

A CRITIQUE OF THE NOTION OF 'PURPOSE' FROM A BLACK BRITISH WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

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embrace their unique personhood, blossom intentionally through the character of Christ, and be a purpose-driven light across their sphere of influence.

'(I) cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, [what] the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints [...]'. Ephesians 1 v 16 – 18 ASV.

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Abstract

This study aims to explore “purpose” from a Black British Christian Woman’s perspective. The study comprises five chapters. The topic of purpose is first introduced in Chapter 1, including the rationale for this study. It contextualizes the discussion by identifying Black-led churches, in particular, the New Testament Church of God (NTCG), as a context, due to the predominance of Black Christian women. In Chapter 2 the critical literature review outlines the key writers about Christian purpose in this field. There is a dearth of writings about this notion concerning Black Christian women in the UK. It establishes that God is positioned as central, to the discovery of purpose. Moreover, although some of the literature incorporates the perspectives of Black women, the majority was found to be written from a male bias and Eurocentric lens. Chapter 3 employs both a Womanist and Psychoeducation paradigm as a culturally appropriate interpretative framework, relevant to Black Christian women. It sets out the methodology, highlighting the process of establishing the focus group interviews. Significantly, the chapter offers an insight into the key ideas deriving from the works of five Womanist thinkers: situating the interplay of race, class, and gender inequalities as central to these women’s contextual realities. Chapter 4 provides the findings and analysis of data, incorporating the voices of 14 Black British Christian women who participated in the Focus Group Interviews. The second part of the chapter is the Womanist practical application, entitled: ‘Purpose Re-Imagined – A Multi-dimensional Model’. This provides a graphical imagery, supported by a personal, spiritual, relational, and socio-political context. Finally, the conclusion summarises that Black British Christian women’s reliance on popular narratives, largely written from a

male bias has limited the way they perceive and navigate the notion of purpose. Furthermore, attribute this to the dearth of scholarly writing which addresses the notion of purpose specifically and relevant to Black British Christian women's context and as such a lack of their engagement. The study has also reinforced the uniqueness and value of Black British Christian women's identities, their lives, and the phenomenal roles and contributions within the family, Pentecostal church, the Black community, and UK society, whilst navigating the interplay of race, class, and gender oppressions. Moreover, how a Black female lens, can be transformational for empowering these women for re-imagining purpose across their personal, spiritual, relational, and socio-political contexts.

Introduction Chapter

Background:

Who am I? What is the meaning of life? Why am I here on earth? What is my purpose? These are some of the philosophical and religious discourses posed amongst scholars, surrounding the notion of purpose, and meaning of life (Clarke, 2015; Elliott; 1992; Mae, 2015). Generally speaking, the quest for the discovery of this notion of purpose; is not limited to the above-mentioned circles, but one in which ordinary people are likely to question at some point during their life journey. In the biblical text, particularly in the Old New Testament scriptures, God's calling, and purpose focused specifically on the communal sense, referring to the divine plan for Israel as a nation. A shift appears to materialize as cited within the New Testament scriptures; where the calling to fulfill God's purpose is extended to non-Jews, is individual, and includes a call to a relationship with God (Romans 1: 16; John 10:16; Acts 13: 47-48). This notable shift, reflected by the apostle Paul, reveals the hope of the calling and distribution of spiritual gifts as being 'for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ' (Ephesians 4: 12 NRSV). Specifically, Black British Christian women who attend Black Pentecostal churches might pose similar questions about the notion of purpose, as it relates to God's design, intent, calling, and plan for their lives, in the UK context (Hardy, 1990; Alexander; 1996). The study is interested in how Black British Christian women, make sense of, and navigate the notion of purpose and whether a Womanist lens can offer transformative insights. By considering key factors relevant to these women's realities, I hope to provide useful contextual background for this study, for understanding how epistemologies about

purpose are constructed and the importance of rethinking this from a Black British female lens.

I set the scene by exploring key influential factors that may inform Black British Christian women navigating the notion of Christian purpose. To start with, the legacy of Western Christianity within this postcolonial era, the ways this informs the ecclesia, and how purpose is understood, are significant. Beckford (2013, p. 33) explains postcolonialism as 'the recognition that, while the colonial period has ended, the world and indeed Christianity has not moved beyond the problems created by colonization'. As such, ideas and values embedded within Western Christianity including undertones which reinforce the superiority of one race and culture over another, remain an underlying legacy and influence on Pentecostal Black churches in the UK. The 'StrongBlackWoman' (Walker-Barnes; 2017) myth, is also likely to contribute to how much these women take on during purpose-driven pursuits; furthermore, being responsible for the challenges faced in balancing strengths and vulnerabilities (Evans et al, 2017). Moreover, impacting Black British Christian women's identity, psyche, and the way they perceive their God-given potential and purpose. The contextual experiences of Black women and men, who came to Britain from the Caribbean during the 1950s in direct response to the call for labourers to rebuild the country after the devastations of World War 2, is well documented and relevant (Frances, 2021; Gentleman, 2019; Coley & Coley, 2023). Commonly referred to as the 'Windrush generation', it can be said these individuals were influenced by their status and sense of identity as being a part of the Commonwealth. Furthermore, this would have been a motivating factor for driving what would have been perceived as a God-ordained purpose, to help rebuild the 'Mother Country' as well as improve their life prospects (Chimbiri, 2020). In terms of context, it acknowledges the relevance of first and

second-generation Black British Christian Pentecostal's dependence almost exclusively on the sacred biblical text and divine revelation by the Holy Spirit of God, for navigating the Christian calling and the notion of purpose (Alexander, 1996, Foster, 1992). Elaine Foster's (1992) trailblazing writings entitled; 'The Inverted Pyramid' for example, offers additional insight to the discussion by illustrating how patriarchal structures within the Pentecostal Black churches in Britain have historically influenced the spheres in which men and women navigate and assume a calling to specific ministry roles. Storkey's (2013) discussion on the nature and significance of gender roles, alongside theological perspectives reveal how in the past, values held on gender roles, perpetuated gender divisions within the churches. Furthermore, explains how these inhibited women responding to the call of leadership. For example, Cooper's, (2023) landmark study of Women's contribution to the economy through enterprise during the Victorian era in the 19th century in Oxford, examined the root of English ideals held, particularly amongst the white and middle class, surrounding the idea of the woman's place, being within the home. In contrast, the lived experiences of Black women within British society, described by Bryan et al, (2018; p.2) as the "triple oppressions", of race, gender, and class, illustrate the extent of the distinct traumatic barriers faced. It would be fair to assume the emergence of the Women's movement of the 1980s was a game-changer in challenging women's historical experiences of patriarchal oppression and the stereotyped view of women's role and place within society. Therefore, sufficiently paving the way for the spearheading of change through campaigns for equality (Alexander, 1983; Bryan et al. 2018; Showunmi and Tomlin, 2022). Bryan et al. (2018, p.2) landmark writing entitled 'The Heart of the Race', however, remains significant to the background of this study in that it acknowledges how 'triple oppression' during the 1980s and to date, interplay across gender, race,

and class within British society, creating barriers to purpose. Moreover, how for Black British women purpose is not assumed, but rather often achieved through practical resistance, activism, and the establishment of key resources within the African Caribbean communities (Akala, 2018). In the Pentecostal Christian church context, academic scholars such as theologian Alexander (1996) has worked hard to capture Black British women's voice, stories, and lived experiences, through theology praxis and social justice endeavours within society. More recently, pre-liminary interviews with PR Specialist Marcia Dixon MBE, who has become a champion for women's voices, also confirm the plethora of ways, the Christian calling and purpose, is being lived out in traditional and non-traditional ways (Adegoke and Uviebinene, 2018; Coleman; 2021; Reid; 2022; Showunmi and Tomlin, 2022). As well as empowering women's resistance against the experience of being othered, discriminated against, and stereotyped, these movements and scholarly contributors appear to have influenced the paving of the way for 2nd and 3rd-generation Black British women using their agency, to determine their pathways. The study also considers how Pentecostal theology, doctrine, tradition, and preached word go some way in informing Black women's sense of Pentecostal identity, expectation, and commitment to church ministry roles and assignments (Tomlin, 2019). Foley's (2023) recent landmark book entitled 'Mothers of Zion', provides new insight into the influential roles of Church Mothers, from the Windrush era within Black Pentecostal settings, revealing how they nurtured younger women in their faith, conduct, life skills, and roles within the home and church. It is noteworthy that during the 1990s, radical paradigms of theology emerged such as Black Liberation and Womanist theology. Both are concerned with resisting Westernised colonial Christianity and Black men and women's liberation from oppression through justice (Cone, 1970; Beckford 2013). However, Aldred (2010)

critiques Black Pentecostals for being ‘theological ignorant’ due to their overall failure to engage in theological thinking. The influence behind Black British Christian women is diverse, personal aspirations, family scripts, cultural trends, tele-evangelism, and the influence of gospel music cannot be ignored.

Whilst all the above influences are relevant, the study will focus on what is observed to be Black British Christian women’s engagement and reliance on popular narratives on the notion of purpose, which derive largely from a male bias. During the 1990’s era the emergence and popularity of Christian narratives orated by clergies, who extended their reach through self-help literature such as Myles Munroe, Rick Warren, and TD Jakes on the notion of purpose, became influential globally within Christendom. Black British Christian men and women within the New Testament Church of God were observed to extend their engagement with the sacred biblical text, to include popular narratives from the aforementioned authors for both personal and spiritual enrichment. The fundamental concern of this thesis is that the absence of a theology on purpose, influenced by the voices, experiences, and complex realities of Black British Christian women, would mean their transformative potential during the 21st century is likely to be inhibited.

Research Aim and Questions:

This study aims to better understand how Black British Christian women in the NTCG engage with popular narratives, for navigating Christian purpose. The research questions are as follows:

- What are the key themes of popular Christian narratives on the notion of purpose?

- To what extent are popular contemporary narratives on Christian purpose relevant to the lived experiences of Black British Christian women?
- How can a Womanist theology and a Psychoeducation wellness model be applied as interpretive frameworks, relevant for Black British Christian women in the NTCG, for navigating purpose?

Terms of reference:

Throughout the study, there will be several key references used. When speaking of 'purpose', this shall refer to the Christian purpose associated with Christian calling (Glen-Burns; 2004). The term 'Black' will be used and applied simultaneously to reflect those who self-identify within these categorizations, an example being 'Black British Christian Woman' (BBCW). In this categorization of 'Blackness', I also include those who self-identify or are racialized as mixed race which, in this study, broadly refers to those with one parent of African Caribbean heritage. Aldred and Ogbo (2010, p.1) offer another paradigm for its use, suggesting scholarly references to 'Black' in the church context to mean 'the multi-denominational Christian tradition that has been established in Britain from the Caribbean and Africa and that draws support largely from those communities in Britain'. Tomlin (2019, p. 2) in contrast draws from a breadth of scholarly and theological contributions, for defining and distinguishing the 'Black' Majority Church and explains,

'African Caribbean Churches are a part of what is sometimes referred to in Britain as Black Majority Churches (BMCs) or the Black Church - both terms she suggests are being contested. Furthermore, these churches tend to be Pentecostal or Charismatic and delineated by two groups: The first comprises

congregants predominantly from an African background, and the second, Caribbean, also referred to as African Caribbean’.

Taking on board these contrasting perspectives, it is important to acknowledge the concept of ‘race’ to be a socially constructed term and the view held in this study is the existence of one human race, created by God. Furthermore, to appreciate that this constructed term has been used historically, to infer one ‘race’ being superior to another and as a way of explaining racism (Lowe,2013). Also acknowledged, is that amongst the continent of Africa and its Diaspora exist people of rich and diverse identities and cultures. As such, although the contentious term ‘race’ will be used across the study, the intent for this study is to narrow down my focus and use the term ‘Black’ to affiliate the overarching cultural identity, physical, political, and religious reality of a people in Britain. Finally, references to the group of churches in Britain where dominant communities come from the Caribbean countries of the African Diaspora shall be termed as Black Majority Churches (BMCs). The study will specifically draw reference to the New Testament Church of God (NTCG) given that it reflects the place where my faith and church journey transpired and is where the women who participated in the focus group interviews associate. References to Womanist theology will also be used throughout the study, as its approach is to ‘develop a range of theological constructions in which black women are the main subject’ (Mitcham, 2002, p. 46). A comprehensive definition will be made in chapter three.

Four Key Problems:

There are several problems this study addresses which is relevant to Black British Christian Women (BBCW) navigating the notion of purpose, summarised across four key points as follows:

1. The absence of a contextual lens

Bevans (2002, p.4) describes the distinct nature of contextual theology as a paradigm that 'realizes that culture, history, contemporary thought forms, and so forth are to be considered, along with scripture and tradition, as valid sources for theology expression'. In my observation, Black British Christian women have depended solely on popular literature such as TD Jake's *Destiny: Step into Your Purpose* (2015), Rick Warren's, *Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth am I Here For?* (1998), and Myles Munroe's *Pursuit of Purpose* (1992). This is problematic as these popular narratives, written largely from a universal perspective assume purpose is the same for both sexes, male and female, and people from diverse social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The universal approach concerned with scripture and tradition, ignores BBCW's identities, complex realities, and the ways this informs the navigation and interpretation of purpose in the British context. The value of applying a contextual approach to the notion of purpose is that it would consider the uniqueness of Black British Christian women's lived realities. Furthermore, locating this specifically within the historical context of their African Caribbean cultural identities and heritage. The wider Black communities in Britain, stand to also benefit from a theological paradigm on the notion of their calling and purpose, which enhances their sense of self and cultural identity (Adi, 2018; Akala, 2018; Beckford, 2013; Felder, 2007; Salley and Behm, 1988).

2. The absence of a Black, female lens, to counter male-bias

The dominance of literature written exclusively by men is challenging for female readers who seek consciousness, liberation, and empowerment in the navigation of purpose. Moreover for Black women who have race as well as gender to contend with (Collins, 2009). This is because the reality of patriarchal oppressive influences within society, compounded through biblical verses such as 'let your women keep silence in the churches...' (1 Corinthians 14:34 NRSV), reinforces gender biases, stereotypes, and sexism. Critically, this hinders possibilities for re-imagining and fulfilling purpose within and external of the church context. A Womanist hermeneutical lens and approach in contrast will be considered for its merits in countering male-biased perspectives in the bible and popular narratives on purpose. The re-reading of biblical stories of women, alongside considering Black women's contemporary and social realities, allows for a re-interpretation of the biblical text and the notion of purpose in a way that is relevant and transformational. This would empower BBCW and girls to re-imagine the plethora of ways women's lives add value and significance across a range of contexts.

3. The absence of an interdisciplinary lens

The absence of an interdisciplinary lens within popular narratives, which acknowledge BBCW's lives holistically, and offer practical application for navigating purpose is problematic. This is particularly important given that BBCW constantly navigate the notion of purpose, against the backdrop and sin of systematic race, class, and gender oppression within British society. An interpretive framework that considers faith-seeking understanding of God, incorporates the voices of Black women, the interplay of social oppressions, wellness, relationality, and justice as paramount to personal,

spiritual, and social liberation. An interdisciplinary approach: incorporating the balance of a Womanist and Psychoeducation lens as an interpretive and practical application framework could be transformative, supporting BBCW to navigate the notion of purpose holistically.

4. The absence of a biblical framework

The final concern this study addresses is the absence of a centralized biblical framework across popular Christian narratives written on the notion of purpose, sufficient for providing a hermeneutical foundation. Given this, the study seeks to explore the ways a hermeneutic of Genesis 1:27-28 fulfills a mandate for purpose that is grounded in the witness of a biblical imperative.

My Context:

This subject matter is dear to me and to give insight into the perspective from which I write, my personal context is therefore, relevant. My curiosity for exploring the notion of purpose, heightened at a pivotal transition in my faith journey, as my 26-year membership and assignments within my local church, a branch of NTCG, came to a timely end. I describe myself as a Black, British woman of African Caribbean heritage and a Child of God. I am also a mother of three adults, who were lone-parented and am blessed with five wonderful grandchildren. Acquiring a professional career in Social Work was key to my childhood aspirations and whilst currently self-employed as a Mental Health Therapeutic Practitioner, I identify comfortably with my working-class roots.

I was born in Hackney, East London in 1965 to working-class parents, who migrated to the UK in the late 1950s from Guyana and was raised in an old council estate. My parents, however, separated and were eventually divorced during my primary years.

As my mother was a Catholic, I was confirmed and participated in communion at the age of 8 years. Much of my childhood was traumatic due to suffering from an acute chronic long-term illness, otherwise described as an adverse childhood experience (ACE). In my earliest memories at age 5, I recall a 9-month stay at a residential hospital for sick children. The experience of ill-health and being separated from my family and home environment during these tender formative years; perpetuated further the emotional unsettlement, which became most apparent throughout my education journey. I recall developing a consciousness as a Black British young woman which grounded my sense of identity. Recognising the struggles of Black women and community, I was inspired by songs such as Judy Mowat's 'Black Woman'. (See Thesis Appendices 1 - Black Woman lyrics, by Judy Mowat). During my life, living with chronic illness resulted in episodes of deep sadness and despair, that I would suffer mostly in silence, however. Yet, being inquisitive and curious, I would frequently question, "*What is the purpose of my life?*" Though I received no clarity, I had this sense of belief and childlike faith, that the answers to my fragile existence and purpose rested with God. In reflection, it seems apparent that my identities and context also informed the notion of purpose.

A particular turning point in my life came after a period of relational turbulence with my life partner during my late 20s. Looking to God, in my *faith-seeking understanding*, for strength and direction seemed my only hope for survival (Williams, 1993). The decision to accept God's gift of Christ as Lord and live by biblical teachings took place during my visit to Ilford NTCG's crusade in the early 1990s. I encountered the divine presence and outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon my heart, filling me with a sense of indescribable love and acceptance of God's unconditional love and grace. This marked the beginning of what Johnson (2000, p.90) refers to as 'radical

reawakenings'; a new journey of discovering and building relation with God. My salvation experience would challenge the entire trajectory of my life, fuelling a new sense of identity, significance, and purpose in the spiritual context.

Here, I was a personal witness of the Pentecostal Black Church's mission for executing the great commission; being fulfilled in the life of the very '*least*' (Matthew 24:40 NRSV). My commitment to the church reflected my love for God and gratitude for the transformative ways salvation was being experienced within my life. Access to biblical education to aid spiritual growth was characterized by local discipleship classes and Christian education programs. My quest for advanced theology training led me to study with the renowned Professor Clinton Ryan, former Principal of Overstone Theological College at certificate and diploma level. Additionally, I engaged in the 12-week 'Black Light', a theological program run by Reverend Les Isaacs OBE, founder of the Ascension Trust and Street Pastors initiative which offered a Black hermeneutical lens. Both programs were theologically and culturally enlightening, equipping me with hermeneutical and exegesis tools for interpreting and translating biblical text. This sharpened ministerial gifting in teaching and preaching the gospel.

A distinct experience in my faith journey within the church, was when I received a distinct word and revelation from God, as I heard in my spirit the words: 'the Macedonian call' reflected in Acts 16: 6 – 10 and referring to the Apostle Paul's vision of a man of Macedonia, and response to the cry for help. I took this to mean, much later in my faith journey that God had called me to the ministry of help. In reflection, I often felt an internal and spiritual pull and sense of being compelled to respond to help or assist those in need or who experience injustice. Carolyn Henry's (2018) theology dissertation reveals a void in NTCG's discipleship model, sufficient for aiding individuals' personal and spiritual growth and understanding of calling. As such, my

attempts to find the meaning of purpose depended on Spirit-led revelations, cemented through biblical texts and sister-to-sister reflections.

After my continual curiosity, I discovered several popular authors, whose narratives spoke to my quest for discovering a greater understanding of God's divine will for my life. Concepts on purpose were explored through the writings of clergy and author, Rick Warren's (2002) *Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* The notion of pleasing God, being part of the church family as a priority, becoming Christ-like, serving in the church, and sharing my life message was invaluable to compound my understanding of the notion of purpose. While raising my family, my passion for young people informed my teaching, preaching, and service in Youth and Pastoral Counsel Leadership. In reflection, it hadn't dawned on me that there were themes of a relationality context to the notion of my calling and purpose across the life span.

During some later years, I was drawn to Myles Munroe's (1992) teachings and principles, which enlightened me with new concepts, namely those centered on Kingdom of God ideas. These narratives empowered me to re-think how my faith in God, enabled me to blossom and become a sphere of influence within and beyond the church context. Parallel to this, the significance of my sense of identity as a Black woman of faith became re-awakened following the birth of the *Woman, Thou Art Loosed* women's empowerment series, facilitated by African American Bishop T.D. Jakes. Once again, this seemed to spark new transparent conversations within the Pentecostal Black church contexts, amongst some aspects of the sister circles about faith, women's lived realities, and navigating challenges about sexuality and relationships. TD Jakes ministries became the go-to place online for inspiration, spiritual upliftment, insight into well-being, and direction for navigating a purpose-driven life.

In the most recent phase of my faith journey and fellowship in the Pentecostal Black Church context in the United Kingdom, my observations are that there is a vacuum of critical theological discussions about the notion of purpose. As such, men and women of faith assume a calling and purpose to fulfil traditional church-based models of ministry, rather than re-imagining a model beyond these ideals. As I look to God again, I reframe the question and ask: 'Father God, what is **your** purpose for my life?' This shift of perspective is a departure from questioning "What is **my** purpose?". I am reminded of the biblical stance: 'Many are the plans of a man's [woman's] heart but it is the Lord's plan and purpose that prevails' (Proverbs 21 NRSV).

As I commence on this new phase in my life journey, as a student in Black theology, it speaks to my yearning towards a 'liberating consciousness', relevant to my identity as a Black woman (Coleman, 2007b, p. 110). Through this study, I hope to deconstruct ideas that are oppressive and reconstruct ideas relevant to my own lived realities and those of other Black British Christian women as a means of enacting justice. To this end, I seek to critique the notion of purpose as presented by popular dominant discourses through a Black British female lens, bringing my voice and lived experience to the discourse. I consider how alternative combined theoretical tools, can be empowering and add fresh nuances to an under-researched area. My interest is how Black women's faith and life journey might be transformed when purpose is re-imagined through a model that reveals multi-dimensional contexts and is envisaged through a Black, British female lens. Having set out my positionality, as the study is about Christian purpose, I will also provide a summary of contextual theology as an underpinning for the discussion.

Contextualizing Theology – A Biblical Imperative:

According to Mae (2015, p. 1), ‘the task of theology is to speak of God’. Christian theology is generally concerned with a faith-seeking understanding of God, the Creator of the earth and humanity, who made Himself and His divine will be known, throughout history to distinct people through Jesus Christ. Christian theology is classified as universal as although the initial calling was to Judaism; its key message and doctrine of salvation is relevant to all. The task of doing theology in this contemporary age requires engaging in critical thinking and reflecting on God’s nature, relationship, and intent for humanity’s lives contextually (Bradshaw, 2013). As the study is situated within the context of the Pentecostal Black church movement within the UK, it is therefore relevant here to explain the theological and doctrinal context. Pentecostalism is best understood as a charismatic denomination of the Christian theology paradigm which in the contemporary form, is reported to have evolved from the ministry, in part led by William Joseph Seymour, an African American holiness minister during the Azusa Street revival in 1906 (Bradshaw, 2013; Tomlin, 2019). The movement spans across diverse cultures within Christendom, however, the Pentecostal Black Church in Britain which provides the institutional context for this study, is known for having characteristics which depict African retention. Beckford (2013, p. 33) explains ‘African retention refers to the ways that slaves and colonial subjects adapted their traditional African beliefs to Christianity, to retain an African base or interpretation’. This materializes through the style of worship, language, dance, and culture, and its central belief and characteristic; is founded upon the Acts Chapter 2 biblical text. The main essence refers to believers being empowered with the Holy Spirit, overcoming sin living holy lives, and being equipped to fulfill the Christian calling and purpose (Bradshaw, 2013).

It is important to understand the backdrop of Pentecostalism and how this informs the notion of Christian purpose, particularly as this is the dominant theological context of tradition from which Black women access biblical teaching. Considering this, the study of Christian purpose will be hinged upon a re-interpretation of the well-known biblical mandate, located within the creation story as follows:

‘So, God created man in His own image; in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:27-28 NRSV).

I propose, the above biblical text supports the theological claim, that God had a distinct purpose in mind for the human creation, which informs the Christian purpose. Therefore, the quest for a purpose requires centering around God’s intent, rather than a self-determined discovery. Mae (2015, p. 27) offers useful theological insights by explaining; ‘The Greek word commonly used in this connects is ‘telos’, which means ‘end’ or ‘purpose’. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is taken to imply that God creates for some reason’. Equally, Mae (2015) highlights in the text, the biblical concept of the *imago dei* (image of God), which positions every human being equally, including marginalized groups such as Black British women. Though there are varied perspectives on how the *imago dei* is reflected, the human capacity to be relational with God, as part of the spiritual identity remains the dominant thought.

Another biblical concept relevant to constructing a biblical witness and framework for the notion of purpose is the concept of ‘dominion’. Having Hebrew origins, this is commonly interpreted as ‘radah’, meaning ‘to rule over’ (Mae, 2015 p. 27 – 30). Mae,

(2015) suggests it is in communion with God's love, that humanity is blessed, to be a blessing, and therefore dominion is possible as they enact love, productivity, and sphere of influence, in the earth. This universal interpretation fails to take into consideration the additional barriers and inequalities Black British Christian women face in their attempt to lead with purpose, in comparison to their white female and black male counterparts. Contextual Theology or contextualizing theology in contrast, considers Christian theology as stipulated above, alongside the dynamic of a particular context and people's lived realities (Bevan, 2002). Considering the Christian purpose, as relevant to Black Christian women in the British context, requires taking into consideration their historical and social context, as well as experiences of injustices and oppression faced by way of their identity and culture. Arguably, this explanation illustrates the value of locating Christian-based ideas within a contextual framework, when referring specifically to the lived experiences of groups of a particular community. Furthermore, concluding the viability of 'doing contextual theology', through the liberating lens of Womanist Theology, for this study on the notion of purpose, as it is relevant specifically to Black Christian women (Pears, 2009; Reddie 2018).

