

NOT FORSAKEN

By Chris McNair

HANDOUTS FOR BIBLE STUDY

Contents

Session 1: The Color of God	Session 5: Just Wanna Be Happy
Session 2: Becoming a Man	Session 6: Fitting In
Session 3: A Godly Man	Session 7: Being Black
Session 4: A Christian in the Hood	Session 8: In Christ

NOT FORSAKEN

Growing Up Black, Male, and Christian in the Hood

Copyright © 2021 Abingdon Press
All rights reserved.

Permission is granted to photocopy these handouts for local church use only.

This material has been prepared for use with the book *Not Forsaken*, which was published as:

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021930356

ISBN 13: 978-1-7910-0000-4

ePub ISBN 978-1-7910-0001-1

Scripture quotations unless noted otherwise are taken from the Common English Bible, copyright 2011. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations noted (NRSV) are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org/>

NOT FORSAKEN

SESSION ONE: THE COLOR OF GOD

Let's go!

Watch the video, "Images of Christ."

- Did you see yourself in the images of Christ? In what way?
- How do you feel seeing Christ portrayed this way?
- How important is it that Jesus "looks like you"?
- Different ethnic groups portray Christ in different ways. Why?
- Do you relate to these images? Why?

What does God say about it?

John was a disciple of Jesus and a close friend. Read about his vision of Christ in **Revelation 1:12-16**.

- How does his description compare with other images that you have seen?
- Consider the phrases, hair like "wool" and "feet like burnished bronze" (NRSV). Does this sound like a White or Black person to you? Why?
- Do you think it matters what a person thinks God or Jesus looks like? Why?
- If Jesus came to your neighborhood, and he wanted to fit in with everyone else, what would he look like?
- What would he wear? How would he act?
- How would you know it was Jesus? How would you react to him?

Read John 4:24: "God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth."

- What do you think this verse means?

The Bible says that God is spirit, and therefore has no human body, color, or ethnicity like we do. He is beyond those things. But for the present, in our society, color and culture have a significant impact on our lives. God has no color, yet all ethnic groups come from him. So the question "What color is God?" is not about his physical appearance; it has to do with how we identify with him, how we relate to him. Different cultures portray Christ in different ways to reflect their own cultural identity. What color is God to you?

Think about it!

Can a Black person relate to Jesus? Do you feel like you can relate to him?

Chop it up!

Young Black men in the city may find many points of identification with Christ.

Matthew 2:13-18: Like young Black men in the city, *Jesus was endangered as a child*. After the wise men from the East came to visit Jesus as a child, King Herod tried to kill him. King Herod actually murdered an entire community of male children two years old and younger in order to get Jesus. But Jesus escaped because God warned his father to take his family to Egypt.

Luke 2:22-24: Like many young Black men in the city, *Jesus grew up poor*. He was born in very humble circumstances and it is obvious Mary and Joseph were not wealthy (born in a stable). According to religious law the firstborn male must be dedicated to the Lord through an offering of a pair of doves or pigeons. But in the Book of Leviticus (12:8) we see that the law requires an offering of a lamb. And only if you could not afford a lamb, pigeons or doves were acceptable. If one needed pigeons or doves you only had to go out into the desert and catch one. This is the offering Mary and Joseph made for Jesus.

Luke 2:41-52: Like many young Black men in the city, *Jesus was likely raised by a single mom*. The Bible mentions his father, Joseph, up until Jesus was about twelve, but when Jesus is an adult his father is no longer in the picture. At least for a time, there was no father in Jesus's home.

Matthew 5:38-42: Like young Black men in the city, *Jesus was persecuted and harassed for his ethnicity*. He experienced racism as a Jew in Roman-occupied Judea. Jesus's admonition to turn the other cheek, surrender your cloak, or carry another's burden derives from the mistreatment Jewish citizens received from Roman soldiers.

Like young Black men in the city, *Jesus's lineage made him Black*. We know that Jesus was born and raised in a part of the world whose population was a blend of African and Asian forebears. By the "one drop" Jim Crow-rule of segregated America, if you have one drop of Black blood, society considers you a Black person. By our standards today, Jesus was indeed a Black man.

I'm down with Christ!

- What are some ways that you, as a young Black man, may relate to Christ?
- What are some things you have in common with Jesus?

Chop it up with God!

Lord, help me to realize that You made me, You know me, and You have plans for me. You made me how I am, and I am a wonderful and special creation. I can relate to You, because I come from You. Help me to know that I am special, because I come from you; in Jesus's name. Amen.

NOT FORSAKEN

SESSION TWO: BECOMING A MAN

Let's go!

Watch the video, "Man Up."

- What did you think of their discussion?
- Were there any questions or responses that you especially liked? Any that you disagree with? Anything you would add?

What does God say about it?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:11: "When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, reason like a child, think like a child. But now that I have become a man, I've put an end to childish things."

- How do you know when you become a man?
- What are some of the "ways of childhood" that you must put behind you?
- What are some ways men talk, think, and reason differently than boys?
- Name some changes boys go through toward becoming a man.
- Name some things you will be able to do as you grow older: when you are sixteen; when you are eighteen; when you are twenty-one.

Think about it!

