragement: Nash Mepukori, Charlene Brown, John Stean, Ruth Everhart, Christy Lohr Sapp, Gerly Ace, Bruce Puckett, Luke Powery, Joey Santoro, Margie Quinn, Vincent Pontius, Andie Rea, Carol Howard Merritt, Emily Dao-Forrester, Bethany Schmall

For editing and feedback: Joshua Lazard, Andrea Lewis, Deb Reisinger, Joan Clifford, Vicki Stocking, Amanda Millay Hughes, Matthew Arbo, Turner Walston, Sam Zimmerman, Jonas Swartz, Annie Krabbenschmidt, Bryce Bigger

This document was designed using free online software by Canva, available at www.canva.com

PRAYING WITH JAMES BALDWIN

IN AN AGE OF
#BLACKLIVESMATTER

For more information visit
www.prayingwithjamesbaldwin.com