The theological claim for this study, will rest upon Genesis 1:27-28 NRSV, supported by the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* that God's 'telos' (purpose) for humanity is to reflect well the *imago dei* (image of God). Furthermore, to discover, embrace and blossom in the uniqueness of identities, using the sphere of influence in transformative ways, across multi-dimensional contexts.

The NTCG Black Church Movement and Women:

The Windrush Generation and Pioneers of NTCG:



Figure 1 – The Empire Windrush Ship.

This infamous imagery marks the beginning of an era when ships like the Empire Windrush, carried British subjects from the West Indies to Britain in the 1950s, where navigating multi-dimensional contexts to purpose against the backdrop of hostility, rejection, and multiple levels of oppression were frequent. Later in this era, the New Testament Church of God (NTCG) in England and Wales was established in the 1950s by the visionary and founder of the late Dr Oliver Lyseight supported by his late wife, Mrs Rose Adassa Lyseight.



Figure 2 and 3 - Pictures: Dr. Oliver Lyseight and Mrs Rose Adassa Lyseight, NTCG Website 1st February 2023.

Through his pioneering vision and outstanding leadership between 1953 and 1978, the late Dr. Oliver Lyseight successfully established churches throughout England and Wales that benefitted the Black communities at large, although significantly those from the Caribbean. This proved to be a pivotal landmark in UK history, with Pentecostal Christianity, contributing to the rich diversity of the communities, and its moral and ethical values. To date, the NTCG boasts over 125 congregations predominantly attended by people of Caribbean heritage whose lives through faith and the church have been transformed (Eric A. Brown, 2013, Foreword). Thompson's (2013) editorial contribution to 'Challenges of Black Pentecostal Leadership in the 21st Century, effectively captures through her exemplary leadership position as NTCG Education Director, the compendium of Oliver Lyseight's lectures in honor of his memory and legacy.

Woman's Discipleship Ministry (WDM):

The WDM is an important department within BMCs, particularly as Black women are in predominance. As such, it provides a useful context for understanding the spaces where BBCW potentially expresses their faith, aspirations, lived realities, and experiences within the church. Run by women, for women, it is one of the only departments where women have full autonomy for strategic and transformative leadership.

The first WDM National Ladies President, the late Mrs Rose Adassa Lyseight was formally appointed in 1964. Mother Lyseight was a migrant from the Caribbean who was born during the 20th century, and it can be assumed that her leadership was influenced by traditional approaches to relationships. Coley and Coley's (2023) ground-breaking book, entitled 'Mothers of Zion – The Windrush Women' positions

Mother Lyseight amongst the legacy of Windrush women who played a phenomenal role in the development of the Pentecostal Black Majority Churches in the UK. Notably, these women who were known for being deeply spiritual, expressed their love for God, utilizing their spiritual gifting, and sense of calling in diverse ways. This included fundraising, administration, children's church Sunday school, youth director, catering lead, cleaning, choir lead, and worship lead, to name but a few (Frances, 2020). As mothers within the church, they assumed a fundamental call to nurture and shape the lives of younger women and children in the church.

Foster's (1992, p. 47) reflection on the early period of the NTCG, sheds some important insights. Using the metaphor of a pyramid to describe the sophisticated gendered structures of the Black church, a distinction is made between its two dimensions. The 'Inverted Pyramid' and 'Upright Pyramid' are explained as follows:

'The first pyramid is inverted and represents the *'female'* church. In this pyramid, lies the spirituality, the life-giving and life-sustaining nature of the church'. In contrast, the second pyramid characterizes the 'male' role as the 'upright pyramid. It represents the church in all its patriarchal and hierarchy glory and contains all leadership, juridical and priestly roles' (Foster, 1992, p. 47).

Foster's critical reflection of the NTCG, as representing the wider BMCs during that era, confirms the model of the church reflecting the difference between gender roles and was characterized by men assuming leadership positions and women being complicit with this. The late Mother Lyseight is fondly remembered as a woman of God, who blossomed in her leadership and sphere of influence across the NTCG Pentecostal movement, before transitioning on to glory, in 2021. In recognition of

contributors, such as Mother Lyseight, the Heritage Centre has been established which provides an opportunity to honor and learn from the personhood, life, and legacy of NTCG faith giants.

NTCG Celebrating 70 Years - A New Era and Administration:

Seventy years on, the NTCG has welcomed to the role of National Administrative Bishop, Claion Grandison on the 1st of September 2022. In partnership with him, is his wife, the National Woman's Discipleship Ministry, (WDM) President, Mrs. Sonia Grandison.



Figure 4 - NTCG Website 1st February 2023.

As relevant to the study, the new leadership envisions the purpose of the New NTCG's new directions for:

'A Relevant, relational church re-imagining God at work in our communities and nation'

Under the strapline: "We are NTCG", the ambitious hope is to achieve this through:

Networking Strategically, **T**heologically Sound Leadership, **C**ommunity Focus,

Growing and resourcing Healthy, Vibrant Churches. (NTCG Website 1st February 2023).



Figure 5 - NTCG Website 1st February 2023.

The above picture powerfully captions a posture of the new National NTCG WDM President, First Lady Mrs. Sonia Grandison. It depicts a vision of a confident Black, British-born, woman of God, a fierce defender of the faith, standing firmly on the word. The WDM Presidency and Board exist during a pivotal time of the 21st century where women and girls are less likely to be as complicit to male-biased leadership as was evident in the former years. Considering this, may look to WDM Board leadership for inspiration and direction in navigating faith and life. Amidst the realities of race and gender disparities within church and society, the study will consider the expectations from women members as they anticipate being empowered with access to spiritual, cultural, and gender enrichment. To this end, the WDM provides an invaluable platform for empowerment and for reducing the gender disparities that exist within church and society, relevant to Black Christian Women and girls across England and Wales. The WDM's vision, as captured on the NTCG website; expresses '*Empowering Women of all Ages and Stages to Reach their God-given potential*' (WDM, 2022).

It is noteworthy, that the NTCG organizational context is characterized by a National Administrative Bishop and a National Executive Council which comprises 12 men, responsible for the strategic leadership of its movement. This is thought provoking given, the church celebrating 70 years in Britain, where women are in predominance. Perhaps it this contextual background which speaks to the realities of women's

invisibility; Burnham (2012) coins the term 'invisible and unvoiced'. This continued disparity between men and women reflects the undertones of patriarchy which is a concern to Womanist thinkers, as it inhibits women's voice and influence in shaping the priorities and strategic direction of the church. Jaegggar and Reddie, ed. et, al (2007, p. 109) suggest, 'Black Christianity is tinged with (or even soaked in...sexism and patriarchy and yet neither the Black Church (in whatever guise) nor Black theology for that matter, could survive without the women'. These Black, British Theology scholars recognize the challenge men have for reviewing and unlearning male supremacies to give credit, where it is due to women in the church. Moore and Gillette (1990, xvii) provide an interesting perspective on patriarchy and explain:

'In our view, patriarchy is *not* the expression of deep and rooted masculinity, for truly deep and rooted masculinity is not abusive. Patriarchy is the expression of *immature* masculinity...it expresses stunted masculinity, fixated at immature levels...Patriarchy in our view, is an attack on masculinity in its fullness as well as femininity in its fullness. Those caught up in the structures and dynamics of patriarchy seek to dominate not only women but men as well.

Thesis Outline:

Within this introduction I have outlined the aim of the study; providing key definitions and terms of reference and explaining the problems the thesis addresses. It sets the tone by providing a theological claim, as a biblical underpinning for the notion of purpose. The NTCG as a context for where Black British Christian women congregates will be the focus of attention. In Chapter 2 which comprises a literature review; entitled *Pioneers of the Purpose Genre*, I will attempt to locate the research study within the context and landscape of scholarly and popular work written on the notion of purpose, which has evolved. Incorporated in the review are contributors such as Christian authors, Rick Warren, Myles Munroe, and TD Jakes. By examining key themes, I seek to identify the relevance to Black British Christian women who seek to navigate the notion of purpose, anticipating they do not take into consideration the voices of Black, British Christian women. In Chapter 3, the study primarily draws on Womanist and Psychoeducational perspectives as interpretive frameworks. Critically, it discusses key themes and principles from identified Womanist authors, Moreover, sets out the methodology used through focused group interviews, conducted with fourteen women and important ethical considerations, drawing on my personal experiences throughout the study. Considering Black women's lives holistically, the chapter will explore Evans et al's (2017) BREATHE Psychoeducation wellness tool as a practical application; relevant to balancing purpose-driven and wellness aspirations.

In Chapter 4, the research findings from the Focus Group discussion with 14 women will be illustrated, with Womanist themes and principles incorporated to formulate an interpretive framework, which offers practical applications. It discusses the research findings across five key themes: ideas on purpose, gendered perspectives, barriers to purpose, BMCs, and the multi-dimensional model. In chapter five, presented is the

recommendation proposed for 'Purpose re-imagined - A Womanist Multi-Dimensional Model' incorporating a personal, spiritual, relational, and socio-political context, alongside Scale of Reflection (SOR) for empowering Black British Christian women to be intentional in prioritising well-being. A range of additional recommendations relevant to Black British Christian women and Pentecostal BMCs are presented. A conclusion is drawn from the findings and voice of the focused group participants. It intends to summarise the study aiming to demonstrate the extent to which, the innovative models bridge the gap in scholarly literature through its original concepts, design, and incorporation of Black British Christian women's voices. The study presents a range of appendices to support the discovery of purpose and well-being.

To this end, the study explores the Womanist approach as a tool for navigating purpose. Despite the contributions of this theological paradigm to date, it is widely recognized that their voices and perspectives remain under-exposed within BMCs in the UK, in comparison to African American counterparts (Alexander, 1996). This study intends to explore this further on the premise that it offers a Black female gaze on theology (Sweeney, 2000; Williams, 1989).

Having set out the background to the study aims and rationale, my context, theological claim, and introduction to the NTCG, I will now critically review the works of pioneers of the purpose genre.

Pioneers of the Purpose Genre – Literature Review Chapter

The aim of the Literature Review Chapter, as stated by Ridley (2012), is to engage in critical dialogue with key researchers and discourses. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the specific aim of my study is to explore and critique how Black British women in the NTCG engage with popular narratives that inform an understanding of Christian purpose. This review will attempt to lay the foundation for the research by providing a critique of key literature from pioneers of the purpose genre whose contributions, respond to two of the research questions: firstly, *what are the key themes within popular Christian narratives on the notion of purpose?* Secondly, *to what extent are popular contemporary narratives on Christian purpose relevant to the lived experiences of Black British Christian women?* By incorporating a Womanist lens as a critical methodology, I intend to justify the significance of a Black British female theological lens as a framework for navigating the notion of Christian purpose, relevant to Black women in the UK.

Structure of Literature Review:

The review is structured into four distinct sections. Firstly, the gaps in published, academic scholarly discourses, which specifically address the notion of purpose from a Black British Christian woman's perspective will be acknowledged. Secondly, a critique of what has been said about the works of popular and academic pioneers of the purpose genre over time, including those engaged with, Pentecostal, BMCs in the United Kingdom, will follow. These will include one book from Christian authors such as Myles Munroe, Rick Warren, and TD Jakes. The review will draw from scholarly contributors by Black British female authors who discuss Black women's experiences

within the Pentecostal BMCs in Britain. A conclusion will summarise the findings from key literature from the purpose genre, alongside justifications for what is potentially a landmark study.

The Void – Black British Christian Women’s Perspective:

It has been established there is a dearth in published academic literature, by writers who specifically address the notion of “purpose”; captioned within its title and context; and written from a Black British female perspective. As clarified in the introduction chapter, this study is concerned with the works of authors who when addressing purpose, refer to a Christian perspective. Importantly to note however, are the numerous writings from Black British female scholars and theologians who have blazed a trail in their contributions to the Pentecostal Black Church tradition, and Black British women’s lives, and which offer, nuanced insights on the notion of purpose.

Critical Review of 7 selected books:

A critical review of 7 books will be analyzed in date order as follows:

Munroe (1992) In Pursuit of Purpose

Munroe’s (1992) book constitutes one of the earliest discourses within the genre to address the notion of purpose. The author asserts the claim of God, being the Creator of humanity and therefore the source from which purpose stems and can be known. Two distinct categories of purpose are discussed; first, a universal perspective, suggesting God’s plan for humanity, is reconciliation, to discover and establish a relationship with Him through applied faith in Jesus Christ. Second, a personal perspective on purpose is illustrated as being for fulfilling distinct assignments. Key to the text is Munroe’s (1992, p.6) attempt to define purpose. He explains ‘Purpose...is the original intent in the mind of the Creator which motivated Him to create a particular

item...’ (See Thesis Appendix 2 – for Munroe, 1992, full definition of purpose). It is this comprehensive approach to the discussion, by incorporating a definition as a prerequisite to the expected relationship between variables and key characteristics, which is conducive to a conceptual framework (Swaen and George; 2022). Although sufficiently detailed, it can be argued the language used to construct the definition is both masculine and mechanical and as such, risks alienating women. A key theme that emerges from the text is the idea that purpose has a distinct nature, characteristics, and principles. The author explains: (1). Purpose is inherent; (2). Purpose is individual; (3). Purpose is often multiple; (4). Purpose is independent; (5). Purpose is permanent; (6). Purpose is resilient; and (7). Purpose is universal (Munroe, 1992, pp.12-24). This seven-point view of the nature of purpose correlates with the idea that it has an innate and nurtured perspective that is intrinsically linked to God’s unique design of humanity, with multi-dimensional features. In Glen-Barnes’s (2004) detailed literature review of the characteristics of a spiritual calling, the claims of it having a multi-dimensional or integrative nature; spanning across different spheres of a person’s life is supported. Munroe also offers principles of purpose, which are consistent with ‘Kingdom of God’ themes, alongside what is referred to as the nature of purpose, constituting what is regarded as a conceptual framework, sufficient for informing insights on Christian purpose generically (See Thesis Appendix 3 – The Nature of purpose).

A fundamental approach of Womanist ideology, however, is about the importance of empowering Black women to use their agency to determine their paths in life, which includes incorporating their voice in scholarly literature which concerns them, alongside depending upon God – *‘making a way out of no way.’* Munroe’s (1992, p.129) ideas seem to support this idea of collaboration between the divine and

humanity; explaining ‘...unity of purpose between God’s will and ours is the ultimate goal of God the father’. Interestingly, Munroe’s discourse hinges on the witness of Genesis 1:28, NRSV biblical passage. By drawing on the ‘dominion’ mandate, the author makes a case for God’s purpose for humanity as being directly associated with leadership on the earth (Coleman, 2007b). Whilst this idea offers one approach to understanding purpose, the reality of BBCW navigating and fulfilling a God-given calling and purpose, within leadership presents as problematic. Black women in the UK generally navigate their sense of calling, leadership, and life aspirations against a backdrop of historically oppressive structures, materializing through the interplay of race, class, and gender inequalities in Britain (Cannon, 1988, Showunmi and Tomlin, 2022, Alexander, 1996). Black Liberation Theologist, Beckford (2013, pp.95-96), considers an alternative approach for adopting kingdom principles in the face of oppression, arguing ‘Black rage’ and ‘righteous anger’ to be effective tools for resistance and doing justice. This author further suggests this approach, counters passivity, and allows for both Black male scholars and Womanist scholars to stand in solidarity. Womanist scholar, Grant (1989, p. 214) offers a similar reflection, capturing the perspective of activist and freedom fighter, Sojourner Truth’s life, who concurs with a radical stance of resistance. Citing her words, the author explains: ‘The love was not a sentimental, passive love. It was a tough active love that empowered her to fight more fiercely for the freedom of her people. Although Munroe does not address specifically the plight of Black women, an entire chapter is dedicated to the African diaspora. By addressing the African diaspora directly, the author encourages the setting of one’s own values, for achieving potential, avoiding the success trap and states: ‘Remember your purpose is that dream, vision, deep desire or lifelong idea that you hunger to accomplish.’ (Munroe, 1992, pp. 148-149).

In summary, Munroe's discourse on the notion of purpose provides an invaluable, comprehensive, conceptual framework of ideas that invites useful dialogue and reflection. The Kingdom principle, interwoven throughout the book is potentially empowering, however reveals the constraints of 'dominion' about Black women and leadership due to the prevalence of structural inequalities. The narrative is relevant to Black women and communities as it recognizes the ways, structural oppressions, systemic inequalities, and racism create barriers for marginalized communities, distort the psyche, self-concept, as is verified by numerous Black psychology studies (De-Gruy, 2018; Evans et al; 2017; Major, et. al. 2018).

Iyanla Vanzant's (1995) chapter entitled 'The Valley of Purpose and Intent' in her book *The Value in The Valley*.

Discovering, the slightly later works of Iyanla Vanzant (1995) in the chapter entitled 'the Valley of Purpose and Intent' in her book *The Value in The Valley* was particularly poignant. The similar shared identities: between the author and me as Black women, raised expectations, that the African American Spiritual Teacher, might offer an insider lens relevant to informing how Black British women make sense and navigate this notion of purpose. Vanzant (1995, p.13) underpins the discourse by employing the term and metaphor, 'valley' to acknowledge the realities of Black women's historical and continual struggle, pain, and setbacks in life and how they can offer teachable moments and a platform for fruitfulness. The author explains; 'Valleys are purposeful. They open our eyes, strengthen our minds, and teach us faith, strength, and patience. These are all essential mountain climbing skills.' The author's use of metaphoric concepts to describe Black women's struggle, bears similarities to African American

Womanist thinker, Delores Williams (2013, p.10) who adopts the term 'wilderness', to reflect the historical and contemporary oppressions faced. Black, British academic scholar, and theologian, Dixon (2014) in contrast uses the concept of 'valleys' as a metaphor that can be useful for understanding the African diaspora's experiences. Furthermore, suggests slavery, and colonialism are like valley's which remain prevalent in the ways they continue to shape the lives of Black Britons in adverse ways. With this insight, this author suggests Black women are empowered to navigate resistance and change to systematic oppressions that impact life chances. Vanzant's (1995, p. 218) contribution to the discourse, is also significant through her attempt to define the notion of purpose. She explains: 'Purpose is an activity or series of activities which enable you to use your God-given talents, gifts, and abilities to fulfill a need in the world. Purpose is not what you do, it is what you are.' Vanzant's definition appears to draw a correlation between the wonders of God's unique design of humanity, their identity, personality, gifting, and call to transformative action.

By drawing on a range of disciplines, to include psychoeducation and the Laws of Compensation. The author seeks to empower Black women to re-imagine a purpose-driven lifestyle that counters the cycle of continuous working, which they are renowned for. Black, British, female scholar Hutchinson (2000) concurs with the importance of deconstructing ideas that promote Black women's continuous cycle of working and giving, arguing this to be paramount to the preservation of well-being. Furthermore, suggest Black women are prone to becoming exploited within the church context. Walker-Barnes, (2017, p.44) advocates for Black women to challenge the myth of the 'StrongBlackWoman' because of the way it de-humanises these women, diminishing possibilities for empathising with their humanity and vulnerabilities. In my reflection,

during my membership with NTCG for example, as an officer I was encouraged to keep busy in my sacrificial service to God within church ministry, giving zero attention to promoting balance and well-being. Valentina Alexander (1996), landmark narrative entitled, 'A Mouse in a Jungle', in contrast addresses through scholarly writings the plight of Black Christian women in Britain navigating their God-given calling and purpose in areas of justice, against the backdrop of historical oppression and life's valleys. Through an illustration of four case studies, reveals the ways in which oppression fuelled purpose-driven acts of justice rather than it becoming a permanent obstacle. The account of these remarkable stories, prove to be inspirational for BBCW within BMCs, where resistance against glaring stereotypes about women's roles within the Pentecostal BMC's, are challenged and countered.

Vanzant, narrative draws on New Thought, the Law of Compensation, and Belief in her discourse, with central ideas of the universe, having the capacity to provide compensation or solutions from life through principles such as '(1). Think right, (2). Order your life and (3). Act right' (Vanzant,1995, p. 234). Whilst these principles have the potential to harness a positive mindset, it is limited as it does not offer Black women a framework for balancing purpose-driven aspirations and wellness. Other themes that emerge from the book are the importance of following one's dreams, being intentional, cultivating vision, and being committed to thriving as opposed to merely surviving.

Vanzant's contribution to the genre narratives on the notion of purpose is relevant for Black British Christian women. From the perspective of a Black woman, addressing Black women, Vanzant echoes a central principle of Womanist thinkers. By coining the concept of valleys to describe the complexities of life's encounters, she provides

a context of relevance, alongside useful self-help tools that can transform the way Black women create pathways for purpose. By drawing on New Age thought, the Law of Compensation and Belief, alongside Psychology paradigms, the principal underpinning of the discourse is contentious to traditional Pentecostal Christian thought.

Guinness (1998) *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose for Your Life*

Guinness's landmark book is unique in that it offers a historical insight into how values amongst Christian thinkers evolved about Christian calling and purpose.

Similar to Munroe's (1992) narrative, Guinness (1998) positions God as the Creator of humanity and therefore, the source from which purpose can be discovered. Two key descriptions of a call and purpose are offered; a primary call and purpose and a secondary call and purpose; both terms are used interchangeably. The primary context: centers on God's calling to humanity to receive the gift of salvation, through faith and acceptance of Jesus Christ (Guinness,1998). The secondary context refers to a form of God-ordained calling to action. Guinness's take on the idea of Christian calling and purpose is that it has the potential to materialize in 'everything everywhere'. The author makes this claim based on God's nature being omniscience; 'which refers to the unlimited nature of God or His ability to be everywhere, at all times (Youngblood, 1995, p. 925). Glenn-Burns (2004) acknowledges Guinness's (1998) contribution to the genre and in particular his take on how those who experience a divine sense of spiritual calling, find a profound sense of focus and direction in life. Additionally, supports a broader concept of the notion of the Christian calling and purpose, suggesting it can materialize through family, work, or community. Her definition

explains it as a 'deep attraction to a particular vocation, type of work, course of action, or life path' (Glenn-Burns (2004, p.1).

Guinness (1998) reflects further on the account provided by Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea during 314AD, citing, his publication entitled 'The Demonstration of the Gospel'. This illustrates an era, where Christian calling and purpose were recognized only by two distinct categories. The 'Perfect Life' was described as one which is dedicated solely to spiritual contemplation, characterized by union with God and therefore, considered a higher form of calling (Guinness (1998, pp. 33- 34). Glenn-Burns's (2004) study on Christian calling, concurs with Guinness's interpretation of church history and the ways ideas were formulated. Citing Hardy's (1990) work, the author illustrates how during the Middle Ages era, it was primarily the priests who were considered as fulfilling the highest form of Christian calling, by way of their contemplation and devotion to God.

In contrast the 'Permitted Life', characterized by the call to action; in areas such as through motherhood, care, activism, and politics, was interpreted as having lesser value, due to its association with secularism. It is worth noting that during this era, the divide between gender ministry roles within the church was greater, Christian women were alienated from priesthood roles and devalued due to patriarchal and sexist ideology. The likelihood of them being associated with roles that reflected a practical call to action was high. Importantly, Feminist, Cohick's (2009) study, however, challenges stereotyped perceptions held of women. Countering the myth of invisibility, she reveals that women were both attentive to the constructs of their gender identity, through maintaining the household and family life, yet were also key influencers in the religion and politics of their cities. Glenn-Burns's (2004) important study on literature that addresses the Christian calling and purpose; also concluded on its multi-

dimensional nature; spanning across life, vocations, work, acts of service, family, and community life (Hardy, 1990).

Guiness, reflection on church history, therefore, shows how the reformation, spearheaded by German teacher and monk, Martin Luther approximately in 1517, aborted the system and vows that categorized, higher and lesser Christian calling and purpose as necessary. It seems clear from the narrative that Guinness, concurred with this need to dismantle the ideas upheld by Christian thinkers of the Catholic church at the time, which were divisive, contradictory, and further hindered believers from embracing the value of their true calling and potential across diverse spectrums of life. (Hardy, 1990). This reveals how early historians who were typically white males, perpetuated a divisive religious and class value system, with faith and Christian calling only being valued through the clergy role, considered the perfect way of life. It can be argued therefore that the reformation, created greater liberation for women, the working class, and other marginalized groups within society. Womanist thinkers and theologians, also challenge how within Black-led churches, congregants include Black women, continually place pastors, evangelists, and those who operate in the prophetic on elite pedestals, to their detriment (Foster, 1992, Alexander, 1996, Grant, 1989, Williams, 2013).

Whilst Guinness ideas of the Christian calling and purpose, as offering possibilities for re-imagining it as 'everything and everywhere', offers a more inclusive paradigm it is not without problems. Black women, for example, are renowned for their continuous cycle of working and serving others; often to the detriment of their well-being (Evans et al., 2017, Hutchinson, 2000; Vanzant, 1998,). Furthermore, feeding into the myth of the 'StrongBlackWoman' (Walker-Barnes, 2017, p.44). I argue that Guinness concepts

and ideas can hinder possibilities for harnessing a balance between strengths and vulnerabilities.

In summary, Guinness concept of Christian calling and purpose broadens the scope for understanding God's calling and purpose for humanity, challenging the contradictory ideas held by early Christian thinkers. The historical account of where these ideas stem is particularly useful for recognizing how Eurocentric male-centric values continue to inform and shape the Black Pentecostal tradition, to the detriment of Black women. Furthermore, it explains how this thread of thought continues to permeate within the Pentecostal, Black-led Churches, where despite Black women's predominance, their agency to determine their sense of purpose and pathway is inhibited.

Warren's (2002) *Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?*

Warren's book presents as a 40-day study guide and journal. From my insider-observations, this was amongst the most popular books engaged with by members within the NTCG; for both personal and group devotional / study purposes. The review reveals a thread of authors, who position God as central to the discovery of purpose, with Warren, explaining; 'If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose, for his purpose' (Warren, 2002, p.17).

Similarly, to Munroe (1992), the personal, innate design of humanity is presented as significant to fulfilling life's assignments, illustrated through the SHAPE tool. Warren (2002, pp.22-23) affirms: 'God prescribed every single detail of your body. He deliberately chose your race, the colour of your skin, your hair, and every other feature [...] He also determined the natural talents you would possess and the uniqueness of your personality...' This perspective is particularly affirming in that it seeks to validate

the multi-faceted personhood, identity, and attributes of BBCW as relevant to their Christian calling. In the following section, I shall critically analyse the notion of purpose, identified across five distinct areas, as follows:

1. You were planned for God's pleasure: The association between acts of devotion to God and practical worship, through tangible actions is presented as a fundamental aspect of the Christian purpose. Warren (2002, p.66) explains: '...Worship is not just for church services. We are told to "worship him continually"'. This perspective relates to what I suggest is a spiritual context to purpose, one of which is central to the traditional Pentecostalism, Black-led Churches in Britain.

2. You were formed for God's family: The second purpose, relates to the relational context of the notion of purpose, as being to serve the church family. Although this seems to be consistent with biblical theology, is somewhat contentious. Warren (2002, p.118) suggests, "Your spiritual family is even more important than your physical family because it will last forever. Our families on earth are our wonderful gifts from God but they are temporary and fragile." Critically, this view is problematic as the composition of the family unit reflects a central aspect of God's creation vision. In the African tradition and worldview, contributions to family life are extended to the village or community and are profoundly important. Several Black theologians and scholars concur with this view, revealing the ways the transatlantic slave trade of West African men and women, post-colonialism, and systematic racism continue to negatively impact families in the African diaspora. (Alexander, 1996; DeGruy, 2005, Mitchem, 2002). Felder explains:

'The family unit was frequently disintegrated...wives were abducted from their husbands and frequently subjected to sexual abuse from their white masters...After studying what was done to the Blacks, it is amazing that anyone

should be puzzled by the deterioration of society in the Black community...'.
(2007, p. CVI).

This insight reveals how challenging Warren's theory, regarding the prioritizing of the church-based family over the biological family, can be for Black communities. Womanist thinkers offer a more measured and culturally appropriate corrective which is to re-imagine purpose holistically through self-care, well-being, and quality family life, alongside services in church and community (Foster, 1992; Hutchinson, 2000; Williams, 2013).

2.You were created to become like Christ: Here the author suggests the third perspective of Christian purpose is to become more like Christ. Leading Christian theologians concur with the idea that Christians are called to reflect the 'image, after our likeness...' of God, which materializes through the process of discipleship and embracing the characteristics of Jesus Christ (Genesis 1:26, NRSV). Whilst Warren's discourse, is consistent with Christian theology, when referring to the lives of four women – Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, the author's choice of reference: 'These were not exactly sterling reputations...;' (Warren, 2002: 196). This is indicative of how patriarchal undertones are unhelpfully interweaved into male-centric narratives. Womanist and feminist scholars offer a contrasting approach to re-reading the bible, as they advocate for adopting a Black female hermeneutical lens. Sweeney (2000) concurs with this, in recognition of how a male-bias lens can be oppressive, urging for a posture of suspicion when reading text to identify, deconstruct, and counter these. This provides possibilities for deconstructing content that degrades and dehumanizes women; reconstructing ways of knowing, which are affirmative and evoke compassion (Mitchem, 2002; Weems, 1998; Williams, 2013).

4. You were shaped for serving God: Warren here posits a key argument to counter the myth of the Christian calling, being limited to the clergy, pastor, or minister (Scott-Wilson; 2008). Instead suggests all Christians have a distinct calling and purpose to serve God, to include through ministry within the church context. The author offers the acrostic 'SHAPE' analysis, which stands for 'Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experience' as a tool for aiding Christians to identify and walk in their calling and purpose (See Thesis Appendices 4 – Warren's SHAPE diagram). Scott-Wilson's (2008) study and critical analysis of Rick Warren's SHAPE tool, reveals the value it offers for empowering Christians with a framework to reflectively examine their innate personal design and correlation to vocational ministry. Furthermore, critiques the Christian church for its failings in this area, referring to non-personalized discipleship and Christians' passivity about knowing and fulfilling their calling. The SHAPE tool offers BBCW an innovative resource and checklist for navigating Christian calling and purpose, within and external of the church context, is consistent with Pentecostal tradition, and has the potential for being radical and transformative.

It is noteworthy that doctrinal themes such as servanthood and self-sacrifice are a continual thread throughout the narrative. For example, Warren (2002, p.19) shapes the narrative by citing that 'self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way to finding yourself, your true self.' (Matthew 16:25). Daly (2008) through a feminist lens, however, critiques the association of self-sacrifice with the destruction of a victim as problematic for women. Comparatively, Mitchem (2002) highlights the historical exploitation of Black female bodies for labour. The correlation to capitalism and the way the servanthood and self-sacrifice doctrine feeds into Black women internalizing and prioritizing continuous acts of sacrificial service in the church is made. Notably, this is often to the detriment of their self and well-being (Evans et al., 2017; Foster,

1992; Grant, 1989; Mitchem, 2002; Williams, 2013). Mitchem (2002, p. 110) concludes, 'Faith in Jesus should empower black women to wholeness, not destruction'.

5. You were made for a mission: The fifth and final aspect of purpose is considered to be the sharing of the gospel. Evangelism is another central principle of the Christian tradition however, I argue that Warren's (2002, p.297) distinction between 'superior' and 'inferior' types of evangelism mirrors the ideology, values, and language of European Christian missionaries and is therefore problematic. These actions rested on the notion of white superiority and black inferiority, justifying the brutal slave trading of West African people (Beckford, 2013). Using concepts such as "world-class Christian" (Warren, 2002; p. 297) to promote effective evangelism can be argued as being comparative to an ideology rooted in imperialism.

In summary, Warren's book on the Christian purpose has been pivotal to informing ideas on the notion of purpose globally; offering some excellent concepts, principles, and tools for discovering purpose, including the SHAPE resource (Scott-Wilson; 2008). It is sufficiently grounded in biblical text and underpinned by doctrinal principles such as servanthood and self-sacrifice. However, as relevant to BBCW, reveals the importance of incorporating liberational theology paradigms such as Womanist, for countering Eurocentric, male-centric concepts, and ideas such, as the prioritizing of the church over biological family – which can be detrimental to Black women and their community.

Bishopson (2014) *A Christian's Life Purpose: A Guide to Finding Your Purpose in Life.*

The author takes a traditional Christian perspective on the notion of purpose. Similarly, to other scholars and popular authors, Bishopson positions God as the key source central to the discovery of purpose and reveals two distinct types: the physical and

spiritual. Outlined are five categories of physical purpose: (1). Marriage; emphasizing the sacredness and value of sex, reproduction, and relationship. (2). The honouring of one's mother and father. (3). Achieving wealth and success. (4). Becoming good stewards for managing resources and (5). Acquiring wisdom necessary for maintaining good health (Bishopson, 2014, pp. 7-11).

In contrast, five categories of spiritual purpose include: (1). to worship God; through devotional acts: singing, prayer (Psalm 34:11, 98:4,100, 150:6). (2). Practical expressions of honouring God through life activities. (3). Receiving God's gift of salvation; incorporating the balance of a progressive Christian life that embraces suffering. (4). Serving God with talents and gifts. (5). The sharing of the good news of salvation (Bishopson, 2014, pp. 13 -17).

Although the discourse on suffering during purpose-driven life concurs with doctrinal ideas on suffering, Bishopson overlooks emphasizing: 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble' (Psalm 46:1, NRSV). Furthermore, the author omits revealing the ways that suffering can drive liberation actions (Mitchem, 2002).

Whilst Vanzant (1995) draws on psychology and New Thought paradigms as sources of theological expression and for addressing barriers (Bevan, 2002), Bishopson (2014), in contrast, offers solutions that reflect biblical theology: first to acknowledge the Creator; second to acknowledge the limitation of time; and third to acknowledge one's blessings (Bishopson, 2014, pp. 22-23).

A further critique and concern are how the narrative associates the accumulation of wealth to purpose and the lack of wealth to sin. Bishopson (2014, p. 9) states: 'Since God is our Father, He wants us to become rich and successful in every aspect of our lives...it is not really a sin if you were born poor and homeless, but if you are still poor and homeless when you die, then that's a sin.' The judgments and devaluing of those

who are economically impoverished within society, reflect a value base reminiscent of classism and capitalism (Akala, 2018; Diangelo, 2018b).

Interestingly, in the UK, Black communities are considered marginalized, although it is noteworthy, that within the Pentecostal, Black-led church context, there is an emerging middle class amongst Black women. Thus, evidence of the progressions made in upward class mobility. Womanist theology, however, recognizes the historical context of oppression experienced by Black communities, resulting in them being classified as marginalized. Cannon (1988) therefore in her book *Black Womanist Ethics* proposes a corrective to dominant Christian ethics by centering on Black women's lived realities. Bishopson's narrative, centered on Christian theology, offers a traditional way of making sense of the notion of purpose, by distinguishing the physical and spiritual context. Concerningly, it also reveals how ethical values, consistent with an ideology that alludes to the superiority and inferiority of groups and status, are interwoven within literature and should be responded to with suspicion (Sweeney, 2000).

Oliver's (2006) book, entitled *Love Work, Live Life! Releasing God's Purpose in Work*.

Oliver's (2006) book focuses primarily on the claim that purpose can be found through specific secular vocations. Similarly, to Guinness (1998), Oliver refutes early Christian historians' view of the priestly office as constituting a perfect or higher way of life. Also, the inference of practical acts, and activities being secular, therefore having lesser value is misleading. As a corrective, Oliver argues that the marketplace provides a tangible context for purpose to be realized, providing opportunities to express God's love whilst experiencing personal and spiritual fulfillment. Glenn-Burns (2004, p.8) concurs with this explaining; '...during the Renaissance period, work came to be seen to express one's freedom and creativity to help shape the world we live...this view was

strengthened by the twentieth century emphasis on individual meaning and satisfaction in one's work.

Oliver's case for placing the workplace as a context for fulfilling the purpose-driven life is viable. In the contemporary UK context, Showunmi and Tomlin's (2022, p. 90) research findings reveal women's participation in the workplace has increased from 53 percent in 1971 to 71 percent in 2018. However, Showunmi and Tomlin posit that Black women are more likely to engage in the work context for survival; and often experience discrimination and disadvantage (Dixon, 2007; Kamasak et al., 2019). From a secular point of view, these findings confirm Black women's positive attitude about work (Vanzant, 1995; Mitchem, 2002). However, whilst the workplace can offer a viable context for purpose-driven aspirations, this can be overshadowed for Black and minority groups due to the prevalence of gender bias, sophisticated forms of racism, and micro-aggressions. Akala's (2018) distinguished book entitled *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire* cements the realization of capitalism, classism, racism, and gender bias permeating British society, resulting in white middle-class men having greater advantage to access aspirational positions in comparison to their Black counterparts. Angela Sarkis (2000) in her chapter entitled 'The Professional Woman' in ed. Aldred's *Sisters with Power* book offers an alternative experience and narrative to work from a BBCW perspective. Describing how her professional role as a probation officer and mentor, provided her with an opportunity to showcase the love of God and engage in justice whilst experiencing personal and spiritual fulfilment. It is noteworthy that given these social realities, Womanist thinkers advocate for resisting all forms of oppression, that perpetuate the interplay of race, class, and gender inequalities (Mitchem, 2002; Williams, 2013).

In summary, Oliver's book illustrates sufficiently, the marketplace as a viable context for fulfilling purpose. However, it is noteworthy that it remains silent about the way structural inequalities in the marketplace present some challenges for the Black community.

Clarke (2015) *Unleashing Your Purpose: Discover Your Unique Significance*.

In this book the author address's purpose from a biblical perspective, drawing on ideas from popular authors such as Rick Warren and Myles Munroe. In a presentation across eight chapters, Clarke centers on God, as being the orchestrator of human purpose.

In chapter two, Clarke's critique of Greek philosophy on human existence provides the basis of his counterargument for a Christian perspective for an understanding of Christian purpose. In the critical analysis, the following perspectives are explained: Nihilism: "the process of devaluing the highest values", saying that "God is dead," and as such, there are no moral rules by which man is required to live' (Clarke, 2015, p. 17). Existentialism: the capacity for human beings, to freely determine their meaning for life (Clarke, 2015, p. 18). Secular humanism: denounces the need for human beings to depend upon spiritual or supernatural influence. Instead, it advocates for the human capability and capacity for determining their own ethical/moral values, for determining their life purpose (Clarke, 2015, p. 18). Postmodernism: refutes all generalist ideas that are centered on absolute truths. The reasoning is that religious views are social constructs, subject to change, and unreliable as a theory for applying to diverse communities (Clarke, 2015, p. 19).

In the critical analysis of these philosophical thinkers, Clarke concludes their ideas should be refuted on the premise that they are man-made and deny the existence and sovereignty of God. Clarke uses a range of concepts to empower readers with the

search and discovery of purpose. These include identifying a 'purpose moment', (2015, p. 2); a 'unique purpose for living' to discover (2015, p. 2) a 'one-of-a-kind personal destiny' that awaits (2015, p. 9); a 'temporary assignment on earth' (2015, p. 28); 'personal destiny' (2015, p.9). Arguably, these are synonymous with a type of pursuit of the American Dream, which I argue has a danger in promoting idealism and capitalism. The book offers seven actions that support the discovery of purpose including: reading the bible, prayer, and listening for the prophetic. Additionally, it puts forward additional cues, using the seed concept as a metaphor, suggesting purpose awaits flourishing. Furthermore, whilst encouraging the reader to be led by the Holy Spirit for revelation, Clarke offers a contingency which is to engage in actions that are consistent with one's capability. This involves listening to one's heart, being prepared to take risks, and following one's dreams and passions. A key emphasis is placed on establishing covenant relationships which will aid the journey of navigating purpose to be fulfilled. This feeds into the proposal of purpose having a relational context.

Relevant to the BMC context, Clarke's book demonstrates contextual relevance, revealing gender inclusivity and cultural appropriation, relevant to affirming Black identity. For example, it introduces an African tradition worldview that is incorporated within the discourse, through the Zulu African concept known as the 'Ubuntu principle'. This considers an alternative worldview to Western values, based upon the central view of humanity's ability and purpose for co-existing. Clarke (2015, pp. 75-76) explains, 'a person is a person through other persons.' In another section of the narrative, Rosa Parks and Maya Angelou are mentioned, affirming the significance of Black women's purpose-driven lives which was encouraging. This methodology is in keeping with Womanist principles about incorporating the voices or perspectives of Black women.

In summary, Clarke's book provides an insightful paradigm for considering the notion of purpose. By highlighting key ideas from Greek philosophical thinkers, Clarke provided an insightful basis for critical thinking and comparisons with ideas situated within Christian thought. The narrative incorporates a range of motivational concepts, language, and terms, grounded sufficiently in biblical text, the life of Jesus Christ, and the active power of the Holy Spirit. As such, it demonstrates a commitment to traditional Pentecostal theology and hermeneutics, relevant to the BMC tradition in Britain. The inclusion of Black women, the reference to justice, and the African worldview were both welcoming and consistent with Womanist and Black theology.

TD Jakes (2015) is the author of *Destiny: Step into Your Purpose*

The narrative can be described as an aesthetic, motivational approach to popular literature written about purpose and is underpinned by concepts in prosperity, theology, psychology, fate, and fatalism. From my observation, this book was widely read by the NTCG local church I attended, by women and men. I shall critically discuss key themes and concepts from across the 17 chapters.

Although written from the perspective of an African American male, Jakes posits as standing in radical solidarity with African American women, reflecting consistencies with Womanist thinkers. It is noteworthy, for example, that he begins the book in the introduction chapter with an extract from an interview with the civil rights activist, the late Mrs. Coretta Scott-King. The fundamental role in the civil rights movement and the cause for justice is the prime focus. Alongside this, Jakes illuminates the uniqueness of her personhood: identity, gifts, talents, capabilities, and qualities in her own right reflect an approach to empowerment of women, again revealing solidarity with Womanist. It is noteworthy that Jakes uses the concept of human instinct and not

the Holy Spirit to reflect her testimonial of having a sense of knowing beforehand her destiny to be the wife of the late Martin Luther King Jnr., thus revealing his willingness to employ a range of sources and theories to underpin his ideas.

Through a unique style of communication, a range of concepts are used to explain purpose and destiny. For example, Jakes (2015, p.9) introduces the concept of instincts, defined as 'that inherent aptitude or capacity to use your emergent God-given gifts effectively at the appointed time and place'. Jakes suggests the idea of using one's instinctive capability for identifying 'innate gifts, abilities, and talents' to aid 'the process of self-insight' (Jakes, 2015, p.9). Similarly, the idea of discovering one's 'authentic self' (Jakes, 2015, p.7) alludes to what I suggest constitutes a personal context to purpose through a process of self-discovery. This is necessary for Black women's growth whilst residing in a hostile environment and requires unpacking one's personhood, identity, and qualities. Jakes (2015, pp. 20-23) also introduces the concept of a 'higher calling', 'authentic more', and 'plus ultra' which correlates to principles of self-actualization, prosperity, and capitalist ideology (Bowler, 2015; Burkett, 1993). The idea of the discovery of purpose being collaborative, between God and humanity, is both liberating and empowering and encourages Black women to consider using their agency, whilst being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. Jakes (2015, p.55) explains, "That divine-human partnership is tough to figure out... Destiny becomes a reality when you partner with God. It is a balance of secular and sacred, the delicate balance of faith and action...'

Jakes provides a balanced perspective to discovering purpose by drawing on goal-setting principles, revealing the importance of vision and of areas to prioritize. A commitment to well-being is evident in this book as it draws on psychology paradigms to promote the importance of mental well-being, physical well-being, self-care, and

balance. Jakes (2015, pp.103-104), for example, advocates for the following: 1). Social reset; 2). Spiritual reset; 3). Physical reset; 4). Emotional reset; 5). Relaxation vital component of a purpose-centered life. (See Thesis Appendix 4 – Jakes, RESET Model). The ideas are also consistent with Evans et. al's (2017) BREATHE culturally appropriate wellness model, which is designed to empower Black women with tools to balance vulnerabilities and strengths. This approach is discussed further in Chapter Three. Finally, Jakes offers relational principles useful for supporting purpose-driven aspirations, explaining the significance of the mentor-mentee relationship alongside those that offer unconditional love and support for managing emotional needs, personal aspirations, and spiritual growth (Henry, 2019; Sarkis, 2000).

Relevant to the study, McGee's (2017) provocative critique of one aspect of the TD Jakes' ministry challenges the idea of the author's empowerment of women. She raises critical questions as to whether men, and in this case, TD Jakes as an African American clergyman, author, and businessman, can be authentic in their claim to be empowering women, whilst gaining economically from their lives. McGee seeks to develop this argument based upon the renowned *Woman Thou Art Loosed* (WTAL) empowerment conferences, which were spearheaded by TD Jakes two and a half decades ago. The international forum aims to empower women across their personal, emotional, and spiritual lives through a range of products. McGee coins the term 'Walmartization' of the gospel, from this process of communication, which is also a departure from a focus on justice missions. She argues this to be exploitative and problematic due to the way women become dependent on the brand as, reflecting their religious and spiritual identity (McGee, 2017, p.2039). McGee's critique highlights that men will need to engage in processes of reflexivity, should they wish to stand in solidarity with women, to ensure they stand to the test of Womanist and Feminist

principles. Perhaps it is not surprising that TD Jakes has since handed over the baton of the WTAL women's empowerment conference to his youngest daughter in 2022. Having said this, Womanist thinkers advocate for women to use their agency to determine their faith walk and healing but also clarify the commitment to Black women and the entire community, for which men are an essential part (Mitchem, 2002; Townes, 1993; Williams, 2013).

To summarise, Jake's book draws on a range of conceptual sources to discuss principles of purpose and destiny. It is written to target a broad audience who senses a conviction and motivation to pursue a greater calling in their lives within or external of the church context. Despite the critique this author has faced about the ethics of his work with women, this book has demonstrated a commitment to include the voice of Black women, alongside the theme of justice.

It is important to note in the British context that several Black British female scholars have made significant contributions to addressing the experiences of Black Christian women in the Pentecostal BMCs in Britain. Alexander (1996) illustrates through a case study analysis of four women's journeys of self-discovery, political and justice work. Coleman (2007b) in contrast gives voice to her journey towards liberating consciousness in her pursuit to respond to the call to leadership as a Black Christian woman. Most poignantly, she charts how Womanist thinkers provide a catalyst for navigating invisibility and validation through revelations of Jesus Christ, offering wholeness and liberation. Dixon (2007) engages in dialogue about the reality of racism in Britain, which has created additional privilege for white middle-class women. Inspired by the work of bell hooks, in the struggle for racial justice, she illustrates how rage can provide clarity of mind and become a conduit for equality through anti-racist practice. This summarised reflection of Black British theology scholars reveals the

important contributions being made relevant to shaping nuanced ideas on the notion of purpose relevant to Black British Christian women. Themes that materialize as significant to the Black experience through a Black female lens are those about self-validation, wholeness, and justice. Their works sufficiently challenge these women to re-think the ways God's intended purposes can be re-imagined within their lives.

Summary:

The literature review found there to be a dearth of published writings addressing specifically the notion of purpose relevant to Black British Christian women. In response to the thesis question, the review has demonstrated popular contemporary narratives on Christian purpose are essentially universal. This approach fails to engage with the contextual realities of any given community, assuming the correlation between faith and lived experiences to be the same. This is problematic for the Black British Christian woman and community as popular literature on the notion of purpose ignores structural injustices within society. The comparison between male and female perspectives revealed no significant findings, largely due to the small ratio of authors between male and female writers. The review showed all the literature prioritizes God as central to the discovery of purpose. There were variations of descriptions of types of purpose, for example, some writers alluded to two types, others five distinct categories, whilst Jakes (2015), for example, presented the idea of a higher calling.

Interestingly, there were some useful definitions, and one author, Munroe (1992) provided a useful comprehensive conceptual framework. Other important themes were the notion of purpose being explicitly personal; with the personhood, innate qualities, personality, identities, gifts, and talents offering clues to its discovery. Furthermore, pointing to God, the process of self-discovery, human instinct, passion, and spiritual sources such as the Holy Spirit, as offering further guidance. Other useful principles

emerged to aid the discovery of purpose including the importance of vision, dreams, passion, goals, effective mentors, and relationships. It was noteworthy that several of the literature revealed doctrinal underpinning to include the Kingdom, Self-sacrifice, Prosperity, and Pentecostalism.

Most discourses referred to the reality of barriers to the discovering and fulfilling of purpose; references to the interplay and intersectionality of race, class, or gender oppressions, however, were lacking. The inclusion of the Black female voice, experience, and perspective relevant to the principle of Womanist Theology was present across a few discourses, however, it remains significantly underrepresented. Due to these limitations, I will consider the Womanist American literature as an interpretive lens and framework for the notion of purpose relevant to Black British Christian women.

A Womanist Lens and Wellness Practice

Methodology Chapter

In this chapter, I introduce the critical methodology and analytical framework for my study. I am examining the notion of purpose for Black Christian women in Britain through an interpretative lens that draws on Womanist theology and well-being paradigms.

Contextual background

It is understood that Womanist theology is positioned within Contextual theology due to the emphasis placed upon the Black experience, yet through a female lens. It considers cultural and historical contexts of the faith experiences of Black women in God; alongside the significance of contemporary realities within British society such as the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class from the Windrush generation to date (Alexander, 1996; Mitchem, 2002). Bevan (2002, p.4) explains: 'Theology that is contextual realizes that culture, history, contemporary thought forms and so forth are to be considered, along with scripture and tradition, as valid sources for theological expression'. This is further illustrated in Figure 1, below:

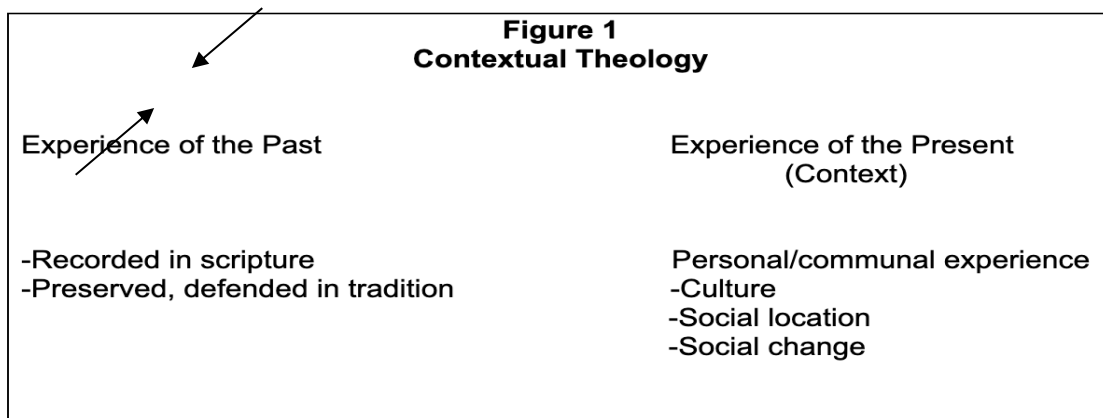


Figure 1, Bevan (2002, p. 7) in Contextual Theology.

In my discussion of key works by Womanist thinkers, I seek to identify principles, themes, and concepts that support my proposal for reimagining the notion of purpose, through a multi-dimensional model. This would incorporate women's personal, spiritual, relational, and socio-political context and is a model that offers transformative possibilities for Black women, the church, and the community.

I have chosen to incorporate the BREATHE psychoeducation wellness model developed by Evans et al. (2017). The rationale for this decision is that it draws from Womanist and Feminist paradigms and the extensive research, dialogue, and practices of Black psychologists, who have prioritized the well-being of Black women and girls and so relevant to the British context. It also adopts an important culturally appropriate framework. Renowned Family and Systemic Therapist, specializing in work with Black families, Boyd-Franklin (2003) strongly advocate for the importance of strength-based approaches for validating these communities in the process of healing and holistic development.

In my discussion, I will reflect on how the theories and concepts can be applied to the NTCG Women's Discipleship Ministry (WDM), given its mission of 'Empowering women of all ages and stages to reach their God-given potential' (WDM, 2022). My own experiences will be interwoven in the discussion.

The chapter is divided into five sections. Part one is a discussion of the key problems identified in the literature review. Part two explains the research methodology. Part three defines Womanist theology, with a summary of its historical context and a critique of one book from five Womanist scholars who have shaped the way I have developed the Womanist interpretative framework. Part four explores the BREATHE

wellness model (Evans et al, 2017). Part five addresses racial trauma and implications for trauma-informed church and pastoral care, before concluding.

Problems and Research Question:

The chapter addresses three key problems, first the absence of a contextual lens that takes into consideration the history, social, and cultural identities of Black women. The absence of a Black, female hermeneutical lens, for combatting male bias. The absence of an interdisciplinary lens, for promoting women's balance and well-being. Finally, the absence of a biblical framework for grounding the notion of purpose.

Primary Research Methodology:

This chapter aims to center the research on the lives of Black Christian women in Britain. I have conducted online focus group interviews via Zoom to provide a case study that highlights their voices. The process of gathering primary data through interviews online was chosen due to the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. My philosophical stance is informed by what Showunmi (2020) describes as a people-centered approach. This incorporates Black women's perspectives in research about them and is consistent with Womanist ideology (Mitchem, 2002; Williams, 2013).

I approached the research mindful of the dynamic of the 'informant-researcher relationship' between us as women, as well as my subjectivity (Few, 2003, p.205). I was also deeply sensitive to the mixed feelings presented amongst the women, including nervousness about the perceived limited knowledge and anxiety about the research process but also feelings of immense excitement and gratitude to be "chosen". My response was to empower participants to engage collaboratively, inviting

'sister-to-sister' talks to create ease and for managing the rich nuanced discussion, sensitively (Few, 2003, p.205).

The 14 women recruited from across NTCG England were from a mixture of pastoral recommendations, associates, and friends. The criteria for inclusion were those who self-identify as being racialized as Black women, with membership or significant connections to NTCG. The semi-structured interview design incorporated 18 questions across five themes. I facilitated two groups of five and one group of four, over 90 minutes each in October 2021. The discussions aimed to establish Black Christian women's ideas on the notion of purpose, how these were gained including sources of influence, and to capture their response to the proposal of a Black British female perspective. The initial hypothesis set out in the introduction chapter states that Black Christian women who attend NTCG depend exclusively on popular books written by male authors for constructing ideas on the notion of purpose, which is limiting. The interview process, and the qualitative data it produced, aimed to test this.

As a requirement of the university, a rigorous ethics review was completed. The Information Sheet demonstrated good research practice, informing the reader of the voluntary nature of their participation, opportunities for opting out, and my commitment to anonymity. It also covered the process of recording, managing, and transcribing data. Consent from participants was received in writing, via email.

A potential risk I identified was the possibility of painful memories being triggered by women recalling experiences of racial trauma (Anderson and Cornelli, 2018; Sieber & Tolich, 2013). I took additional steps to ensure that the participants had the opportunity to debrief at the end of each group interview and they were provided with a list of helplines (Few, 2003, p.205). (See Thesis Appendix 6 and 7 – Research Publicity

Sheet and Letter to Participant). The findings of these interviews will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Defining Womanist Theology:

Theology is concerned with the study of God. Womanist theology is considered 'faith seeking understanding', relevant to and from the perspective of Black women (Williams, 2013, p.xv). Mitchem (2002, p. x) defines it as the 'systematic, faith-based exploration of the many facets of African American women's religiosity'. Williams (1989, p. xvii) describes "...a prophetic voice reminding African American denominational churches of their mission to seek justice and voice for all their people, of which Black women are the overwhelming majority. [...It] is concerned about the entire African American community, female and male, adults, and children...'. Both perspectives reveal a radical faith vision for the betterment of Black communities across the broad contexts of life, with a specific focus on women.

My Womanist Lens:

A review of the historical context of Womanist Theology gives some insight into the ways social issues within society inform developments within theology. It is established that the Womanist movement was spearheaded by African American female religious scholars during the 1980's (Mitchem, 2002; Williams, 2013). Prior to this, the social and political climate, characterized by segregation laws, perpetuated discrimination towards African Americans, based upon the myth of racial inferiority versus white superiority (Beckford, 2013). The activist W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) coined the term 'double consciousness' in the article entitled 'The Souls of Black Folk' to explain the internal conflict that arises from African American identities; from seeing themselves through their lens, as well as through the lens of their oppressors (See Thesis Appendix 8 - The Souls of Black Folk). These complexities in part led to African Americans' resistance to social and religious oppression and are relevant to Black British woman and men within the British context today.

The 1960's civil rights movement prompted the emergence of liberation paradigms such as Liberation theology, Feminist theology, and the Black Power movement (Adi, 2018). The influential theologian and Minister J H Cone is thought to have coined the term Black Liberation Theology (BLT), providing a radical hermeneutical lens relevant to the faith, hope, political, social, and spiritual liberation of African Americans (Beckford, 2007 in ed. Jagessar and Reddie; Mitchem, 2002). Although, transformative, BLT and Christian Feminism at the time were critiqued for failing to incorporate the voices of African American women (Coleman, 2007b; Mitchem, 2002). In the following section, I critically discuss one book each from five key Womanist scholars, namely: Alice Walker (1983), Katie Cannon (1988), Delores Williams (2013), Jacqueline Grant (1989), Renita Weems (1998), and Emily Townes (1993).

Alice Walker – *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983).

Walker (1983) is credited for first coining the term 'womanish'; an expression of self-definition, which derives from Black folk culture and implies girls' capacity to act or be grown (Walker, 1983, p. xi-xii).

In this text, I am curious about how the author's ideas support my theory of a distinct personal context to the notion of purpose, through self-discovery of personhood. A radical description of Black womanhood/personhood is made within the introductory chapter, inferring the qualities of a Black Feminist: '...outrageous, audacious, courageous...Responsible. In charge. Serious' (Walker, 1983, p. xi). From my personal experience, Black women in BMCs are rarely observed to openly declare an alignment with feminist ideology. A key thread across the text is women's right to blossom in self, creativity, innovation, and potential. Additionally, to use their agency to inform self-definition and pursue the things they love (Walker, 1983, xi). These themes are consistent with the idea of a personal context to purpose through self-

discovery of personhood. The second principle refers to women's capacity to love romantically both men and women, an idea most contentious to the Pentecostal BMC tradition in Britain. The third principle relates to these women's capacity to appreciate diversity, whilst recognizing their strengths and vulnerabilities. The fourth principle, I found particularly liberating, given my struggles with health issues, the author refers to Black women's capacity to love: to include life and struggles. Notwithstanding; 'Loves herself'. Regardless' (Walker, 1989, xii). Finally, by making a distinction between the two political paradigms, ("Womanist to feminist as purple to lavender"), the author here, seeks to justify the strengths of a Black female activist perspective for empowering Black women to resist systematic oppression and engage in the struggle for justice (Walker, 1989, xi).

Walker's 'womanish' concept is a term used within the custom of African American communities that describes an African American girl who shows signs of maturity. The author's attempts to re-construct the term to reflect the religious identity of African American women. Furthermore, align to a political ideology through a Black Feminist lens which has now been formally adopted to describe this liberation theology paradigm (Walker, 1983, p. xi; Coleman, 2007b in ed. Jagessar and Reddie). These themes are sufficient for WDMs to engage in critical dialogue about the discovery of women's personhood and identity.

Katie Cannon – *Black Womanist Ethics* (1988).

In Cannon's book, I explore how a Black Womanist ethic can shape Black women's moral compass. Cannon's initial challenge of dominant Christian ethics concerns the way social and economic inequalities, which impact African American communities, are ignored, resulting in an 'invisible dignity' (Cannon, 1988, p. 2). Cannon (1988, p.2)

explains: 'I discovered that the assumptions of the dominant ethical systems implied that the doing of Christian ethics in the Black community was either immoral or amoral. These cherished ethical ideas predicated upon the existence of freedom and a wide range of choices proved null and void in situations of oppression.'

Similarly, in the UK, disparities between Black and white women, in terms of access to aspirational, economic, and relational success, are wide scale (Akala, 2018; Showunmi and Tomlin, 2022). A Womanist ethic offers a corrective to dominant ethics, recognizing the additional disadvantage Black communities face due to inequalities within social structures.

Cannon's key principles include prioritizing African American women at the starting point of the discussion about ethics. Drawing on intellectual literature traditions that are committed to justice, such as activist Zora Neale Hurston, Martin Luther King, and Howard Thurman, reveals a contextual thread and commitment to being culturally inclusive. The principle also demonstrates a community interest, reflective of the African thought tradition, where ideas of self are intertwined within the community, as echoed within the African Proverb: "I am because we are" (Mitchem, 2002, p. 35; Mbiti, 1970). It incorporates moral wisdom within ethics as a source of validating theology.

An example of this approach is a statement by one participant from the research focus group. Reflecting on her mother's survival strategies against systemic racism and moral wisdom, she explained: "My parents instilled in me from I was young that as a Black woman I would have to work twice as hard to succeed...". Finally, the capacity to apply humanness, compassion, care, mercy, and advocacy alongside biblically informed faith toward the marginalized is paramount. Grant (1989, p. 221) describes

this as the enacting of mercy, justice, and theology praxis to the “very least...” in society (NRVS Matthew 25:40).

Cannon’s Womanist ethic offers a framework that is humanistic, culturally appropriate, and has the potential to transform the way the Black faith community engages with one another and its community.

Delores Williams – *Sisters in the Wilderness, The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk (2013).*

Delores Williams is a renowned trailblazer of the Womanist tradition (Mitchem, 2002). Williams’ book addresses nuanced ideas on God-talk, from which I draw key concepts and principles that are relevant to my theory of purpose being multi-dimensional.

The author draws a parallel between the experiences of African American women and the story of Hagar, the slave girl, owned and brutally exploited by Abraham and his wife Sarah (Genesis 16: 1-16 and Genesis 21:8-21 NRSV). Several relevant themes emerge from this book including an acknowledgement of Black women’s historical struggle and suffering. Williams, however, seeks to reframe this narrative and constructs the following theme for the Womanist tradition: ‘*survival/quality-of-life struggle and the community’s belief in God’s presence in the struggle*’ (Williams, 2013, p.5). Thus, reflecting their qualities, faith, and aspirations and revealing the transformative insights gained from a female perspective. Similarly, Mitchem (2002, p. 109) challenges the doctrine of suffering, given the Black experience, making explicitly the point that ‘suffering in itself is not salvific. It is redemptive only in that it may lead to critical rethinking of meaning or purpose, as might any life crises.’

A further theme transpires when Hagar experiences a divine-human encounter with Yahweh during her desperate wilderness moment leading to her conviction and

revelation: “You are El Roi” to mean ‘the God who sees me’ (Genesis 16:13; Williams, 2013, p. 22). As an African unmarried slave girl, pregnant with a child, this was a profound moment in that it countered invisibility and promoted the value and legacy of African identity and heritage alongside Hebrew identity. These principles are in keeping with the anthropological model of contextual theology ideas concerned with the ‘preservation of cultural identity’ (Bevan, 2002, p.54) in the bible (Sweeney, 2000). These ideas strengthened my sense of self, cultural identity, and esteem, and reinforced the Black community’s testimonial of ‘God making a way out of no way’.

Williams’ (2013, p. 132) posture for reading the bible is characterized by three key steps of inquiry: subjective, communal, and objective; referred to as a ‘Womanist hermeneutic of identification-ascertainment’. This involves, firstly, re-reading the bible for a text that can be personally identified with. Secondly, reading the bible for text which the community gains identification and association with, drawing on sermons, songs, and testimonials. Finally, the objective mode encourages reading biblical text for identification with those with which biblical authors connect, alongside those that are ignored. From my own experience of attending bible studies in the church for over 26 years, I recall participants were not encouraged to read “sacred” biblical texts critically. Beckford (2013, P.49) challenges the Pentecostal, Black-led churches for their ‘theological solipsism’.

The terms ‘coerced surrogacy’ and ‘social surrogacy’ explain the complexities of African American women’s bodies and lives through exploitation within maternity and labour roles (Williams, 2013, p. 54). I argue that Black women’s “survival” of historical exploitation, mistreatment, and brutality has contributed to the misleading myth of Black women being ‘superhuman’. Walker-Barnes (2017, p. 44) refers to this as the ‘StrongBlackWoman’ myth. It is not surprising that the author encourages Black

women to reclaim self-love, affirm their African identity and cultural heritage, and engage in acts of social justice.

In the closing chapter, a staunch reminder of the church's mission includes offering upliftment, a moral voice, and leaning on strategies to combat injustices. Williams (2013, pp. 181-182) prophetically declares: 'The black church is invisible, but we know it when we see oppressed people rising up in freedom. It is the community essence, ideal and real as God works through it on behalf of the survival, liberation, and positive, productive quality of life of suffering people'. Several scholars concur with this point by revealing community cohesion to be consistent with African philosophy, customs, and tradition (Hill, 1972, 1999a; Mitchem, 2002).

Williams' book is grounded in Womanist hermeneutics, depicting the importance of contextual theology approaches for incorporating the Black experience through a Black female lens for gaining insights on women with African heritage, and for revealing the ongoing struggle for justice. This supports my theory that purpose is multi-dimensional.

Jacqueline Grant - *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (1989).

As I reflect on my journey in the church, I recall pivotal moments of injustice where I took a stand which I now understand coincides with Feminist principles. This experience fuels my curiosity about how this book informs Black Christian women's sense of spiritual identity.

Grant (1989, p. 13) defines feminism as '...a theology of liberation, [...] concerned about exposing universalism and reinterpreting the experiences of women...'. Christology, in contrast, considers the person, role, and nature of Jesus Christ and

how this informs the forging of a religious identity. Grant's review of Feminist Christology reveals three key concepts. The Biblical Feminist model, which adheres to the bible, is read critically. Drawing on Mollenkott's (1979, p. 56) analysis of God's image reveals how re-imagining God with feminine and masculine sensitivities can be liberating for women. She states, 'if both male and female are made in God's image, then in some mysterious way the nature of God encompasses all the traits which society labels feminine as well as the traits society labels masculine'. Grant (1989, p.96) therefore cites the idea of a Biblical Feminist model, promoting 'a relationship of mutuality and partnership' with the divine, self, and others (Mollenkott, 1979). Storkey (2013, p.72) in her chapter entitled 'Women in Leadership' agrees with the idea of mutuality. Whilst acknowledging 'glaring stereotypes' held within society that reinforce gender role assumptions, she argues for greater hermeneutical maps which would increase our understanding of gendered relationships. The Liberationist Feminist model, in contrast, resists all inequalities within society that impact women. Furthermore, it advocates for their liberation across all aspects of society through strategies of justice. The Rejectionist Feminist model rejects both the Biblical and Liberationist Feminist models on the premise they fail to call out male-centered patriarchal influence.

Grant's Womanist ideology, like Cannon's (1988), considers Black women's historical and contextual struggles as a relevant starting point for theological dialogue. In this respect, Grant suggests Black women's realities, including their suffering, align with the personhood and humanity of Jesus, and therefore are more conducive to the idea of being 'co-sufferers' (Grant, 1989, p. 212). In contrast, Grant views that white women are perceived to have greater privilege from their social identity and lived realities (Mitchem, 2002). This assumption leads to Grant's theory of white women's alignment

to Christ; the divine or 'God-bearer', as being less contentious in Feminist thought. Grant's theory suggests a need for there to be a distinction between the dual roles of Jesus Christ: His humanity and Divinity.

Grant's ideas are provocative in the Womanist tradition, given their attempt to re-imagine Christology in a way that counters the concept of Black women's dependency on a male Saviour. However, I argue in 21st-century Britain, Black women from diverse positions of class are less likely to subscribe to the concept of being 'co-sufferers' with Jesus (Grant, 1989, p. 212). While suffering is real for many Black women, reflecting their vulnerabilities, so are their amazing resilience, resourcefulness, strengths, and victories. A reflection of 'this same Jesus' (NRSV Acts 1: 11) who after being crucified, arose.

Grant's critique of Black Feminist Theory and Christology is provocative, controversial, and insightful. It has challenged my philosophical stance on feminist ideology, affirming the liberation held to maintain an identity in the dual personhood and divinity of Jesus Christ.

Renita Weems - Just a Sister Away: Understanding the Timeless Connection Between Women of Today and Women in the Bible (1988)

Weems' book discusses stories of nine women from the Bible. It reflects on the social-economic realities and draws on the African American storytelling tradition. I am interested in how a radical hermeneutical interpretation of bible stories can reveal narratives about women that are filtered through a male-dominated lens.

The story and biblical account of Miriam, the sister of Moses, reveal inspiring insights about personhood, spiritual gifting, relationships, and justice. By re-reading biblical text through an empathetic female lens, Miriam's multidimensional gifting, exceptional

leadership qualities, and seasoned prophetic utterances are illuminated (Exodus 1:22 – 2: 4-10, 15:20 – 21, Numbers 12:1-13). This is a departure from a male lens that at times focuses on women's shortcomings. The significance of the socio-economic climate, alongside the power of gender roles, identity, women's gifting, qualities, and sisterhood are among the themes that emerge from the text. Weems is careful to demonstrate Jesus's support of women, reinforcing the following verse: 'Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her' (Matthew 26:13, NRSV). In a similar vein, Grant, (1989, p 107) echoes this, suggesting Jesus's female inclusiveness equates to him being a 'feminist'.

Weems' book encourages a female hermeneutical lens for re-reading the bible, revealing women across a diverse range and personal gifting. The fascinating stories, re-read through a hermeneutical lens, highlight the power of women standing in solidarity, and in love for enacting sisterhood, care, and justice.

Emilie M. Townes - *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope* (1993)

Emily Townes (1993) draws on the different facets of Ida Wells-Barnett's life, providing insights and a model of justice. The Black Lives Matter campaigns in the summer of 2020, following the death of George Floyd, fuelled a new awakening about the realities of social inequalities globally, as well as amongst BMCs in the UK context.

A key discovery drawn from this book is how Townes reveals that it was Ida-Wells Barnett's encounter with injustices that fuelled her conviction to engage in resisting oppression and engaging in social justice activism. This thread of Black women using their suffering, personal encounters, and stories of inequality as a catalyst for driving change is noted among Womanist scholars. In this study, I suggest when the bible

explains that all things will work together for the good of those who love the Lord, that it has the most relevance in circumstances of inequality and justice (Romans 8:28 NRSV).

A further principle identified from the book is how Ida Wells-Barnett used her vocational competence as a journalist and author as a vehicle for spearheading civil rights activism during the 1890s, whilst campaigning against the lynching of African Americans (Alexander, 1996). Townes identifies six principles for social justice:

(1) **Obedience:** Here, the author identifies discerning God's will, for an area of injustice within society, as a priority. A clue to this is when a genuine sense of empathy is felt. Discernment and empathy, however, are to be followed with obedience for enacting clear strategies of activism.

(2) **Authoritative use of scriptures:** accepting and relying on scripture is deemed important. However, this needs to happen in dialogue with sciences, humanities, and Black women and men's lived experiences. The author advocates for both genders to share a mutual understanding of each other's needs and be united in community justice, as this reflects the communal vision of the Womanist tradition.

(3) **Pain and suffering:** the notion that women's suffering is a part of God's will be rejected, particularly given the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression in Black women's lives (Grant, 1989; Mitchem, 2002). Instead, Townes (1993, p.196) re-imagines the resurrection of Christ, as God, 'transitioning power of pain', as the liberating agent of change. I suggest that Paul's encouragement in the following biblical verse is relevant here: 'For all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord and are called according to his purposes' (Romans; 8:48).

(4) **Liberation and reconciliation:** this refers to the ambition for social liberation alongside spiritual liberation; attainable through affirming pride, dignity, and a sense of self-worth. Townes illustrates that any goal towards a transformative and just society can only be achieved through divine and human collaboration.

(5) **Pastoral voice:** essential pastoral characteristics are identified for establishing justice work in the community. Suggested is the capacity to balance the maintenance of a moral code with the ability to display genuine understanding and empathy for people's process and journey of transformation.

(6) **A prophetic voice:** five distinct components are identified: this includes the ability to discern God's will for the oppressed, identify injustice in society, advocate a rationale for social action, establish mutual respect for partnering with others/agencies, and, finally, create a community of faith through effective pastoral relationships.

Comparatively, Black, British theologian Robert Beckford co-produced alongside Tony Bean, the song 'Magnificat', Black Women of the Earth, as part of the Jamaican Bible Remix Project (Beckford and Bean, 2016). This creative and dynamic solo performance piece, enhanced through the genre of reggae and RnB, constitutes an ambitious remix of biblical text. The spoken word voiceover by Reverend Rose Hudson and backing lyricist Justice Ennis to Luke, Chapters 1 and 4, provides a contemporary, culturally sensitive account of the gospel. Key themes that emerge, through gospel reggae and RnB backing sounds, include the significance of women's voices and worth, God's presence and purposes within their lives, and the value of African heritage and identity. In addition, the significance of being empowered to influence politics and justice. Critically, however, Sturge (2022, p. 101) calls out BMC's

'deafening silence' and inaction in response to racial justice aside from prayer and intercession. A link is made to the eschatological hope in the return of Christ. As a way forward, Sturge (2022) encourages BMCs to consider (1). engaging in the work of the African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliance (ACEA), (2). embracing Racial Justice Sunday and Windrush Sunday going forward.

Townes' (1993) model of justice drawn from the life of Ida Wells-Barnett is thoroughly comprehensive and adaptable to any church setting. Beckford's 'Magnificat' model of justice, in contrast, reveals an inspiring, culturally appropriate, and contemporary model, drawing on spoken word and music relevant to the Black British context. Sturge's (2022) contribution, provides useful contextual insight and strategic forward thinking. All these examples support my theory of a socio-political context to purpose.

The critical review of the works of five Womanist scholars reveals a contextual reality characterized by the lived experience of race, class, and gender oppression, impacting Black women and communities. It demonstrates how resistance, alongside strategies to enhance faith, survival, and quality of life remains of imperative importance.

A Practical Application

Towards A Womanist Informed Wellness Model:

Caring for myself is not self-indulgent, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare (Lorde, 1984).

The above statement echoes the thread of Feminist and Womanist voices. They advocate for the continual struggle for Black women's quality of life to be prioritized as intrinsic to their survival, well-being, and progression. In this section, I will illustrate how the themes from Womanist thinkers offer scope for practical application in Women's Empowerment Forums across BMCs, and specifically NTCG WDM.

A Critique of the BREATHE Wellness Model:

Evans et al's (2017) Wellness model and acronym for encouraging Black women and girls to BREATHE. I will then discuss trauma as a barrier to purpose, exploring its impact and the extent to which trauma-informed pastoral and church care offers solutions for healing and well-being. References to BBCW and BMCs will be used as appropriate.

B Balance: considers how women prioritize their well-being amidst numerous responsibilities, which is relevant to Black women in the church who struggle as they engage in continuous works and acts of giving to others (Foster, 1992; Mitchem, 2002; Hutchinson, 2000; Vanzant, 1995). Evans *et al.* (2017, p4) encourage women to: 'Engage in the purposeful repositioning of one's commitments such that all priorities are addressed'.

The authors discuss evidence-based techniques, relevant to enhancing wellness and include positive affirmations, sleep, nutrition, exercise, and relaxation. It is noteworthy

that positive self-talk, a technique used in psychotherapy disciplines that focuses on verbally affirming one's strengths, proving to be a powerful technique for building self-worth and confidence. When positive words are identified, starting with the pronoun 'I AM' and spoken out loud, they have the power to be transformative. A fitting example is: 'I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made marvelous are thy works: and that my soul knoweth right well (Psalm, 139: 14). Similarly, the authors argue that a good routine and a nutritious diet are vital. This is hugely relevant as Africans and Caribbeans in the UK are more prone to hypertension, heart disease, and strokes (Saint Hill and Madukah, 2022). A good sleep routine, engaging in low-cost exercise such as walking, is thought to dramatically improve health and brain functioning, whilst reducing the risk of disease (Rucklidge, 2021). By creating opportunities for planned leisure breaks from the usual routine, it is thought to significantly reduce stress and promote relaxation, which is vital for rejuvenating the mind and body (Ebanks-Babb, 2022; Evans et al, 2017).

R= Reflection: The concept of reflection is used across several disciplines. In the context of mental well-being, Evans et al. (2017, p. 5) explain, 'Set aside time for contemplation and performing emotional and cognitive audits.' When applying the tool and technique of reflection for this purpose, arguably this can be effective for enhancing emotional literacy and mental health in conjunction with reflective prayer and meditation; the latter is greatly encouraged within BMCs.

When applying the tool of reflection during storytelling and autobiographical writing, can aid in determining which parts of the stories or narratives are helpful. Reflection during journaling is equally thought to aid the processing of subjective thoughts which is effective for creating psychological release. Interestingly, the mental health advocate R Ebanks-Babb (2022, September 13th), in an article published by BRAINZ

Magazine entitled 'How to Have a Great W.E.E.K' supports this theory, as she explains: 'journaling is great for self-exploration. It can help you gain clarity about what impacts your mental health, recognize when your mental health is declining, and seek solutions to address it.

Comparatively, Bevan's (2002, p.76) extensive writing on contextual theology applies the tool of reflection for measuring theology praxis, which is concerned with engaging in action first, followed by reflection (Bartlett and Burton, 2016). Arguably, the tool and technique of reflection, when used across several disciplines, interchangeably, has the potential to be effective in enhancing the balance between wellness and purpose-driven aspirations.

E=Energy: The idea of energy in this context is used as a metaphor for motivation towards goal setting. Evans et al. (2017, p.5) write, 'Reinvigorate goals and set upon a path towards achieving them'. The key principle here is the setting of smaller goals alongside larger goals, which cultivates a "winning" mindset and inspiration (Evans et al., 2017, p. 5). Women are also encouraged to be intentional in celebrating achievements, regardless of how small, as it is thought to create a sense of inner peace (Vanzant, 1995). Byrne's (2020) scientific studies explain how the brain responds to rewards. For example, when the brain is trained to focus and celebrate positive experiences, this creates a release of endorphins, which are important hormonal chemicals in the brain that cultivate the feel-good factor. This continual practice rewires the brain to recognize value and significance. Evans et al's (2017, p.7) BREATHE model have been developed through the contribution of over a dozen Black scholars who are proficient in understanding Black women's "unique position". As such, the research is considered cutting edge, sufficient for transforming Black women's and girls' lives and wellness.

A=Associations: I am a firm believer that establishing positive associations can be significant for both well-being and purpose-driven aspirations. Evans et al. (2017, p. 6) state: ‘Create and maintain social networks that promote, affirm, and encourage wellness’. The authors draw from empirical data, revealing the transformative potential of “sister circles”, sisterhood groups, therapeutic/social forums, and positive friendships for improving mental well-being (Evans et al., 2017; Weems, 1998). Of significance is the majority of the participants engaged in the focus group interviews who scaled pastoral care as poor and in contrast explained the most effective means of church support was amongst the sister circles (See Figure 4 below).

Barriers to Purpose

All participants indicated that traumatic experiences had adversely impacted their sense of purpose. Whilst there was diverse feedback on the methods used to support in overcoming trauma, Pastoral support was considered poor. There was the suggestion that the BMC leadership was ill-equipped in this area, with Figure 4 reflecting the most common rating score of support from the BMC as 3 out of 10. Interestingly, peer-to-peer support was acknowledged as the most significant way in which Black Women receive support, confirming the interpersonal and relational context of purpose.



Arguably, these women may need to consider how they might widen their networks beyond the church context, striking the balance between male and female associations.

T=Transparency: Evans et al. (2017, p. 6) encourage people to ‘actively avoid remaining silent about painful experiences.’ Being open and truthful about vulnerabilities, I concur, is vital for needs being met. However, it is also acknowledged that within Black communities, there is mistrust, caution, stigma, and shame attached to sharing sensitive matters which can be a barrier to well-being. Of significance are recent reports that highlight an increase in Black African and African Caribbean

women becoming overwhelmed, frustrated, or developing mental health disorders (Bignall et al, 2019; Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Burrowes, 2019; DeGruy, 2005; Major et al., 2020; (Mirza, 1992; Showunmi and Tomlin, 2022).

A review of Roberts' (2005) discussion on transparency, reveals the significance of engaging openly in dialogue as a key method within the therapeutic process for increasing positive outcomes. I conclude from this that Black women should use their agency and be self-accountable for seeking resolutions to personal challenges. Additionally, BMCs would need to review the culture of encouraging reliance on prayer as the only source for achieving solutions to challenges and may consider connecting with Christian Counsellors as a strategy for improving access to well-being going forward.

H=Healing: Within the Pentecostal BMC tradition, healing is considered one of the gifts of the spirit (1 Corinthians 12). My personal experience, however, suggests that spiritual or physical healing is prioritized over emotional healing in the church. Evans et al. (2017, p. 6) encourage Black women to 'Look for ways to nurture wellness in self and others', referring to this as a continual process that involves self-care. Beauchamp & Childress (2001) define self-care as providing adequate attention to one's own physical and psychological wellness. From the work of Evans et al. (2017) I have identified two key ideas to support healing processes for Black women and communities, as follows:

(1). Black women and self-care: Afejuku et al (2017, p.246) reveal these women's pattern of continuous expression of love to others, however, they conclude that 'Self-love is assumed'. This suggests that being intentional about working to improve self-

love, self-esteem, and self-worth is a vital part of ongoing healing, and links to a personal context to purpose.

(2) Love lessons for mothers and daughters: Afejuku *et al* (2017, in ed. Evans *et al*) drew on the findings from extensive clinical studies during the observation of parenting, attachment styles, and interactions between Black girls and their mothers. The findings are summarised in what is referred to as Clinical Pearls. These are abbreviated as CPs in the following summary:

CP 1: Avoid the authoritarian approach in parenting. Instead, model self-love through cultivating sensitivity, nurturing, and meaningful connections which empower girls in the development of personality, identity, and self-esteem.

CP 2: Promote an environment conducive to open emotional expression, model effective communication, and support the development of emotional literacy, regulation, management, and validation. On a nurturing level, displays of affection through verbal expressions of love and physical touch are thought to foster security, improved relationships, and mental wellness.

CP 3: Designate quality time and daily attention, limiting distractions to enable the child(ren) to feel heard. Work on building self-worth and significance through skill development. These strategies are thought to fulfill a sense of love, worthiness, and solution-focused responses to problems and purpose.

Afejuku's *et al.* (2017) theories on self-care and Clinical Pearls have the potential to be empowering for Black families. Additionally, they reveal a significant context for fulfilling relational purpose, alongside healing. Boyd-Franklin (2013), in her extensive therapeutic work with Black families, urges family work practitioners to be mindful in

acknowledging the numerous qualities and strengths amidst adversity. (See Thesis Appendices 9 – Love Lessons summarised).

E=Empowerment: The idea of women’s liberation and empowerment is the ultimate goal; this coincides with NTCG WDMs. Evans et al. (2017, p. 7) write: ‘Enlist one’s agency by accessing internal power sources and taking ownership of one’s wellness’. Here, the authors advocate for empowering women to use their agency to self-reflect toward achieving their goals. This is thought to promote sustained inner peace and wellness. Evans et al’s (2017) ideas on empowerment bear relevance to Collins’ (2009, p.308) view of the need for a ‘holistic epistemology’. This refers to new ways of knowing through self-definition to counter powerlessness, and for determining one’s pathway.

In summary, Evans et al’s (2017) BREATHE acronym offers an insightful strength-based comprehensive model for enhancing Black women’s well-being. Although the research and authors are American, it offers an excellent, culturally appropriate toolkit for aiding Black women globally on their journey of well-being, empowerment, and purpose.

Understanding Trauma:

In this final section of the chapter, I address racial trauma as one example of what I regard as a barrier to purpose for the African diaspora in Britain.

Van Der Kolk (2014, p.1) describes trauma as the brain’s emotional response to a distressing experience or event that manifests in the body. Recent studies reveal a correlation between historical everyday racism, sophisticated forms of racism, and

racial trauma impacting Black communities (Boyd Franklin, 2013; Burrowes, 2019; DeGruy, 2005; Major et al, eds., 2020; Showunmi and Tomlin, 2022; Beckford, 2013).

For example, DeGruy's (2005) ground-breaking study, entitled: 'Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) reveals a link between historical and intergenerational trauma and Black parents' adopting of authoritarian parenting styles. Contrastingly, Professor Robert Beckford in his provocative paper entitled 'Bewitchment' (2013) which refers to a mindset that has been adopted by individuals within the Pentecostal, Black-led church tradition, illustrates a link between the legacy of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trading post-colonialism structural inequalities and Pentecostal BMCs ecclesiology. Beckford (2013, pp. 36-37) suggests the projection of mystical violence towards Africans who were enslaved by Western missionaries has resulted in what is described as a 'zombie' type state. The evidence of this, in part, is the Black church's lack of engagement with politics, justice, liberation theology, and politics (Beckford, 2013).

Showunmi and Tomlin (2022) offer new ideas in their writing entitled: 'Understanding and Managing Sophisticated and Everyday Racism: Implications for Education and Work'. The term 'sophisticated racism' is understood as referring to structures designed to promote racism whilst on the pretense of advocating anti-racism. Major (2020, p.3-4), in contrast, addresses overt and covert types of discrimination and explains: 'micro-aggressions over an extended period can lead to traumatization and symptoms resembling post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)...'. Examples include micro-aggressions, implicit bias, everyday racism, and being ostracised, with huge impact, leading to powerlessness, imposter syndrome, and anxiety. These micro-aggressions can be detrimental to the psyche if internalized and exposed to over a period.

Trauma-informed church and pastoral care:

Since the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK, emerging discussions on trauma-informed church and pastoral care have transpired in my networks (Huyser-Honig, 2019; Lartey's EY, 1997; Mitchem, 2002; Stolorow, 2007). Megan Cornwell's article published in *Premier Christianity* on the 2nd of November 2022, entitled: 'This trauma-informed church' reveals a ground-breaking model that caught my attention. Cornwell's report reflects Pastor Betsy de Thierry's innovative work at the Freedom Centre, UK. Using her psychotherapy training, she has established trauma education, and pastoral training initiatives, and has developed several trauma-informed healing groups for their parishioners. Whilst the programs are still being developed, the testimonials from service users, church members, and the community are revealing positive outcomes. Significantly, and relevant to BMCs Lartey's (1997) five-part model, advocates for pastoral care to be active as caregivers facilitating healing through therapy.

Summary:

This chapter aimed to outline the methodological and analytical framework for my study. In part one, the chapter set out to determine how Womanist and Psychoeducation paradigms offer a critical methodology and interpretive framework for the notion of purpose relevant to Black Christian women in Britain. An introduction to Womanist theology revealed its contextual nature as a valid source for shaping theological expression. A psychoeducation paradigm was explained, through Evans et al's (2017) BREATHE wellness model. Additionally, I set the scene for the discussion chapter by introducing the idea of an interdisciplinary approach with the

proposal for a multi-dimensional model that considers the personal, spiritual, relational, and socio-political contexts to purpose.

In part two, three problems were identified, and the rationale for the methodology chapter - namely, the absence of a contextual lens relevant to celebrating African cultural heritage, a Black female lens for countering patriarchal forces, and an interdisciplinary lens relevant to incorporating psychoeducation and wellness.

In part three, it was established that the chosen research methodology, through a qualitative approach via focus group interviews, provided a safe way of facilitating research during the COVID-19 pandemic. A key strength of the process was the 'informant-researcher relationship', established between the participants and me (Few, 2003, p.205). The person-centered collaborative approach empowered the women to recognize the centrality and value of their voice in shaping scholarly research relevant to the Black British faith communities.

The extensive methodology and ethics process ensured that risks were identified, and controls put in place according to university procedures. A key limitation of the research methodology was in the design of the questions. Upon reflection, I would have incorporated questions that relate directly to the four areas of the multi-dimensional model. This would have enhanced the translation of the data process. The process has concluded for me that further research in this area would be advantageous for incorporating a broader cohort of women's voices across a revised set of themes and questions.

In part four, the diversity of voices of Womanist theologians reveals their commitment to incorporating the voice of African American women, as well as offering a prophetic vision for the betterment of the entire church and community - male, female, and

children. The historical overview further evidenced the significance of contextual theology concerned with the 'culture, history, contemporary thought forms...' for shaping theology (Bevan, 2002, p. 4).

The review of one book each from five key Womanist scholars revealed key themes and principles that are relevant to my study.

Alice Walker's ground-breaking book provided a four-part definition of womanhood/personhood, alongside coining the term 'womanish' (Walker, 1983. P. xii) Themes such as women's right to blossom, enact agency to determine pathway, love as she chooses, and engage politically in acts of justice supported my theory of a personal context to the notion of purpose through self-discovery.

Delores Williams' (2013) book provided an exemplary comparison between Hagar, the African Egyptian slave girl, and African American women. The significance of Black women's faith in God and struggle for survival in the wilderness was relatable. The Womanist 'hermeneutic of identification-ascertainment' lens provided an enlightening way of re-reading the bible. Themes of resistance, the value of African cultural heritage, and women reclaiming self-love and justice evidenced a multi-dimensional context to purpose.

Katie Cannon's (1988) book established thought-provoking ideas relevant to Christian living. It demonstrated the benefits and limitations of a Womanist ethical and moral stance. In my critical reflection on the Pentecostalism BMC tradition and commitment to a rigid brand of holiness, the barriers to such ideas being incorporated by the church are apparent. How a Womanist ethic could be transformative on a personal and WDM level for informing relational and theology praxis to the 'least' was enlightening (Grant, 1989, p.221).

Weems' (1998) work demonstrates how a radical hermeneutical approach to re-reading biblical texts can be an empowering tool for navigating the multi-dimensional aspects of women's lives, alongside the importance of cultivating solidarity in sisterhood relationships which act as a context for the notion of relational purpose.

Townes' (1993) example of a justice model, reflecting on the life of activist Wells-Barnett, provided a phenomenal framework for doing justice through a culturally appropriate gender-inclusive model, which was enlightening. Contrastingly, Professor Beckford's media representations via 'Magnificat' of a justice model relevant to Black women and community were dynamic engaging, and relevant to the British context.

In part five, my discussion of Evans et al. (2017, p. 4-7) BREATHE Wellness model revealed several strengths as a culturally sensitive strength-based framework for enhancing Black women's well-being. The importance of the acronyms: balance, reflection, energy, associations, transparency, healing, and empowerment are fitting memorable, and relevant, given the ongoing struggles faced by those marginalized within Black communities, and demonstrating sufficiently the importance of balancing 'strengths and vulnerabilities' (Evans, et al. 2017).

The discussion on racial trauma, through micro-aggressions and its impact on the psyche over extended periods, reveals what I argue to be an example of significant barriers to purpose experienced by the African diaspora. Furthermore, it compounds the concern raised by Professor Robert Beckford about the need for BMCs to engage in dialogue about their role in moving things forward. The limited discussions, therefore, clearly evidence the importance of psychoeducation and Black women using their agency to engage in continuous self-care whilst awaiting BMCs to get their act together through strategies of justice and change. Williams (2013, p. 151)

articulates this as a process of 'revaluing value' as it relates to the care of mind, body, and soul. Similarly, the limited discussion on trauma-informed church and pastoral care offers BMCs thought-provoking ideas for developing services that promote wellness as reflected in biblical verse: 'Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul' (3 John 2).

Finally, Womanist thinkers have contributed hugely to transforming ideas of faith, well-being, and justice relevant to the African American communities. In the UK, although the historical, social cultural challenges and strengths differ for Black British women and community, the evils of intersecting race, class, and gender remain the same. The case for adopting a Womanist philosophical ideology as an empowerment tool for Black women in the church is strong. Given the relational complexities identified within the Black church, however, I remain hesitant about how the endorsing of the Womanist tradition within BMCs in the UK will be perceived as a friend or foe.

Black British Christian Women Re-imagining Purpose

Research Findings and Analysis Chapter

In this chapter, I introduce and discuss the findings from the Focus Group Interviews, reflecting the voices and perspectives of Black British Christian women, (BBCW) associated with the New Testament Church of God (NTCG). The research aim will be revisited: *'To illustrate how Black British Christian women, engage with popular narratives about Christian purpose, and the relevance to their lived experiences'*. I will interpret this primary data through A Womanist theology, focusing on the themes within the interview question design. I discuss how (BBCW) perceive the idea of purpose, relevant to their faith, lived realities, well-being, and calling. The research question, this chapter responds to is: *'How can a Womanist lens be applied as an interpretive framework for the notion of purpose relevant to Black British women in NTCG?'*

Structure:

In part one, the findings from the research data, gained from the Focused Group Interviews are discussed across five key themes. Part two will introduce the Multi-dimensional Model.

Outcome of Research Question

Having reviewed the findings from the Focus Group Interviews with 14 women, across NTCG, England, I established that all participants engaged in reading at least one book by popular authors Myles Munroe, Rick Warren, and TD Jakes as a means to develop their understanding of purpose, as a primary source (See Figure 7 below).

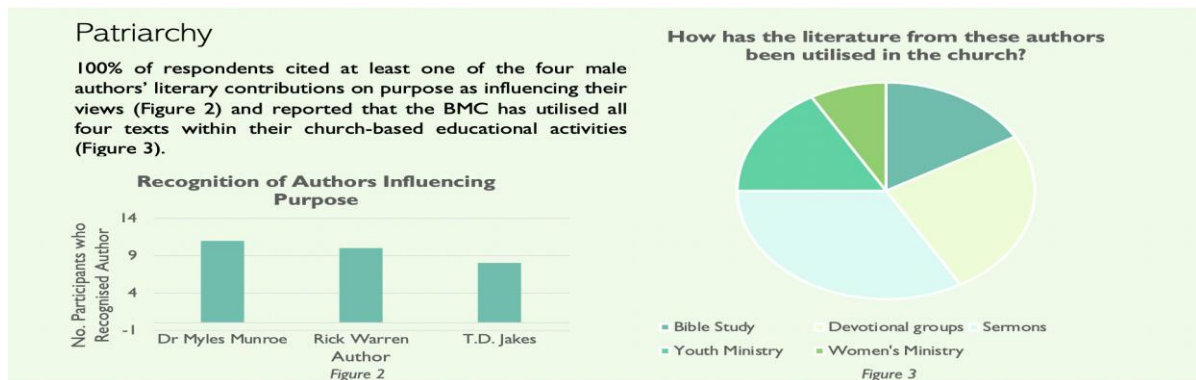


Figure 7 - Patriarchy.

Whilst the findings demonstrate that Myles Munroe, Rick Warren, and TD Jakes were the main sources, references to bible apps and engaging with sources such as Howard Mills, Wayne Dyer, TB Joshua, and Joyce Meyer were also established. Encouraging the women to expand on this, I questioned: *Where have you gained your ideas on purpose from?* A range of responses suggest a combination of knowing themselves, engaging in personal and parental discussions, and through the church context. In the following section, an expansion of their views is captured:

“Through wondering in the wilderness of life and church”.

“Always indicated being special and church unveiled this more”.

“Ideas gained from upbringing and church and then you have to try and figure it out”.

These findings reveal that in the absence of specific contextual literature on purpose from a Black British Christian’s perspective, these women have drawn from a range of sources to quench their quest for making sense of their own lives and purposes. The most dominant source, however, alongside the bible and the church, is evidently through the literature of popular male authors. These discoveries provide insight into the ways oppressive patriarchal influences, characterized by the demonizing, devaluing, and stereotyping of women, become internalized through the psyche. It seems apparent therefore that BBCW will need to adapt what is referred to as a ‘suspicion approach’

when reading sources of enrichment, to include the bible, when navigating their pathways (Sweeney, 2000, p. 117). A Womanist theoretical framework empowers women with insight and tools to resist oppressive obstacles which are detrimental to purpose and well-being, whilst navigating liberating possibilities.

Research Findings

The overall findings from the Focused Group Interviews were rich and nuanced. It captures the heart, voice, and perspectives across the following themes: (1) ideas on purpose, (2) gender influences (3) barriers to purpose (4) BMCs and future perspectives (5) views on the proposed multi-dimensional model.

Ideas on the Notion of Purpose:

The first series of questions set out to establish the source and content of ideas on the notion of purpose. *Q. Explain your ideas and understanding of purpose.* The responses are illustrated in a word cloud in Figure 8 below.



Figure 8 – Purpose diagram.

As reflected in Figure 8, several biblical passages were cited, as relevant to understanding Christian purpose. Those most popular included, Jeremiah 29: 1, 29: 11, referring to God’s knowledge, plan, and Divine calling, towards persons pre-and- post birth. Matthew 5: 13 and 16, referred to being light on the earth, whilst Psalm 139:14 suggest the human design to be significant. 3 John 1:2 was thought to be significant, drawing connections between prosperity and wellness. The question was thought-provoking contributing to additional views, captured below:

“Purpose is an intention, an aim, a plan, a design, or a reason for which something is done. ‘I wish that you prosper and be in good health...’ (3 John 1:2). It is about what God has intended in our lives which includes heir and inheritance...to let my light shine in work, home or wherever I go...being the salt in the world and being something positive” (Matthew 5: 13 and 16)”. Focus Group 1, participant 1, 2021, personal communication, 14TH October 2021)

Other interesting discoveries were the ways their Christian purposes were deemed connected to their identities; considering both their innate personalities as well as their constructed identities; race, class, and gender. The extracts below reflect their perspectives on this:

“We are all born with something, God has put something in us, the pearl in the center. It is about becoming fulfilled in the things that make you happy.

“My identity is my I AM and then comes my purpose”.

“I have a small frame and in my unique design, it informs my purpose...”

“...it is my why...the reason why you do things is your purpose. It is something that is big and is your drive toward the end goal (Heaven).

“Purpose is more than a calling and gifting. It is about finding purpose in purpose, understanding what you are good at, and using it to affect your environment...Purpose is also interchangeable, adaptable, and seasonal...”

It has to be relevant outside of the church context because it is about BEING which is transferable”. (Focus Group 1, participant 1, 2021, personal communication, 14TH October 2021)

The Mug as a Metaphor:

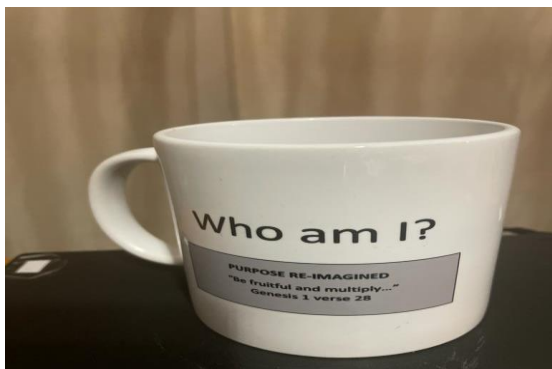


Figure 9 – Who Am I? Mug - Personal design. No source is required.

As one of the women reflected deeply on the question, she was prompted to share her personal lived story. Raised in the church from childhood, purpose was associated with self-sacrifice and serving in church ministry across a range of platforms before moving to pastures new with her husband and family. The stories shared revealed themes pertaining to identity, belonging, significance and loss: her sense of identity, belonging, and significance as she struggled to make sense of purpose outside of this intensive context. Using the concept of a mug for her analogy, expressing:

“I am trying to figure out who I am?”

“Can the mug bear any significance when it is not in the doing mode?” “When is being “just” a mug, ok?” Her conclusion was “...Purpose is discovering what / who I am”.

Further reflections were added, with shared empathy made by the other women in the group, which enabled her to have the confidence to express further:

“I spent all of my childhood in ministry...doing...I was so defined by the things I do; the things I am good at that I have recently had to step off the treadmill and be OK with just being... and seeing that I am not just made for what I do... sometimes ideas of purpose in the church have been used to control and label people, so they stay in their box...” The participant concludes retrospectively: “Who am I now?”.

Being an observer of these powerful reflections was deeply moving, empowering women to re-evaluate their meaning. Hutchinson (2000, p. 8) shares a similar reflection on Black women’s continuous acts of doing within the church, often with delayed gratification and at times to the detriment of their well-being, before concluding ‘*I am sufficed sufficiently*’. Further questions about the correlation between purpose and identity and specifically how race, class, and gender impact the fulfilment of purpose, provided important discoveries illustrated as follows:

“Identity is about how I perceive myself and how God sees me so linked to my purpose”.

“It [racism and sexism] can have a dramatic effect on people’s lives...people are stereotyped in lots of ways and the church can also make you feel like an outcast as if you don’t belong due to status. My experience has impacted me and my aim in life is to reach out to those who are suffering and cannot use their voice. My barriers have informed my purpose”.

“As a teacher, I am mindful that minority groups are excluded so I work to empower students to overcome these barriers”.

“It has fuelled my passion to empower young women about how to excel”.

These profound perspectives from the Focus Group Participants, reveal very specifically that Black women perceive their identities; to include every aspect of their

unique design and personality to be an intentional part of God’s purpose for humanity. Furthermore, one’s constructed identities include race, gender, and class to be of equal value and significance to God. Through the sharing of harrowing stories, the interplay of race, class, and gender oppressions, encountered during childhood and adult life, reveal the lasting impact. Most profound of all, was the revelation that oppression experienced can be traumatic and seriously inhibiting and, the vehicle that inspires purpose-driven activities, that make a difference.

Gender Perspectives – Male and Female Lens:

In this section, I seek to identify how the participants perceive gender roles and relationships, within the church and community to be relevant to the notion of purpose.

A snapshot of the contrasting views is highlighted as follows:

“I have had to fight as a single woman and mother...I had to push...I had to not be afraid to use my voice...I observed a stigma around being unmarried and witnessed being blocked, particularly in Pastors Council”.

“I vote for a woman’s lens always...I continue to challenge the notion that women should be silent in the church...”

“Women ministers are prewarned “is a man’s domain...the gender balance is unequal...female pastors are not widely welcomed and are barred from Bishop status which is unfair. NEC representatives are all male...”

In contrast, the findings reveal, that not all women uphold traditional ideas about men's and women's roles both within the church and society as is evident by the following extracts:

“Why do we have to genderise purpose?”

“...I don’t believe a woman should be a pastor or a leader...it can undermine the man...in the church, it is up to God (God led) in the home men must lead for harmony and women lead with the children...It is the man that heads up as there is an order...this doesn’t make women any lesser as we have a voice...”

The diverse values and experiences about gendered relationships tell and reveal the importance of Black British Christian women using their values, principles, and agency in response to oppression and for determining their choices and pathways.

Barriers to Purpose:

Another sensitive period emerged during the Focus Group Interviews and discussions when discussing the lived experience of traumatic racism and the ways these were perceived as barriers to establishing purpose. The following quotes provide insight into experiences in the church:

“It has been traumatic...I had been blocked from moving forward...”

In contrast, one lady, who has a richer melanin, reflected on her experience of racism alongside her aspiration as a young woman to pursue her passion for catering in London. Having attended the interview setting, describes being overlooked amongst her competitors and subsequently over-hearing the interview state:

“...because you are so dark, I walked past you...”.

Another reflected on her childhood encounters, attending a majority white school. She explains:

“...I was spat at...called names...one school friend said, “*If you use carbolic soap, you can become white like me...*”

Given the Black experience and interplay of race, class, and gender inequalities within the UK society and churches, I was curious about the Focus Group Participants' views about the role of NTCG in providing trauma-informed church and pastoral care. When asked to scale its effectiveness the following feedback is revealing:

“ [nationally] when therapeutically trained locally and where people feel comfortable to share personal trauma the response is good...as the right people have been identified...”

“...there have been some really good experiences and some extremely poor ones...I don't think the church leadership places the right people in the right places...”

The sister-to-sister space provided these women with the safe space to reflect on painful and traumatic memories encountered in their personal lives, through race, class, and gender discrimination both within the church and society.

Black Majority Church:

Another important discovery was the views held amongst the Focused Group Interview participants of the perceived role of BMCs in Britain for countering the interplay of race, class, and gender inequalities, oppressions, micro-aggressions, and unconscious bias internalized. The views are revealed as follows:

“What is covered should be uncovered. We should all be more aware”.

“Promote more black literature [for personal reading] and more literature targeted towards families”.

“You cannot effect change if you are not in a position to do so...Let us move away from the tokenism i.e., let us all dress up in cultural attire...Black history is important but Black Future is even more important. ...Womanist from African America are stuck in the past, but we have to move forward...so they cling to past events...we also need to teach value, heritage, skills... how to be Black and engage effectively in society...how to excel...how to aspire...focus on progression to include Black Business Forums...”

The chart below illustrates that although ‘Black History as a continuum’ scored highest as a source of enrichment, this may be so, due to the limited knowledge about Black Theology education and Womanist Theology education. Having said this, all 14 participants welcomed a Black hermeneutical lens for re-reading the bible to enhance African cultural identity and heritage as an important strategy for affirming a positive sense of Black identity. These later perspectives reflected the views of the younger group of women who by observation, presented as under 40. Their views and ideas were grounded in their understanding of the Pentecostal NTCG tradition, yet with

insights on society that made their contribution contemporary for 21st-century Britain and relevant for the next generation. See Figure 5 below.

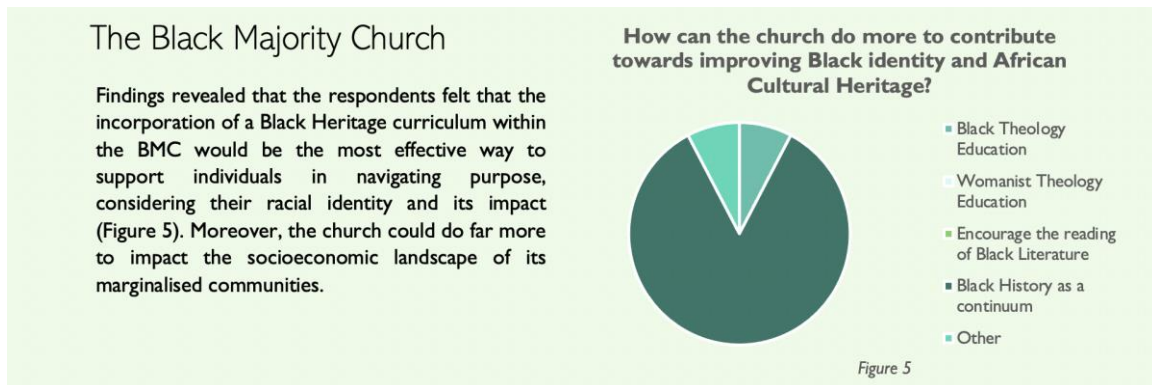


Figure 10 - BMCs

Further questions about relationality and purpose were asked. For example: *How effective is the church leadership in addressing Christian Women and Singleness?* A snapshot from the respondents is telling:

“More required on the increasing joint learning on relationships...”

“Education about womanhood and life planning needed.

SAM (Single Adult Ministry) agenda is improving about education process...”

“SAM is not taken seriously by leadership”.

Perspectives on married relationships were incorporated into the discussion:

“...I am wondering why there are no questions about the effectiveness of the church in supporting married women when there is such a high divorce rate...it is highly problematic that at the age of 22, I got married and have received no guidance...”

The final question about how BMCs can improve their mission as relevant to the Black experience, I asked: *Do you consider your church to have a clear mission for practical acts of social justice?* There was a consensus that the church is instrumental in initiating food banks, soup kitchens, prison ministry, homelessness projects, national women’s refuge, some political initiatives, addressing poverty, support to single

parents, education initiatives, and small community initiatives. However, additional thoughts were extracted as follows:

“We are living in a bubble...we are too busy entertaining each other on the stage...we use the pulpit as a theatre...”

“We are a BMC whose leadership is not focused on the community”.
“The church needs to warn people of divine justice...”

“Martin Luther King contributed to why I am at liberty today...we need to build on that platform”.

“...Social justice theology and program has been established which was inspired by the death of George Floyd and has been amazing...political involvement – you can’t affect change if you are not in a position to do so...”

The diverse responses seem to give voice to observations made by Womanist scholars. For example, Mitcham (2002) and Foster (1992) observe that Black women are much more orientated toward positing themselves in the heart of the community. Men, however, see themselves as upholding the structures of the church. This may be one explanation for why there is a disparity between there being so many women in the church following a male model and vision. It may also explain why there is a relational crisis within BMCs with a disproportionate number of Black women experiencing unwanted singleness, due to the lack of Black men with shared faith and the church’s discouragement of this.

A Multi-Dimensional Lens:

The ‘Multi-dimensional Model’ was put forward to the participants of the Focus Group Interviews, as a proposed alternative framework to empower BBCW to navigate the notion of purpose. The following responses are captured:

“Never heard of it...however it is impressive it captivates the whole woman”.

“Your purpose cannot just be within the church...your purpose is throughout life...so it’s based upon the example that we see in Jesus but is relevant to your context”. The discovery of purpose requires constant introspection...”

“...Have heard... this is African American faith theology, so is contextual and deals with BLM agenda...on the surface there are a lot of important values, principles, and intent it is helpful however has some questionable content...particularly about the binary agenda...”

The openness to a Black female lens on the notion of purpose was evident and it was clear there was a sense of hopeful anticipation alongside some reservations. In the final of the three Focused Group Interviews, three of the women who by observation presented as younger than the majority (under 40) continued their reflection on the proposed ‘multi-dimensional model’. Drawing reference to the mug analogy mentioned above, they seemed to be developing new insights and revelations, which I have sought to capture:

“The model is empowering. It has made me reflect on the earlier metaphor of purpose as a mug and the priority must be to keep the mug clean...then I ask: is it fit for purpose? If I never take the mug out and use it, it’s still a mug. Even if the mug smashes it can still be repaired...I think it’s important to let the I AM stand and allow purpose to flow from it...Then we need to constantly have check-ins with ourselves, with God, our family and re-evaluate what purpose is...”

In response, another participant in the group expressed:

“It is an interesting model as purpose is not just about one thing...it must take account of the different transitions in people’s lives. For example, if I dream, aspire, and strive for a single thing and it is not fulfilled or doesn’t turn out how I hoped, this disappointment can bleed into everything else in our lives...Therefore, we need to have clear teaching and discussions that allow us to revisit purpose, find out what we have learned from our experiences, and make sense of life changes. Then we can reframe purpose, grieve the loss and disappointment from what didn’t materialize, consider how purpose can be reimagined, and then ask ourselves; what is my purpose now...?”



Figure 11 – The Mug

It was in these profound conversations that the vision for re-imagining the notion of purpose through a multi-dimensional lens, relevant to Black Christian women's identities and complex realities became affirmed. A model that allows people to dream, pursue their aspirations, and sense of calling. However, in doing so can begin to recognise the inevitability of the life cycle changing, forcing one to navigate barriers and challenges, and find hope by faith in God for appreciating the areas where you can still be fruitful and blossom in the sphere of influence, across various contexts of their lives.

Summary:

This chapter has addressed the research aim, which sought to illustrate how Black British Christian women engage with popular narratives about Christian purpose and the relevance to their lived experiences. Having reflected on the voices of Black British Christian women, who participated in the Focus Group Interviews, the findings reveal that popular books by Myles Munroe, Rick Warren, and TD Jakes were the primary sources accessed to navigate an understanding of their purpose. Specifically, I have discovered this has resulted in a dependence on the church-based model for establishing significance and a Western lens for making sense of faith and Black identity. Moreover, dependence solely on literature written from a male perspective

overlooks important realities relevant to Black women's needs, including aspirations for marital relationships. I argue this to be problematic because these popular narratives ignore the realities of Black British women's complex realities; moreover, they inhibit possibilities for re-imagining the plethora of ways to purpose.

By providing a platform for Black Christian women in Britain to contribute their voices to this research has been inspiring for myself as a researcher and for the participants. The sister-to-sister conversations have challenged these women to re-imagine the notion of purpose in thought provoking, innovative ways, through the collaboration of Black female lens. Sufficiently challenging their epistemologies to envisage beyond what they are conditioned to accept within traditional church-based models of ministry. It has enabled me to recognise the benefits and restraints of a Womanist lens, as an interpretive framework for the notion of purpose relevant to Black British women in NTCG. I have illustrated how a Womanist lens, alongside themes of well-being, can be used as an interpretive framework for practical application. Moreover, how the findings provide possibilities for rich dialogue in safe spaces through Women's forums across BMCs in Britain to include NTCG to enable women and girls to fulfill their potential.

Recommendations and Conclusions Chapter:

Re-imagining Purpose - A Womanist Multi-Dimensional Model'

This chapter presents my recommendations for re-imagining the notion of purpose through a Womanist interpretative lens, as relevant to Black British Christian Women's faith in God and contextual realities. The recommendations will incorporate the 'Model' as well as a list of recommendations specifically for BBCW and BMCs. This will be followed by a thesis conclusion.

In the introduction chapter, the following research question was posed: *'How can a Womanist lens be applied as an interpretive framework for the notion of purpose relevant to Black British women in the NTCG? Re-imagining Purpose – A Womanist Multi-Dimensional Model*, is innovative as it draws on the voices, convictions, and perspectives of Black British Christian women from NTCG, Womanist themes and my own contribution to the study as a researcher, through the development of this original model design.

The aim is to empower women to recognize Gods purpose for Black women is to honour and reflect well the imago dei (image of God). To discover, embrace and blossom in the uniqueness of their identities, using their sphere of influence in transformative ways across multi-dimensional contexts.

The rationale of this model, is for Black women to reclaim their value, re-imagining the plethora of ways God envisioned the blossoming to evolve to include the personal, spiritual, relational, and socio-political contexts. By adopting a Black, female Womanist lens to underpin the model, the faith, aspirations and lived realities are centralized, providing an alternative to popular literature written largely from a male-centric perspective. The model adopts Genesis 1: 27-28 as the biblical imperative for re-articulating God’s purpose for humanity.

The Model Explained:

The key design consists of four distinct contexts which will be explained as follows:

(See, Figure 12 – Multi-dimensional Model).

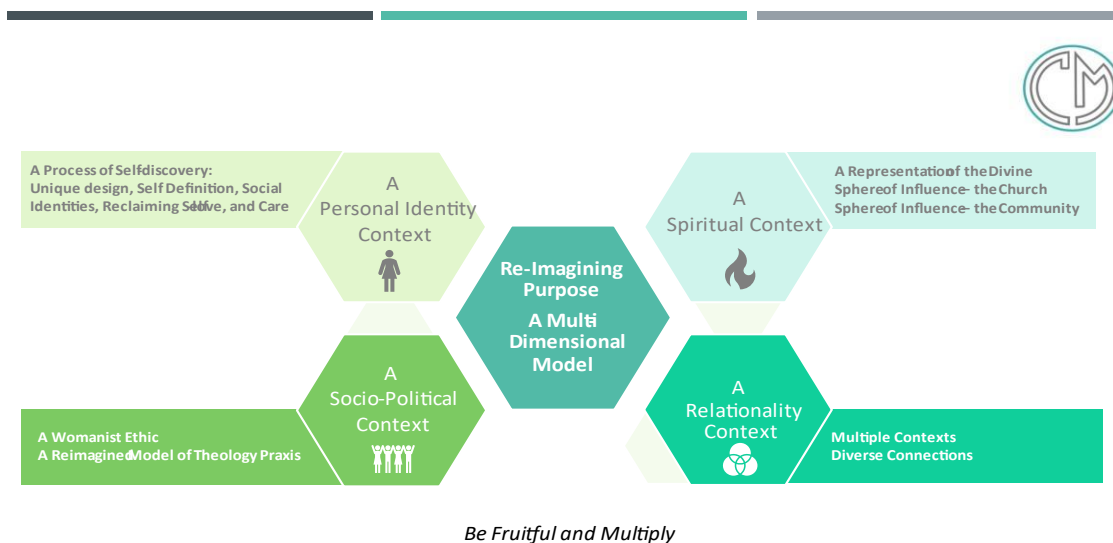


Figure 12. Re-imagining Purpose Multi-dimensional Model

The Multi-dimensional Model offers an innovative framework and principles for navigating the notion of purpose across four distinct paradigms: personal, spiritual, relational, and socio-political. Purpose-driven aspirations and well-being aspirations as it relates to Black women are both vital and require balance. The personal, spiritual, relational, socio-political paradigms are further explained as follows:

The Personal context: considers how individuals might represent the image of God, whilst harnessing one's unique and intersecting identities. Encourages a process of self-discovery, making sense of self holistically and reclaiming radical self-definition, self-love, self-care, and agency to determine pathway.

The Spiritual context: considers a Womanist hermeneutical lens and a biblical mandate for re-imagining distinct mandates to fulfill purpose, alongside the sphere of influence whether in the church or community context.

The Relational context: considers the intersecting identities held across multiple contexts which offer possibilities for connecting, interacting, and being transformative through your sphere of influence within the community.

The Socio-political context: considers the key issues within society to include the sin and injustice of racism, gender issues, and class oppression. It challenges the re-imagining of solutions through the collaboration of spiritual activity and theology praxis.

Re-imagining a Personal Context:

The personal context to Christian purpose relevant to Black women, involves a journey of self-discovery, seeing yourself through the eyes of God, embracing self-love, self-definition, and self-care. ‘...My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth’ (Psalm 139: 14 NRSV).

The re-imagining of a personal context to purpose allows for Black women to recognise it is part of God’s purpose for his daughters to discover, embrace and blossom in the wonders of their human design. This concept counters women’s invisibility, setting them up to discover, “Who Am I?” in relation to personality, traits, capabilities, identities, vulnerabilities, and the significance of the lived realities. Numerous Bible passages reveal how Jesus displayed authentic respect and regard for women’s personhood, departing from cultural norms of the day that undervalued or made them invisible. (John 4: 7 – 28; Mark 5:28). Re-imagining a personal context to purpose provides important possibilities for Black women to resist negative, stereotyped, and controlling perceptions. Furthermore, promotes opportunities to reclaim self-value through (1) self-discovery, (2) self-definition, (3) re-claiming self-love (4) continuous acts of self-care.

1. Self-discovery:

The process of self-discovery requires women to remind themselves that their unique personhood is part of God’s vision. One participant alluded to this as she made the correlation between purpose and one’s personhood/identity, expressing: “*It is innate and part of your design*”. Understanding this requires women to be intentional about

engaging in self-reflection or group reflection. Exploratory questions such as “Who Am I?” can provide a useful starting point. (See Thesis Appendix 10 - A Woman Designed by God).

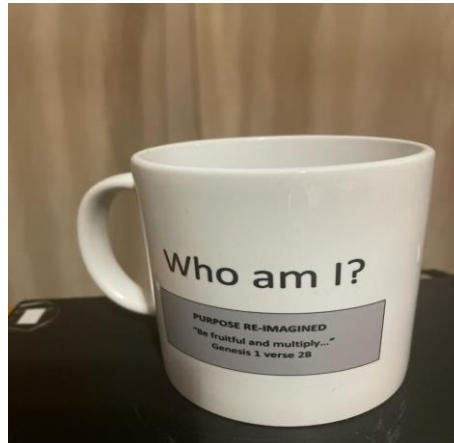


Fig 14 – the Mug - Personal design, 3rd February 2023.

According to Vanzant (1995), Black women need to do the ‘work’ of self-discovery on themselves. Popular authors such as Vanzant (1995) Munroe (1992) and Warren (2002) show that human design includes personality traits, talent, capabilities, giftings, innate qualities, and traits, offering clues to our purpose. Warren’s (2002, p. 236) SHAPE (Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, Experience) tool consists of a powerful resource for aiding a Christian to consider direction about personal calling and the fulfilment of purpose. One participant puts it like this:

“Here is my personality, here is my gifts and talents...God uses all of you and so it has to be interlinked...”

I suggest this is a task for unpacking what the bible means when describing humanity as being, ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’ (Psalm, 139: 14 NRSV).

2. Re-defining self

The process of self-definition is determined by biology, socially constructed identities, how one sees themselves, and what God’s word says. Black women have historically been subjected to various stereotyped definitions, such as the angry, hyper-sexual,

and superhuman (Collins, 2000; Williams; 2013). Additionally, the adoption of the ‘*StrongBlackWoman*’ myth is particularly unhelpful as it inhibits Black women from embracing their vulnerabilities along with their strengths. (Walker-Barnes in Evans et al, (2017, p. 44) The interplay of race, class, and gender inequalities, further compounds the labelling placed on Black women’s sense of self. The multi-dimensional identities and roles provide an identity context for re-imagining the “I AM” as it relates to purpose. Black Feminist Walker (1983, p. xi) demonstrates the power of self-definition, as she describes Black women’s capacity for being ‘...audacious [and even] courageous...’. I suggest here that the identity of Jesus Christ is of vital importance to our spiritual identity. Parallel to this, there is great power and significance when the collective self-definition of ‘Black women’ is asserted (Collins, 2000, p. 110). For example, the participant explained, “My identity is my I AM, and then comes my purpose”.

3. Re-claiming Self-love

Re-claiming self-love first involves engaging in reflection about Black women’s love language through continuous acts of giving. (Hutchinson, 2000; Foster, 1998: Vanzant, 1998). It also acknowledges the legacy of European oppression, including the dehumanizing ways that Black women’s bodies have been presented. Showunmi and Tomlin (2022, p. 106) illustrate how this leads to internalized racism, particularly for girls: ‘The young Black women stressed that perceptions of beauty and appearance forced many...to adhere to the European way of looking. This would mean relaxing their hair, whitening their skin, changing their body shape...’. Whilst this example may not be representative for the majority of Black women and girls, it does reveal the importance of exercises to explore what it means to self-love, alongside encouraging practical goals to achieve this.

The goal, therefore, is for Black women to reconcile with every aspect of their personhood as relevant to their calling and sense of purpose. This requires acknowledging strengths and vulnerabilities, knowing God's grace is sufficient, and then to 'love themselves. Regardless'. (Walker, 1989, xii).

4. Reclaiming self-care

One participant cited a Biblical passage to illustrate the importance of self-care:

'Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul' (3 John 3: NRSV). Womanist thinkers are key advocates for Black women's health and quality of life to be prioritized (Williams, 2013). Evans et al. (2017) propose the culturally appropriate *BREATHE* wellness model which is specifically designed by a Black psychologist to empower Black women holistically as they seek to balance their aspirations, calling, and emotional and physical well-being. journeys between their aspirational goals, calling, and well-being. The first acronym B=Balance, is critical to this (See Thesis Appendix).

In summary, re-imagining a personal context of purpose through a Womanist lens and by incorporating the voices and perspectives of Black British Christian women, is transformative. Countering male-centric literature, this approach makes women's personhood visible, and significant and provides possibilities for self-discovery, self-definition, self-love, and self-care (See SOR below).

In the intentional process of self-discovery, as well as identifying strengths, it is also important that women prayerfully address and identify those internal battles, critical inner voices, and self-defeating behaviours that have the potential to become the greatest barriers to potential (Coleman, 2021; Jakes, 2015). "...a man's gift makes room for him and brings him before great men..."

Re-imagining a Spiritual Context:

The spiritual context of Christian purpose relevant to Black women involves allowing the communion and love of God, to blossom through their lives, so that the liberation to enact their sphere of influence, can materialize across multiple contexts, within and external of the church 'Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father' (John 14:12 NRSV).

Re-imagining the Application of a Womanist Hermeneutical Lens:

Although popular literature offers insight into the notion of purpose, the foundational text of Christianity and how women relate to the Bible influences their spiritual connection to God and their sense of purpose. Patriarchal readings historically confined the role of women in the church context and social sphere. Alternative approaches to reading the bible open new avenues for women to reimagine their relationship with God and renegotiate their role in the church. Black British Christian women are increasingly becoming more visible in realms beyond the church, including in business and the media landscape. I argue that when these women re-imagine and live out their Christ-centred lives they will realize, nonetheless they "Christianise" and influence all spheres when applying spiritual principles or service by faith. To summarise, Black British Christian women respond to their sense of calling, in both the church and community, both contexts pleasing to God and fulfilling what Jesus prophesized as the 'greater works' of kingdom ministry (John 14:12 NRSV).

A Calling to the Church:

It came as some surprise, that during the Focus Group Interviews, there was minimal direct association with the notion and concept of purpose to named church ministry.

One participant offered the following perspective:

“It is attached to ministry and is something you enjoy doing. Growing up in church purpose reflected your ministry...so if you knew your purpose, you knew what ministry you were called to...”

This feedback seems to suggest that the enjoyment experienced in any one area of ministry, is indicative of the fulfillment of purpose. This is an interesting idea, particularly given the absence of any form of pastoral assessment process. Traditional church ministry and non-traditional ministry will be described. Davis (2020) refers to the Five-Fold Ministries, sometimes referred to as offices, as functions that are foundational in any church. Ephesians 4: 11-13 provides the main biblical underpinning, which refers to the Apostle, Prophet, Pastor, Evangelist, and Teacher. In the NTCG, after being disciplined, brethren were encouraged to testify, which was often used as a measure to discern one’s spiritual growth and calling to a particular area of ministry. The purpose of the Five-fold Ministries is to nurture Christian believers to maturity, however, within the NTCG context, the Senior Pastors and Bishops assume the final authority for determining the ministry areas people are allowed to serve in. It is noteworthy that in the past, women were discouraged from these roles (Storkey, 2013). A further dimension of spiritual context, described within biblical text, of relevance, are spiritual gifts. These are understood to aid the apostolic calling and may include roles such as administration or help for enhancing the ‘*body of Christ*’ (I Corinthians, 12: 4 – 31).

In contemporary Britain however, Black women serve as Evangelists, Teachers, and in more recent years, there has been an increase in Pastoral Ministry. As the dominant doctrine, underpinning the NTCG is Pentecostalism, the role of the Apostle is not

prioritized. Prophecy, in contrast, is active as a gifting in opposed to the prophetic office. It is noteworthy that although the Evangelist and Teacher roles are fundamental, there is often less credibility given to these ministries, in comparison to the Pastoral roles which contributes to the latter being inappropriately exalted as superior (Davis, 2020). Women are blossoming in a range of leadership roles including Ladies Ministry, Catering, Hospitality, Single Adult Ministries (SAM), and Worship: leader, solo, and musician. Creative Ministries may include dance, flag, and media, to name but a few. Several British, female scholars speak of the ongoing challenges women in church leadership face, with navigating leadership terrain (Coleman, 2021; Storkey, 2013). In whatever capacity, Black British Christian women, in their response to a God-given calling to blossom, are enacting their sphere of influence, for impacting lives within the church, to the glory of their God.

A Calling to the Marketplace:

In contrast, the calling to the marketplace is characterized by possibilities for transformational Pentecostal power to materialise through a sphere of influence in a range of settings, external to the church. One participant suggests in the following extract:

“Purpose is transferable...we have to take purpose out of the church language and perhaps it's about gifting which can be transferable to any genre...the problem with the church is that we put the idea of purpose in a box so if you don't see your gifting in an obvious way in the church, we question whether we have purpose...we are supposed to be light and salt so wherever you are, your purpose can be...”

Newbigin (1994) considers the model and concept of the missional church, which in contrast presents a community-focused perspective of the ecclesia as ‘...*the called-out community of God amid the specificity of a culture*’. In keeping with this

perspective, the following summarizes Black British Christian women's fulfilling purpose external to the church:

A Womanist Hermeneutical Lens:

Williams (2013, p. 132) introduces the idea of a 'Womanist hermeneutic of identification-ascertainment' approach to reading the bible. This is characterized by three key steps of inquiry: subjective, communal, and objective. By employing this methodology, she demonstrates how re-reading the bible offers personal resonance, and community resonance, which incorporates the use of songs and testimonials and the objective mode, allows for connecting with stories or perspectives that celebrate Black women's identity and culture, which is often ignored. A great example of this was demonstrated by Williams, re-reading the story of Hagar, the African Egyptian slave girl belonging to Sarah and Abraham. In this context, the value of connecting with Jews and non-Jews faith, life, and culture became possible, where Hagar's African Egyptian heritage could be appreciated. I argue that adopting this approach would enhance the connection with biblical text from a Black perspective, thus improving consciousness, identity, and self-esteem. Perhaps the church can learn, from the Pan-African Saturday School programs which incorporate education with an African Heritage enrichment curriculum. Bryan et. al (2019) (See Thesis Appendix – African Cultural Heritage Education (Rosa Parks)).

Women in Media:

Amongst PR guru, Marcia Dixon's MBE (2017) published an article such as '*Women of Influence*', showcasing a dozen Black British Christian women, who are impacting the kingdom through a diverse range of pioneering innovations. These include award-winning mentoring programs, music, businesses, and social enterprises. Black British Christian women have become increasingly visible as kingdom influencers through social media and social audio apps such as Clubhouse. A forum that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic 2020 lockdown, it provides opportunities to connect with hosts on matters of business, ministry, topical discussions, and for releasing prophetic gifting.

Women in Business- Social Entrepreneurs:

The 2020 national lockdown following the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic in the UK provided a window of opportunity for business innovation. The Federation of Small Businesses reveals an engagement in new businesses by Black and minority groups in the UK by 30%. Statistics in 2020, in comparison to 11% by non-ethnic groups, contributed to the 25 billion economies. Black British Christian women are included in these stats. <https://www.thebbbawards.com/blog/ten-black-owned-businesses-driving-change-in-the-uk> . Numerous Black British women attest to the transformative Pentecostal power in their lives through business and social entrepreneurship (Reid, 2022).

Women authors:

Another exciting development has seen Black British Christian women fulfilling their purpose in non-traditional ways through the publishing of books across a wide range of genres from theology to business. Notably, the pioneering vision for publishing

books as memoirs, offering a collection of stories and perspectives from multiple authors certainly reflects the ‘*be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth*’ biblical mandate (Genesis 1:28 NRSV). Examples include Marcia Dixon’s MBE, (2022) ‘*Black, British and Single*’ and Claudine Reid’s (2022) ‘*Navigating Life Anthology: Mindset, Identity, Relationships.*’

Re-imagining a Relationality Context:

The relationality context to Christian purpose relevant to Black women materializes when connecting with God’s love and informs self-love and self-care. It involves the liberation to establish meaningful, mutual, and reciprocal connections where the love of God informs your sphere of relational influence. ‘You shall love thy neighbour as yourself’ (Mark 12: 31; NRSV).

The lives of Black British Christian women reveal untold possibilities for expanding the imagination of purpose through transformative and fulfilling relationships. Storkey (2013, p. 84 in ed. Thompson) states: ‘We are described as the ‘image’ of God, and like God, we are relational; in our humanness we are in union with each other, needing each other. We are interdependent, made different but similar. In this section, I explore three contexts for purpose-driven relationships.

Relationality and Marriage:

“Education about womanhood and life planning needed”.

“More required on the increasing joint learning on relationships”

” ...it is highly problematic that at the age of 22, I got married and have received no guidance...”

“Pre-pre-marriage counselling required”.

Marriage between two people provides an important relational context for two people to navigate purpose-driven fruitful and productive lives, unto God. Given the emphasis the church places on the significance of married relationships, training on the Life Stages, Life and Relationship Goals, and Relating between the sexes would be empowering. Reid's (2022) key tips include: '...mutual respect, sharing similar values, recognizing the unique value each brings to the relationship, ...shares similar values, understanding spouse love language'.

Connecting and Relating:

Considering the crisis of Black women being in predominance in the BMCs, with an over-representation experiencing years of unwanted singleness, divine-human action is required. These women who sense a call to marriage would do well to employ Godly direction and wisdom and use their agency to connect and establish meaningful interactions with male counterparts, to increase prospects for relationships that lead to marriage.

Relationality and Motherhood/Family Life:

"Purpose is centered around your life goals...it is your driver and may include family and marriage".

"Your early life experiences as a woman/mother can inform your passion which can inform your purpose".

Both quotes from the focus group interviews provide insight into how some women perceive the connection between their relationality through motherhood and family life. For many, the commitment to nurturing these relationships is prioritized, reflecting several biblical passages: Matthew 19:14, Psalm 127:3, Proverbs 22: 6, Deuteronomy 6: 4-9. However, from my observations, the emphasis on parenting and family nurturing, as a distinct calling and ministry, is underplayed, and indeed Rick Warren's

book *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* a deep contradiction is made, with Christians being encouraged to prioritize the church family over the biological family (Warren, 2002).

Womanist scholar Williams (2013) reflects on Black women's historical experience of brutality and exploitation through diverse mothering roles including biological mother, mammy, wet-nurse, breeder woman, housekeeper, and church mother (Williams, 2013, p.54). Furthermore, given the intergenerational impact the exploitation of Black mothering has had upon the Black community, challenges Black women to consider redefining the remit of mothering to 'Nurturers' within the Black community. Thus, being in line with the African Thought Tradition, which focuses on the community: "I am because we are" (Mbiti, 1970). This approach is thought to expand possibilities for Aunty, Godmother, Sister, Church Mother, Sunday School Teacher, Youth Leader, and Children's Church Worker, to fulfill a relational purpose with enhanced significance. The findings also show there are diverse value systems that inform ideas on relationality through families and parenting, as evident from the following statement:

"In the church, it is up to God (God led) in the home men must lead for harmony and women lead with the children...It is the man that heads up as there is an order...this doesn't make women any lesser as we have a voice..."

When women, are reminded of the value of parenting, family life, and nurturing others in diverse capacities, they are empowered under God to build healthy relationships that blossom in fruitfulness and expand kingdom values. (See Appendix 8 – Love Lessons).

Relationality and Singleness:

“I’m not single, I’m just not married...”

“There is a shift from focusing on finding a man to addressing a range of life issues, and possibilities...”

The above statements suggest that singleness for many women can provide immense joy, freedom, independence, and opportunities to fulfill personal calling and a sense of purpose across different contexts. Singleness in this context provides women with greater opportunities to expand their sense of purpose. Several scholars and published literature written by Black British Christian women reveal the extent of BMC's poor teaching, in-action, and poor counsel, which has compounded the life sentence of singleness (Coleman, 2000; Dixon, 2022; Foster, 1992; McLeod, 2000). Daniel (2022, p. 147) calls it ‘the curse of enforced singleness in the church’.

What is noteworthy is how Black Christian women are rising to speak about their realities and create new pathways and opportunities from their realities. Examples of this are seen through (1) Dr. Sarah McLeod, (2000, p.390) turning ‘HOPEbrokenness’, to setting up her own Singlehood Academy, so turning her challenges to driving important purpose. (2) Marcia Dixon used her profound PR, journalism, writing skills, and social media platforms to engage the community in dialogue, then published her first ground-breaking memoir, with a foreword by Dr. Carol Tomlin entitled ‘*Black Christian and Single*’. (3). The establishment of the NTCG Single Adult Ministry (SAM):

“SAM agenda is improving about the education process, [however] SAM is not taken seriously by leadership”.

(4) Important lessons to learn from Pastor Dave Daniel, in terms of strategies to increase the number of women engaging in positive relationships which led to

marriage. This included being intentional, praying, promoting healthy discussions in women’s and men’s church forums, establishing a ‘Relationship Forum’, and Valentine’s meals. (Daniel, 2022, p.152).

Relationality, Sisterhood, and Women’s Conferences:

“...I was in leadership, so my voice was heard but it is determined by the perspective of the leader...”

Encouragingly, in the British context, there is an emergence of Women’s Empowerment Conferences (WEC), which are designed to empower Black British Christian women, with business, entrepreneurship, and leadership skills as well as personal enrichment and upliftment.



Figure 15 and 16. Women’s Events – Destined to Soar and Re-dig the Wells.

“No...women’s voices are heard when invited to speak...I believe that if our voices were heard more adequately the church would be in a better place...”



Figure 17 NTCG Convention – NTCG Website

There is a new wave of independent and BMC-based women's conferences, breakfasts, workshops, and events being spearheaded across the UK. A common thread of women's empowerment materializes through these events. A key Feminist and Womanist principle is about Black women developing consciousness and new ways of knowing that empower them to have the confidence to use their agency to determine their pathways and to stand in solidarity through sisterhood and engage in holistic initiatives to support the whole body: mind, body, and spirit for creating personal and collective transformation (Mitcham, 2002; Weems, 1989).

Re-imagining a Socio-Political Context:

The socio-political context of Christian purpose relevant to Black women involves resisting all forms of oppression, including the interplay of race, class, and gender inequalities. It involves doing justice in collaboration with God, through prayer and theology praxis to the 'very least' within society (Matthew 25: 35 – 37 NRSV).

Re-imagining a socio-political context to purpose, through the lens of Black British Christian women, challenges ideas currently held about Christian ethics, personal/spiritual convictions about issues of injustices, and insights on theology praxis models relevant to the Black community. The rationale is to cultivate transformative Pentecostal power through theology praxis in community spaces. During the Focus Group Interviews, the participant's perspectives consolidate these ideas. I will explain as follows:

Approach one – A Womanist Ethic:

When asked about the NTCG social justice mission, respondents expressed:

“On a national level it is not apparent...”

“We are a BMC whose leadership is not focused on the community”.

Both comments speak to the issue of ethics. Cannon (1998) found it was immoral to apply traditional Christian ethics to the Black community, based on societal inequalities. A corrective explored was a Womanist ethical framework characterized by the centering of Black women's realities, the bible as a guide, and the incorporating of African tradition, to echo the African Proverb: “I am because we are” (Mitcham, 2002, p. 35, Mbiti, 1970). Moreover, and committed to the bible, for direction and the

incorporation of intellectual literature traditions such as activist Zora Neale Hurston, Martin Luther King, and Howard Thurman. Additionally, the capacity to apply humanness, compassion, care, mercy, and advocacy toward the marginalized and non-churched community.

Approach two – Naming the Sin of Injustice:

BMCs in Britain have historically and continue to do pockets of great support to marginalized communities. Yet are criticized for their lack of engagement in justice matters. Sturge, (2022, p. 103) calls out the ‘deafening silence’ and in-action, whilst Beckford (2013, p. 48) advocates for an ‘exorcism of the fear of politics.’ The second approach is to recognize the issues of justice, are relevant to all believers. Being a part of the conversation, naming the sin of injustices, and prayerfully engaging with God, creates opportunities for transformative Pentecostal power to materialise through theology praxis.

A Reflection on issues of injustice:

- The sin and injustice of sexism in BMCs and British society
- The sin and injustice of racism within British society
- The sin and injustice of classism within BMCs and British society
- The sin and injustice of economic deprivation impacting Black families within British society.
- The injustice of culturally sensitive theological education being accessible and free in local BMCs.
- The injustice of wide scales social inequalities within British society.
- The injustice of Westernised national education
- The injustice of one in five Black women (or their babies) dying at childbirth in British society.

- The injustice and void of opportunities for women's voices to be represented through a communication – feedback loop within BMCs national strategic forums.
- The injustice of BMCs in Britain failure to address the disproportionate numbers of Black Christian women facing a life sentence of unwanted singleness strategically and practically.
- The injustice of increased numbers of Black girls and women becoming victims of domestic abuse and violence within society.

Figure 18 – Issues of injustice – self designed

Approach three:

The reimagining of a socio-political

“...Social justice theology and program has been established which was inspired by the death of George Floyd and has been amazing...”

“...Need education, attainment, single parent families, poverty, doing financial literacy, politics”.

“...Political involvement – You can't affect change if you are not in a position to do so...”

The above statement represents some of the views and perspectives of women in the church. Re-imagining a socio-political context to purpose is possible for those, with culturally sensitive ethical values towards the non-churched and marginalized of the community, who have an authentic conviction about an area of injustice, and a strategy for theology praxis in collaboration with other organizations or groups with shared values. The creative media project entitled 'Magnificat', Black Women of the Earth, as part of the Jamaican Bible Remix Project by Black Theologian Robert Beckford, constitutes an invaluable starting point for doing justice. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRWGMvT5Ucg>. Townes (1993) concludes that theology praxis is informed by the prophetic voice and conviction, which commences with the ability to discern God's will for the oppressed. Moreover, to identify injustice in society, advocate a rationale for social action, establish mutual respect for

partnering with others/ agencies, and finally, create a community of faith through effective pastoral relationships. (See Appendix Thesis 9 – A Womanist Justice Model)

To conclude, Williams (2013, pp. 181-182) states:

‘I believe the black church is the heart of hope in the black community’s experience of oppression, survival struggle and its historic efforts towards complete liberation...we cannot confine the black church to one special location...the black church is invisible, but we know it when we see oppressed people rising up in freedom. It is community essence, ideal and real as God works through it on behalf of the survival, liberation, and positive productive quality of life of suffering people’.

Purpose-driven aspirations and well-being:

Evans et al, (2017) BREATHE culturally appropriate wellness model, has been established to empower Black women’s well-being, given the diverse ways historical and systemic racism leave its legacy. It demonstrated the importance of the church, engaging in (1) dialogue about intersectionality, (2) the importance of establishing trauma-informed church and pastoral care initiatives, and (3) the value of safe spaces for stories, healing, and solidarity in sisterhood. (4). The importance of women reflecting on injustices, and how they might establish justice initiatives. The objective of BREATHE is balancing strengths with vulnerabilities; through considering **B**alance, **R**eflection, and **E**nergy to set goals and celebrate achievements, establish effective **A**ssociations, learn to be **T**ransparent about feelings, and engage in acts of **H**ealing and **E**mpowerment for change (Evans et al, 2017, p.4-7).

The Scale of Reflection (SOR) detailed below, signifies Black British Christian women tipping the balance between purpose-driven lives and well-being. It encourages women to pause and reflect on how they are balancing between each and during those pivotal reflections, to act on identifying what new actions are needed to regulate each. Individuals are encouraged to scale between 1 – 10 the attention given to one's calling / purpose and well-being and encouraged to make the necessary adjustments in their goal setting and planning.

Figure 13. Scale of Reflection (SOR)

Recommendations Cont'd - BBCW and BMCs:

1. Black British Christian Women (BBCW) and BMCs to critically explore how a Black, female theological lens informing the '**Purpose Re-imagined – Multi-Dimensional Model**' might offer an empowering enrichment tool and interpretative framework for navigating the Christian calling and purpose in the 21st century.
2. BBCW to explore a **personal context** to their calling and purposes, through personal development initiatives that aid self-discovery and response to "Who Am I?". This would include utilizing resources for exploring qualities, traits, capabilities, identities, and gifts which offer clues to purpose. Moreover, to aid the defining/redefining of self, examining/reclaiming self-love, and reclaiming acts of continuous self-care / wellness.
3. BBCW to prayerfully re-imagine a **spiritual context** to purpose in traditional and non-traditional ways, within and external of the church setting. To consider, how one might reflect well the imago dei (image of God) (Mae, 2015), blossom in potential, to enact one's sphere of influence. Furthermore, to adopt as a biblical imperative for the notion of purpose, the biblical text: '...Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it...' (Genesis 1:28 NSRV).
4. BBCW to discover the **relationality context** as a distinct paradigm of Christian calling and purpose. Recognizing the human capacity to be relational with God and humanity; utilizing a range of tools and resources to grow and engage in purposeful ministerial and life assignments: such as marriage, family, parenting, sisterhood, education, and entrepreneurship.
5. BBCW to harness a **socio-political context** to purpose, through identifying Black women's passion for countering injustices within society. To critically examine the range of Womanist and other justice tools to aid collaborative partnerships of theology praxis in the community.
6. BMCs, including NTCG to critically incorporate **contextual theologies**, namely Black and Womanist Theology and the works of Black female scholars, as a theological imperative alongside Pentecostal and biblical theologies, as

relevant for countering Western influences. Capturing theologically, the significance of African cultural heritage, identities, the Black British voice, culture, and lived experience (male and female) offers transformative possibilities in the 21st century.

7. BMCs, including NTCG WDMs to prayerfully explore creating safe spaces for critical reflective discussion on social and other barriers to purpose to include: the interplay of **intersectionality**: race, class, gender oppressions, and the impact on Black women. Moreover, how a Womanist hermeneutical lens to re-reading the bible, alongside books written by Black British female scholars might counter barriers to purpose and well-being for BBCW.
8. BMCs, including NTCG to apply an **interdisciplinary** approach (theology, social science, humanities) to church leadership and pastoral care in and external of the churches, in response to the holistic needs of members and communities. Examples include the pioneering of innovative initiatives such as trauma-informed pastoral care, the BREATHE wellness model, Womanist Justice Models, African heritage, and future empowerment.
9. BMCs, including NTCG to develop strategies that empower WDM district leaders to develop a **Woman's Justice Manifesto**, which incorporates Black women's voices and perspectives. This could include the need to address the disconnect between church and men in the community and unprecedented numbers of BBCW, facing an unwanted lifetime of singleness. The National Executor Council (NEC) board meeting forum is to be explored as vital for ensuring BMCs in Britain whose membership is predominantly women, contribute their voices strategically, to matters concerning them.
10. BMCs including NTCG adopt a **Black, female hermeneutical lens** as guided by Weems (1998) and Williams (2013) for re-reading the bible, for countering texts that perpetuate stereotypes, myths, or the dehumanizing of Black women and enhancing narratives which affirm, strengthen, and empower. Additionally, to strengthen the heritage of the African diaspora in the United Kingdom, promote Black futures and community cohesion between Black men and women within church and community.

Thesis Conclusion:

In this research study, I initially set out to explore how a Womanist theoretical lens can be applied as an alternative framework to the notion of purpose relevant to Black British Christian women. In developing my original rationale for the study in Chapter 1, my concern was that popular narratives - with specific reference to the works of authors Myles Munroe, Rick Warren, and TD Jakes - appeared not to reflect my identity; specifically, my gender, culture and lived realities as a Black British woman. Additionally, ideas from these popular books ignored the significance of the multi-dimensional contexts in which purpose can be realized. Whilst recognizing that these popular narratives had an underlying influence on BMCs within the UK, I was intrigued to establish their key themes and principles, to enable me to make sense of my calling and sense of purpose. At the same time, I had hoped to contribute to a more nuanced and integrative approach in this area.

Upon undertaking this study, the focus of my initial study aim shifted from solely applying a Womanist lens, which incorporated aspects of Black theology and psychology paradigms. Following a review of the initial approach, the modified research aim was to explore and critique how Black British Christian women in the NTCG engage with popular narratives about Christian purpose. A Womanist lens as an interpretive framework was chosen, given its principle for prioritizing the voices and perspectives of Black women within scholarly research. To reflect the principles of Womanist for the study, the research methodology focus was revised incorporating Focus Group Interviews as part of gathering primary data. This vital shift has demonstrated how hugely important it was to these women, for the opportunity to have their voices heard, increasing their visibility, whilst contributing to research that is concerned with their faith, realities, and hopes. I then introduced psychoeducation

wellness concepts, as a practical application of the study to demonstrate how Womanist concepts can be applied by women personally, as an empowering tool for balancing purpose and wellbeing. Additionally, it illustrates how Womanist themes can be interwoven to drive transformative ministries and activities within the BMCs and community.

The research has addressed the key problems identified at the start of the study, demonstrating entirely the value in applying a Womanist theology lens as an interpretive framework for the notion of purpose, as relevant to the lived experiences of Black women can be transformative. This is largely evident through the Model, which empowers Black women to re-imagine their purpose in distinct ways in line with their calling, and in multi-dimensional ways across the personal, spiritual, relational, and socio-political contexts. There have been limitations in the development of an African cultural lens, although the study has revealed the value of a Womanist hermeneutical lens for reading the bible and connecting with characters of African heritage, such as Hagar the African Egyptian slave woman connected to Sarah and Abraham story (Genesis 16: 1 – 16; 21: 8 - 21). It has demonstrated the necessity of a female hermeneutical lens for countering male-centric literature, which has proved to have patriarchal undertones that are detrimental to Black women. By exploring a Psychology lens and wellness framework, it has shown through the multi-dimensional model, prioritizing a personal context to purpose, the BREATHE concepts, and the SOR tool the importance of well-being and balance for these women. Moreover, the importance of the church of the 21st century adopting a multi-disciplinary approach to faith and life. The final problem set out in the introduction; the study has addressed is the importance of a biblical mandate for underpinning the notion of purpose. Moreover, Genesis 1:27-28 biblical text offers a sufficient mandate from which

purpose, through communion with God's love, blossoming in fruitfulness and enacting one's sphere of influence across diverse contexts is possible for men and women equally.

Centralizing NTCG as a focus of the study and its aspiration to become 'a relevant, relational church re-imagining God at work in our communities and nation', has revealed new insights. The success established over 70 years from the Windrush era to date, with a vast contribution made by women, who are in predominance. Moreover, whilst there have been substantial changes and developments in women being empowered to reach their potential and rise to their calling across diverse spheres, male-biased undertones are continuously prevalent. Despite this, Black women from the Windrush generation to date have displayed various levels of tolerance and against much adversity, continue to thrive, excel, and blossom in the church context. The findings from the primary research also reveals a new generation of Black British women blossoming as they navigate and live out their faith walk with God in dynamic and non-traditional ways, enacting their faith and sphere of influence across multi-dimensional contexts, to include the church, home, workplace, business, politics, in social justice, as authors, in education, through charities and more.

In the *Pioneers of the Purpose Genre - Literature Review Chapter*, I have set out to respond to the research question: to what extent are popular contemporary narratives on Christian purpose relevant to the lived experiences of Black British Christian women? Secondly: What are the key themes of popular Christian narratives on the notion of purpose?

It was established from the onset that there is a gap in published scholarly work, on the notion of purpose specifically from the perspective of Black British Christian

women. Although it is acknowledged that there is significant published literature from Black British female scholars whose published scholarly writings, distinctly address Black women's experience in the church. There were key insights gained from the two female authors: Vanzant and Bishopson. I established amongst the literature that Vanzant's book, shared ideas on purpose that were relevant. By illustrating Black women's continual cycle of work, struggle, and valley experiences, the author alluded to their strengths, capabilities, and struggle to overcome systemic oppression. Against this contextual reality and insight, these women were challenged to pursue purpose, from the starting point of being intentional about personal development, doing the reflective 'work' on themselves and adopting a mindset for change. Vanzant's narrative is written from the perspective of a Black woman, with clear insight into the complexities of Black women's realities although not directly from a Christian standpoint. Although the racial identity of Bishopson is unclear, what was presented in her narrative was a balance between the Christian calling and purpose, within the context of the church through traditional forms of ministry, alongside appreciating God's purpose as being deeply relevant in other areas, to include the family context. Concerningly, in Bishopson's text however, emerged dominant values synonymous with white privilege, with indications of class bias, capitalism and prosperity paradigms. Ethical values and judgements around the accumulation of wealth and conditions of poverty; and the association of poverty to sin was deemed problematic. To conclude, this book was underpinned by traditional Western Christian thought, however presented with limited insight, compassion or ethical consideration relevant for empowering marginalized communities. To this extent, although some of themes were valuable, were treated with 'suspicion' (Sweeney, 2000) and caution due to its oppressive undertones, being demeaning to Black women and community.

In contrast, the review of literature from popular authors such as Munroe, Warren, and Jakes was intriguing given, that it was their works that I had in my personal experience indulged in, as was trending amongst Christian sisters and brothers within the BMC, from my observation. A common theme that emerged across all the narratives was the author's perception that God is central to the discovery of purpose. A variation of definitions and concepts emerged, with authors such as Munroe providing comprehensive definitions and conceptual frameworks for navigating the notion of purpose – all of which are insightful. I discovered several authors pointed to the primary Christian purpose, as being for humanity to come to know God, through salvation in Jesus Christ. Moreover, inferred to diverse terms and concepts to explain what was perceived as a secondary specific calling and purpose: assignment, destiny, ministry, appointment, or marketplace task. Other themes that emerged across the literature, related to the spiritual and personal context, such as the idea of self-discovery. Clarke, Jakes, Munroe, and Warren for example all alluded to God's creation and design of humanity, to include their innate qualities, gifting, traits, capabilities, talents, and passions as being significant. Concluding, they help respond to the question, "Who am I? and therefore provide clues to identity, the notion of calling and purpose. All the authors offered useful tools to aid the discovery of purpose. For example, Rick Warren's, presentation of the SHAPE reflective tool for identifying personal gifts and qualities is particularly useful. Munroe's conceptual framework is effective for establishing the nature and principles for interpreting the notion of purpose. TD Jakes's narrative focused on inspiring the enquirer for seeking more, however the provision of tools for addressing the balance between purpose-driven aspirations and well-being reflects well the essence of this study.

To what extent are popular contemporary narratives on Christian purpose relevant to the lived realities of Black British Christian women? It was welcoming that Black authors, to include Clarke (2015) with his reference to Mayo Angelo and African traditions, Jakes (2015) who in his introduction page illuminates the life of the late Coretta Scott King, Munroe (1992) who dedicates an entire chapter to the diaspora and Vanzant (1995) who speaks directly to Black women. Other narratives, revealed a thread of male bias, class privilege, and Westernised theology all of which were oppressive to Black women and her communities. An interesting finding from the analysis of popular literature on the notion of purpose was the diverse levels of theological, doctrinal, and other disciplines underpinning the narratives. These were consistent with Pentecostalism, Prosperity paradigms, Kingdom themes, Self-sacrificing, Psychology, and New Age Thought. Thus, revealing that popular Christian authors, who have written on the notion of purpose, draw from a range of sources, to include biblical text, doctrine, as well as their own personal contexts and realities to frame their teaching. The review provided some universal themes relevant to all. It has become evident that these narratives and books written on the notion of purpose, were not written for the perspective of Black British Christian women and neither claim to do so. As such, key factors such as Black women's context: personhood, identities, culture, faith and lived realities to include, the interplay of systemic barriers to potential and purpose such as race, class and gender inequalities within the church and society in the main remain void. Bevan's (1992) case for the importance of engaging with models of contextual theology, where biblical text, issues of past, present, culture, social location can be incorporated is vital in faith seeking understanding.

In the Womanist Lens and Wellness Practice – Methodology Chapter, it has been structured in two parts to capture, a). a discussion of the methodology used and a

critique of Womanist themes as relevant for developing an interpretive framework for the study and b). a practical application – towards a Womanist informed wellness model. In part a. Contextual theology was explained in terms of how it informs the chosen theoretical lens. The chapter explained how the methodology was established, through primary data collection. Primary data gathered for the study through online Zoom focus groups; was deemed most sufficient for engaging in meaningful semi-structured discussions, whilst promoting maximum safety for participants during the delicate period of lockdown, due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. The process of recruiting 14 Black British Christian women from NTCG, developing publicity, research criteria, and recruitment drive; revealed important sources from sister-circles, friendships, and recommendations from senior pastors who helpfully provided direction to local church connections. The interview design, which incorporated 18 questions, across five themes, highlighted the extent of a rigorous ethics process. Measures implemented to minimize risks associated with primary research, including allocating time at the end for debriefing after each interview round. Furthermore, helplines were provided for participants as a precaution given the sensitive nature of interview questions, such as those which invited discussion of experiences of racial inequalities or trauma. The women were selected by availability and were divided into three groups. From the dynamic interview process, which invited sister-to-sister talks, I discovered diverse views about purpose, which are discussed in chapter four. Another significant aspect of the methodology in this chapter included a critical review of one book from Womanist thinkers to include: Alice Walker, Katie Cannon, Delores Williams, Jacqueline Grant, Renita Weems, and Emily Townes was made. The aim being to explore how the works of Womanist scholars might contribute to an interpretive framework for the notion of purpose relevant to BBCW. Sufficient insights

from key themes, concepts, and principles were gained. A definition of Womanist theology was established to illustrate the priority of faith-seeking understanding relevant to - and for - the Black community of which women have great significance. It revealed Walker's pioneering literature where the coined concept of 'womanish' was reconstructed to reflect the religious identity of African American women who align to a political ideology through a Black feminist lens. The importance of women's self-definition as it relates to purpose, were thought-provoking: 'audacious...courageous...serious...' (Walker, 1989; xi). Interestingly, as a means of resistance to the interplay of race, class, and gender oppressions, Walker encourages Black women to reclaim their personhood, self-love, self-care, and African cultural heritage as necessary to blossom in potential and through activism. In contrast, the innovative writings of Williams (2013, p.10) draws on the concept of 'sisters in the wilderness' to explain the common experience of oppression shared by African American women. This was effectively compared to the reality of Hagar, the African Egyptian slave girl in the bible, significantly emphasizing her faith in Abrahams God, the uniqueness and value of her identities, cultural heritage and how she overcame. By coining the term 'coerced surrogacy' and 'social surrogacy', Williams exposes contemporary Black women's historical struggle against exploitation through maternal and labour experiences, challenging the concept of Black women accepting continuous suffering. A Womanist hermeneutic of identification-ascertainment for reading the bible, reveals themes relevant to inform an interpretative framework. These include the importance of resisting oppression, reclaiming African heritage, justice, and women prioritizing quality of life as a means of survival all of which are relevant to the BBCW experience and therefore aspirations for purpose-driven lives. A conclusion is drawn, with a message to the Black-led church, where leaders are

encouraged to depart from the preoccupation with church buildings and be re-positioned at the heart of the community in response to the needs. Cannon's (1988) development of a Womanist ethic reveals a corrective to doing ethics amongst the Black community as the approach in dominant Christian ethics proved problematic. An alternative perspective is offered which considers Black women's realities at the start of the dialogue, incorporating their historical 'moral wisdom' used as a survival strategy, alongside cultural intellectual traditions. Finally, incorporating African thought tradition and approaches in humanness reveals transforming possibilities for reviewing the way the Black-led church views the marginalized. Thereby, has offered ethical justifications for prioritizing Black British Christian women in this study, as a form of justice against marginalisation and invisibility. Grant's provocative book, 'White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus – Feminist Christology and Womanist Response', proved to be riveting as it advocates for Black women to engage in critical dialogue on how ideas about the identity of Jesus Christ impact their own sense of religious identity. A critique of feminist models demonstrates how key ideas inform one's philosophical stance. Grant (1989, p. 5) considers ideas from feminist thinkers in terms of aligning with a male-God figure, proposing the concept of Black women aligning with Jesus's humanity, as 'co-sufferers' to be less conflicting. Weems discusses the possibility of gaining transformative insights when reading the bible through a female-hermeneutical lens. Most significantly nine bible stories, sufficiently demonstrate examples of countering male bias or text that devalues women or promotes invisibility. Using this source, Weems, re-authors and re-imagines the stories of women's personal qualities, gifting, skill, diverse roles held within society, relationships, impact, and most poignantly the significance of sisterhood. Finally, Townes, through the innovative review of the life of Ida Wells-Barnett, an activist in the

civil rights movement, illustrates the potential of a justice framework. Six innovative principles are discussed revealing themes: obedience, authoritative use of scripture, pain and suffering, liberation and reconciliation, pastoral voice, and the prophetic voice. A comparison was made to Professor Robert Beckford's Magnificat media representation of justice, an innovative creative art piece relevant to inspiring, affirming, and empowering Black women in the UK, with ideas from Surge, contributing. Both models combined reveal an excellent framework for justice that could be adopted by BBCW and BMCs in the UK.

In part b). a practical application – towards a Womanist informed wellness model was discussed as a potential approach to BBCW wellness. Evans, *et al's* (2017) culturally appropriate BREATHE wellness model has been critiqued. By employing the following acronyms: balance, reflection, energy, associations, transparency, healing, and empowerment the chapter reveals the ways in which this tool can be transformative – encouraging Black women to tip the balance between strength and vulnerability, balancing purpose-driven aspirations with wellness. Alongside wellness tools and techniques, the study has shown the model is useful as a framework for enhancing relationships between, particularly between Black mothers and daughters. Chapter three concludes, with a critical discussion on racial trauma, challenging Pentecostal BMCs in the 21st century, to consider the benefits of trauma-informed education and pastoral care. The BREATHE model demonstrated an effective practical application that can be applied, as a framework for Women empowerment forums.

In the Black British Christian Women Re-imagining Purpose - Research Findings Chapter, the rich findings from interviews with the Focus Group participants of comprising 14 connected to NTCG were discussed. The views and perspectives of the participants of the focus group were discussed and analyzed using the Womanist

interpretive framework. The semi-structured interview questions, focused on five key themes to include: (1) ideas on purpose, (2) Gender roles, (3) barriers to purpose, (4) BMCs and (5) views on the Womanist informed, 'Purpose re-imagined – A Multi-dimensional Model'.

The focused group interviews of 14 women associated to NTCG England and Wales established ideas on the notion of purpose were influenced from diverse factors. All 14 women confirmed they had engaged significantly with books from popular male clergies to develop their epistemologies. Biblical text – most popular Jeremiah 29: 1 and 29:11, church, family, personal discovery, revelation by the Holy Spirit were amongst the other influences. It was welcoming that these women all had innovative perspectives on how they saw their purpose, alluding to non-churched and non-traditional ideas. Most interesting was the discussion of the 'MUG' as a metaphor for exploring significance regardless of when in "use" with one group concluding the importance of Black women engaging in "being" rather than continuous cycles of doing. In response to the gender theme, all the women voiced having the experience of being treated unfairly or differently within church and community. Moreover, expressing women having greater challenges navigating their calling and purposes in a "man's world". All felt it paramount for BBCW to be empowered with agency to have their voices heard and to navigate their own pathways. The third theme addressed what the women perceived as barriers to the notion of purpose, with all sharing heartfelt stories pertaining to the interplay of traumatic racism within British society during their school and adult years. For others, racism has acted as a fuel to developing inclusion and services which empower the marginalised. Critiquing BMCs in this 21st century, the majority expressed there is insufficient constructive dialogue about intersectionality or educational / pastoral care forums to equip members to

navigate. The fourth section focused on how they see BMCs providing an environment which supports individuals to navigate purpose. A range of positive contributions were made to include an inclusion of Black literature, Black theologies, applying a Black, female hermeneutical lens to reading the bible, comprehensive approaches to relationships and a commitment to social justice within the community. Finally, when invited to comment on the viability of a Womanist multi-dimensional model and framework on purpose, some expressed caution due to the perceived association with American agendas. The majority felt a Black, British female, lens would offer intriguing insight and therefore the proposed model was welcomed.

In the recommendations and conclusions chapter five, re-imagining purpose – through a Womanist Multi-Dimensional Model is presented. This ‘model’ and innovation is an original design and as a researcher is my contribution to the discussion on purpose. The chapter is structured in three parts, first recommends an outline of the ‘Model’, second, recommendations are made specifically to Black women and BMCs and then third and finally a conclusion of the study and thesis content will be drawn.

The visual design and representation of the multi-dimensional model, reveals aesthetically ‘purpose re-imagined’. Additionally, the Scale of Reflection (SOR) presented as a visual design, supports Black women in being intentional about the practical application of wellness and the importance of reflecting on this periodically using the SCALE to support tipping the balance between purpose-driven aspirations and wellness. The recommendations incorporate Womanist themes as an interpretive framework, interweaving the voices of 14 Black women associated with NTCG and the idea of purpose re-imagined across the personal, spiritual, relational, and socio-political context. A biblical imperative underpins the recommendations.

Recommendations to re-imagine purpose as a personal context is set out as an imperative for empowering Black women to combat against invisibility. Women are to recognise the intentionality of their unique and personal design and seek to discover this as it relates to identity. The chapter recognises, how intersectionality interweaves itself in several guises to include race, class, and gender inequalities, negatively impacting the psyche and sense of self. It shows how a continual commitment to self-discovery and personal development acts as resistance, providing possibilities for embracing identities, reframing self-definitions, reclaiming self-love, self-care, and agency to create one's pathway.

Recommendation to re-imagine purpose in the spiritual context is discussed as the capacity to reflect well the imago dei (image of God), (Mae, 2015) and to encourage Black women to blossom through church-based ministry or the sphere of influence across multi-dimensional contexts of life. It reveals a distinction between the calling within the church and the sphere of influence within and external of the church context. Traditional biblical models to Christian calling, namely the fivefold ministries: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are discussed as significant. This recognizes and embraces the importance of empowering believers to mature so they envision their calling to ministry within the church. Additionally, and significant to this study, it addresses the re-imagination of biblical passages which reveal a non-traditional calling to enact one's sphere of influence in diverse ways, through multi-dimensional contexts external of the church. Both; are explained as offering a plethora of ways purpose, and the scope for being fruitful, blossoming, or being productive in representing God's image and characteristics on earth. Central to the spiritual context, a re-imagination of how a Black theological–hermeneutical lens can be transformative for the Black church and non-church community' in enhancing a positive cultural

identity, esteem, and confidence, and fulfilling purpose in a hostile oppressive, and misogynist world. Several examples illustrate the emerging new wave of Black British Christian women presenting as women of excellence encouraged through conference forums such as 'Destined to Soar', spearheaded by Marcia Dixon MBE. Recommendations made for re-imagining a relational context to purpose illustrates the significance of Black women's multi-dimensional identities and possibilities to blossom in the sphere of influence. Comparatively, the value of personal relationships is explained, with a critique of the church about how it has neglected to support Black women, who present as unwanted singles. Most importantly, a re-imagination of purposeful, relationships between men and women are revealed necessary. Recommendations for re-imagining a socio-political context to purpose reveals the aspirations towards a greater balance between church and community-based endeavours. Within the NTCG context, excellent examples of current community and justice works were illustrated including soup kitchens, food banks, homelessness projects, and the national senior citizen provision. The recommendations for BBCW to harness and own their own passions to engage in justice work, is transformative for them and the church. The recommendations made, offer food for thought, alongside revealing models of justice in which BMCs can consider, drawing from tools provided by Professor Robert Beckford's Magnificat and Townes Justice Model and the adopting of what Surge describes as 'Windrush Sunday'.

The study has shown the significance of Contextual theology; from which Womanist and Black Liberation theology stems. The distinct and complex histories of the African diaspora in Britain, the legacy of the transatlantic enslavement of West African people, and the thread of inequalities perpetuated through structural and other forms of racism and oppression justify departing from Western Christianity models. The study

concludes, therefore that Womanist theology provides an important critical lens for faith-seeking-understanding in relation to the notion of purpose from the perspective of Black women. Although, this theological paradigm has emerged from the African American experience, it is important to note that Black women across the globe share commonalities as well as differences. Womanist theology, in relation to this study has therefore provided a useful framework for drawing themes which challenge women to trust in the God who continues to make a way out of no way. Moreover, to depart from passivity, resist oppression, adopt correctives, prioritize personhood, femininity, self-love, become activist for the advancement of the entire community; men – women – and children. The study has revealed the importance of Black British Christian female scholars, continuing the work of faith seeking understanding in a way that bridges the gap between sacred theological spaces and ordinary Black women that spend their lives dedicated to the confines of their local church settings. To progress this agenda, it is vital that it stands in solidarity with Black theology and those who champion it. That way the Black, British Christian community has a collaboration of theological perspectives from which to draw in unity.

My final thoughts are that Womanist theology has provided an invaluable interpretive lens for framing the notion of purpose, cementing an approach that can be applied through the 'Purpose Re-imagined - A Multi-dimensional Model'. This 'Model' is sufficient for offering a framework relevant to women and men. Its primary commitment is to empower, validate, and promote Black women in their re-imagination of purpose. It is by no means only interested in women and demonstrates a commitment to the entire community, women, men, and children. Thus, it recognizes it gives a perspective in a bigger picture within liberation theology, where Black Liberation Theology has an invaluable role to play in the aspiration for the entire

liberation of the Black church and non-churched community. Coleman (2007b, p. 115), cites a quote, which stems from Alice Walker,

“I believe that the truth about any subject only comes when all sides of the story are put together and all their different meanings make one new one. Each writer writes the missing parts of the other writer’s story. And the whole story is what I am after (Collins, 1990, p. 37).

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<https://thebbawards.com/>

Black Woman' by Judy Mowat

Chorus

Black Woman, oh Black Woman
I know you've struggled long
I feel your afflictions
To you, I dedicate my song

Verse 1

Black woman, oh Black Woman,
Like you have struggled long.
You have trod one of life's roughest roads,
You got the heaviest load.
To be someone, to belong
Too near a mile and a half furlong
Don't give up now
Just pray for strength now
For you, I dedicate my song to you!

Verse 2

We had forsaken once
In the plantation, lashes to our skin
On auction blocks, we were chained and sold
Handled merchandise
Highly abused and used for refuse
And thrown in garbage bins
But no need for that now
Free us, stand on back now
And help me to sing my song

Verse 3

When you're fighting stand up for the right thing
And not that which is wrong
I heard Rachel mourning for her children
When Herod and Pharoah took their little heads
But just like Mary and Joseph
Mother of Moses too
Overcame its evil devices.
I dedicate my song to you.

Purpose is...

- The original intent for the creation of a thing
- The original reason for the existence of a thing
- The end for which the means exist
- The cause for the creation of a thing
- The desired result that initiates production
- The need that makes a manufacturer produce a specific product
- The destination that prompts the journey
- The expectation of the source
- The objective of the subject
- The aspiration for the inspiration, and
- The object one wills or resolves to have

Munroe (1992, p.6) In Pursuit of Purpose, Bahamas: Destiny Image Publishers

Appendices 3

<u>Nature of Purpose:</u>	
1. Purpose is inherent	Individual design is inherent for intended purposes to include, our qualities, tendencies talents, abilities, personality, skills, height, race, skin color, language, physical features, and intellectual capacity.
2. Purpose is individual	Purpose is individual and unique. No one has our fingerprint. 'You are the way you are because of why you are' (Munroe; 1992, p.15).
3. Purpose is often Multiple	The sun was created for multiple purposes, so it is that we have a multiplication of Purposes i.e., Moses was a leader, spokesman, and lawgiver for God.
4. Purpose is interdependent.	The principle is that Purpose is interdependent and therefore requires actions to take place to ensure the bigger Purposes are being fulfilled. Purpose cannot be fulfilled in isolation; therefore, our part is a vital link. (Moses 1992, p. 19)
5. Purpose is Permanent	God's intended Purpose and promise was for Abraham and Sarah to have a son as heir. Despite Sarah's hastiness, resulting in Hagar having Ishmael, God demonstrated the permanence of His Purpose through the birth of Isaac. (Gen 17:17)
6. Purpose is Resilient	The principle here is that God's Purpose is not hindered by difficulties, experiences, mistakes, and your past, rather it acts as a catalyst for learning and testimony.
7. Purpose is Universal	The universal Purpose for humanity is to be conformed by faith to the image of God through Christ who is our destiny, who provides hope and significance in this world.

Table (Munroe 1992, p. 26)

Appendix 4

SHAPE: Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gifts		
S	Spiritual Gifts	Every believer is given a unique spiritual gift for ministry and must be discovered and used. 'A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church'.
H	Heart	We are encouraged to listen to the desires of our heart, as a clue to include 'hopes, interests, ambitions, dreams, and affections'.
A	Applying Your Abilities:	Abilities can range from architectural...engraving, embroidering, debating, poetry...'
P	Using Your Personality:	Recognises all humanity have a unique DNA and personality type which is relevant and a clue for ministry areas. (Introverts versus extroverts, thinkers, and feelers. (Warren 2002: 244-245)
E	Employing your Experiences:	Family, educational, vocational, spiritual, ministry, and painful experiences encountered are further clues that are relevant to God's divine purpose and assignment.

SHAPE diagram. (Warren; 2002: 236-248)

Appendix 5

How to Reset to Reach Your Destiny:	
Social Reset	Reset relationship priorities which may include resetting or widening associates.
Spiritual Reset	Consider deepening spiritual roots. 'Spirituality is the gas that gets you to Destiny' (Jakes, 2015:103)
Physical Reset	Reset how you 'feed' the body, i.e., lifestyle, diet, skin, weight, and presentation.
Emotional Reset	Develop the courage to manage historical and emotional challenges. Be practical, through counseling.
Relax to reset	Self-care through mind and body rest.

Reset Diagram: (Jakes, 2015:103-104)

CANTERBURY CHRISTCHURCH UNIVERSITY

Research on Purpose.

Participants Required!



I am a Theology & Religion Research Student at Canterbury Christchurch University. I am interested in exploring the research idea of purpose which is talked so much about amongst Christians in America. I have been thinking about the subject from the perspective of being a Black Christian Women in Britain. My membership with NTCG, spanned over 26 years, and would be very interested in your views and perspectives on this so have decided to expand the research to include the voices of women from the NTCG, England. It would be great if you could take part.

If you are interested, please email your availability to:

c.a.mckenzie885@canterbury.ac.uk

Thursday 14 th October 2021	6.00 pm-7.30 pm	7.30 pm – 9.00 pm
Saturday 16th October 2021	11.00 am – 2.30 pm	2.00 pm – 4.00 pm
Saturday 16th October 2021	6.30 pm	8.00 pm

Many thanks

Ms Carol Mckenzie [MA Research Student CCU]

CANTERBURY CHRISTCHURCH UNIVERSITY

Research on Purpose.

9th October 2021

Dear Participant

I am a Theology & Religious Studies Research Student at Canterbury Christchurch University.

I am interested in exploring the research idea of purpose which is talked about much in the Black Majority Christian Churches both in Britain and America. I have been thinking about the subject from the perspective of being a Black Christian Women in Britain. I held membership within one of the New Testament Church of God (NTCG) churches in Britain, serving for over 26 years, and would be very interested in the views, perspectives, and voices of women from across the different churches in NTCG, England. It would be great if you could take part.

I will be facilitating a series of online focused group interviews via Zoom with clusters of 4 women per group for the duration of 1.5 hours and the meeting will be recorded strictly for research purposes. I will create a code of conduct to encourage respect for each participant however cannot promise absolute confidentiality, some topics may be sensitive and opting out will be possible. There is no compensation for participating in this study however, your participation would be an invaluable addition to the research findings and could lead to a greater understanding of the notion of purpose.

If you are willing to participate, please email me at c.a.mckenzie885@canterbury.ac.uk

In the first instance express your availability on the following dates:

Thursday 14 th October 2021	6.00 pm-7.30 pm	7.30 pm – 9.00 pm
Saturday 16 th October 2021	11.00 am – 2.30 pm	2.00 pm – 4.00 pm
Saturday 16 th October 2021	6.30 pm	8.00 pm

Kind Regards

Carol Mckenzie [MA Research Student at CCU]

The Souls of Black Folk Double Consciousness

'The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of his older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity close roughly in his face.'

The Souls of Black Folk (Du Bois, 1903) in Harris (1995: 2-3) 'Racial and Ethnic Identity Psychological Development and Creative Expression, NY, London: Routledge

Love Lesson

Love lesson 1 – refers to the importance of reinforcing their spirituality, teaching the agape love, and fostering the power of prayer and affirmation through exposure to a faith community to improve psychological well-being (Petts, 2014).

Love lesson 2 – reveals a connection to a positive sense of ‘racial identity’ and heritage, and improves a sense of self-image, esteem, and pride (Hesse-Biber, 2004, p. 58). Therefore, a commitment to sharing affirmative stories of Black women’s success, the impact of race and culture, alongside how they overcome struggles is highly recommended.

Love Lesson 3 – Suggests a positive environment, encouraging interests, skills, and extra-curricular activities, through enriching educational and life experiences to build pride, self-esteem, positive self-concept, and confidence. Moreover, the power of positive self-talk, affirmations, and creatively, reinforces key images and life of Black women’s beauty. Afejuku et al (2017, p.256) cite Britton, (2007, p1) who states: ‘Your daughter creates a positive inner voice by promoting positive self-talk’.

Love lesson 4 – Teaching self-sufficiency through alone time, reflection, journaling thoughts and feelings, and personal dreams without media distraction harnesses self-contentment, inner security, and completeness.

Love lesson 5 – Developing Self-advocacy, considering the reality of intersecting oppressions instils self-love. Promoting the confidence to use one’s voice appropriately. Teaching the legacy of women who engaged in activism and social justice such as Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth provides tangible examples for roleplaying scenarios of conflict, advocacy, and solutions.

Love lesson 6 - Teaching the importance of establishing good friendships, alongside relational boundaries is paramount. Facilitating reflection on positive qualities and traits of mother’s friendships can instil self-value, love, respectful loving relationships, and ways to repair or exit from relational ruptures.

Love lesson 7 – Research reveals that modelling romantic love, and engaging in conversations about love experiences, feelings, intimacy, joy, trust, and respect is the most authentic means of teaching healthy love relationships. This must be balanced with an awareness of the types of relationships to avoid, including abusive behaviours and boundaries.

Love lesson 8 – focuses on exposure to people from diverse backgrounds through activities such as volunteering and generating social/global awareness and respect for others.

Love lesson 9 – refers to the benefits of altruism, where messages of being blessed are reinforced, alongside encouraging altruistic values and actions of giving to help others as a means of harnessing effective global citizenship.

Love lesson 10 – Encouraging dreaming big, cultivating positive imagination towards purposeful life goals, and measuring achievements through journaling is an essential means of harnessing self-love.

Love lesson 11 - Black girls and women require strategies for developing resilience whilst navigating their dreams in an oppressive world by teaching that failure and setbacks provide opportunities for perseverance, growth, learning about self, life, and love to improve self-concept.

Love Lessons: Black Women Teaching Black Girls to Love

Afejuku et. al in Evans et al (2017), Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

pp. 245 -264

A Woman Designed by God

In the beginning, God created woman; she was beautifully, wonderfully made in the likeness of an image of God. She is unique, special, full of much worth and inestimable value, the crown and glory of all creation; specially endowed with Individuality, personhood, human dignity, intelligence, and free will. She is the handiwork of a loving God: the unparalleled work of art intricate in design, of complex personality and exquisite beauty with a predetermined purpose and foreordained destiny to fulfill...possessing multi-functional gifts and skills yet she is no unmitigated consummateness.'

Muriel Mohabir in *Sisters with Power* ed. Bishop Joe Aldred 2000, London: Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership.

African Cultural Heritage for Churches- Lesson Plan

Black History Month

Famous Black Men and Women


Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks was born in America and as a child she became aware that people were treated differently because of the colour of their skin. She noticed that black people were kept apart from white people; in many buildings they had to use different entrances, at the bus stop black people had to stand in line while the white people sat and waited on a bench, they had to use different public toilets and go to a different church. Rosa didn't understand why black people were being treated differently because of the colour of their skin and she didn't think this was fair. However, Rosa grew up following the rules that the government had made and didn't make a fuss.

When catching a bus, black people had to sit on seats at the back of the bus while white people sat on special seats at the front of the bus and if the bus was full, a black person was expected to give their seat to a white person even if they would have to stand for the whole journey.

On December 1st 1955, Rosa caught a bus home and sat in the seats for the black people. The bus was full and when a white person got on the bus Rosa refused to give her seat, just because she was black. She was arrested by the police and fined for breaking the rules, but thousands of other black people and some white people as well, agreed with Rosa and made this clear to the American government. They refused to take the bus to work or school and marched through the streets for 381 days. The bus companies lost a lot of money!

Eventually they changed the rule and black people no longer had to sit in a separate section of the bus or give up their seat to someone just because of the colour of their skin.



Rosa Parks
1913 - 2005

twinkl

Resource sourced from: www.twinkl.co.uk.

Appendix 12

A WOMANIST JUSTICE MODEL

Ida Wells-Barnett, an African American woman, used her faith, and vocational competence as a journalist and author as a vehicle for driving civil rights activism during the 1890's. Her campaign was against the lynching of African Americans. Six key principles from her life and work are identified as relevant for informing justice.

(1) **Obedience:** Here, the author identifies discerning God's will, for an area of injustice within society, as a priority. A clue to this is when a genuine sense of empathy is felt. Discernment and empathy, however, are to be followed with obedience for enacting clear strategies of activism.

(2) **Authoritative use of scriptures:** accepting and relying on scripture is deemed important. However, this needs to happen in dialogue with sciences, humanities, and Black women and men's lived experiences. The author advocates for both genders to share a mutual understanding of needs and be united in community justice, as this reflects the communal vision of the Womanist tradition.

(3) **Pain and suffering:** the notion that women's suffering is a part of God's will be rejected, particularly given the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression in Black women's lives (Grant, 1989, Mitcham, 2002). Instead, Townes (1993, p.196) re-imagines the resurrection of Christ, as God, 'transitioning power of pain', as the liberating agent of change. I suggest that Paul's encouragement in the following biblical verse is relevant here; 'For all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord and are called according to his purposes' (Romans; 8:48).

(4) **Liberation and reconciliation:** this refers to the ambition for social liberation alongside spiritual liberation; attainable through affirming pride, dignity, and a sense of self-worth. Townes illustrates that any goal towards a transformative and just society, can only be achieved through divine and human collaboration.

(5) **Pastoral voice:** essential pastoral characteristics are identified for establishing justice work in the community. Suggested is the capacity to balance the maintenance of a moral code, with the ability to display genuine understanding and empathy for people's process and journey of transformation.

(6) **A prophetic voice:** five distinct components are identified: this includes the ability to discern God's will for the oppressed, identify injustice in society, advocate a rationale for social action, establish mutual respect for partnering with others/agencies, and finally, create a community of faith through effective pastoral relationships.

Emilie M. Townes - *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope* (1993, pp.183 - 212)