- How do you *know* when you are a man?

Chop it up!

The Bible offers a formula for growth from Jesus's life. **Read Luke 2:52:** "Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people."

Wisdom: A young Black man must have wisdom. The pursuit of knowledge is critical to thrive in society today. But along with knowledge the young Black man must learn to use and apply it. European (White) culture thrives on academic knowledge, but the nature of African (Black) culture derives from experiential, practical, and relational knowledge as well. The young Black man in American society needs knowledge from both cultures. Working hard to gain knowledge and training at school and submitting to authority over him (parents, teachers, employers, police) is the path to wisdom.

- What are some ways you can gain wisdom?

Stature: A young Black man must be healthy in mind, body, and spirit. The body is not just about the physical, but we must seek and possess emotional health as well. Being physically and emotionally fit in our practices and daily habits is essential. Avoiding any form of chemical abuse (drug) or dysfunctional attachments (abusive relationships), having healthy lifestyles, and positive relationships makes us strong.

- How can you grow in stature?

Favor with God: A young Black man must grow spiritually. He must be connected to God to be authentically Black. We only gain God's favor if we honor God's Son and submit our lives to him. Our relationship with God through Christ is the most important one in our lives. Our identity must be in Christ.

- What are some ways you can grow spiritually?

Favor with men: The young Black man is a part of society and as such must gain favor with society. We have to give respect in order to gain respect. No one will respect us if we do not respect ourselves. If we are strong and positive on the inside, we will reflect those attributes on the outside. We are leaders and great contributors to society, not outcasts and castoffs.

- How can you gain or earn respect from others?

I'm down with Christ!

Instead of looking to others to signify when you have reached manhood, young Black men must turn to God.

- What kind of man do you want to be? Describe this person.

Chop it up with God!

Lord, help me to find my path in life. Help me to be the man you created me to be; in Jesus's name. Amen.

NOT FORSAKEN

SESSION THREE: A GODLY MAN

Let's go!

Name some qualities you think a godly man must possess.

What does God say about it?

Read Galatians 5:22-23. These are the attributes of a godly man, the fruits of the Spirit: peace, love, joy, patience, self-control, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness.

If you want to be a godly man, then you will follow Jesus and try to live like him. The fruits of the Spirit are qualities that grow in you as you try to live for Christ. They are opposites of ungodly, or worldly, values.

Read Galatians 5:19-21 (NIV). These are the attributes of a man far from God, the acts of the flesh: sexual immorality, dissensions (arguments and separation), impurity and debauchery, factions (gangs), idolatry and witchcraft, envy, hatred, drunkenness, discord, orgies (wild parties), jealousy, selfish ambition, fits of rage (uncontrollable anger).

- Which list is more common in your community, the acts of the flesh or the fruits of the Spirit? Tell some instances of when you've witnessed these attributes in your community.

Think about it!

- Which kind of man do you want to be?

Chop it up!

Situational ethics are a morality, or sense of what is right, that is dictated by the person and circumstance: they change depending on the situation.

For instance, many people think it is acceptable to lie, cheat, or steal, even kill to survive. Do you? Explain.

Which would you do? [You have to choose one extreme, you can't be in the middle]

- Smoke an offered joint?
Or refuse and be called a goody-goody?
- Steal something from a store?
Or do without something you really want?
- Beat somebody up to take their shoes?
Or keep wearing your "busted-out" ones?
- Have sex with a girl?
Or have people call you a virgin?
- Work a job where you have to clean bathrooms and wash dishes?
Or be broke?
- Cheat on a test?
Or study and do your best?
- Start a fight at school?
Or have people call you a punk?

Many people think doing wrong things are acceptable to get ahead. What do you think?

Are there times when doing something wrong or unlawful is acceptable behavior? If so, describe such a situation.

I'm down with Christ!

- What would it take for you to be a godly man, or Christian?
- Can you name any behaviors, or sin, that are keeping you from being a godly man?

Everyone has to choose. Do you want to be a good, or godly, man, or do you want to be an ungodly man? If you choose to follow Christ and live out his values it will not be easy, but it will be rewarding, both for this life and the one after. Choose what kind of man you want to be. Surrender your sins and ungodly desires to God; then through Christ, God will help you to be a new person. If you allow Christ to work in you and change you then you will be a godly person, a true Black man. None of us can do it without Christ.

Chop it up with God!

Lord, help me to be a Christian. Help me choose to follow you; in Jesus's name. Amen.

NOT FORSAKEN

SESSION FOUR: A CHRISTIAN IN THE HOOD

Let's go!

Watch the video: "Christian in My Context."

How relevant are these statements to your life? Rate them on a scale of one to five, one being irrelevant and five being very relevant.

- "I have to do this [something wrong/illegal] to survive."
- "I struggle to make good choices."
- "I'm afraid to become a Christian."
- "I have to protect my little brother and sister from the streets."
- "I have to protect my mother from her boyfriend."
- "You have to know whose turf you're on [or you're liable to get jumped]."
- "You have to be hard [to make it in my neighborhood]."

Explain your responses.

As a Christian in the city, you are often in conflict with the accepted social values of those around you. In the hood you have to live by a code of "street wisdom" and sometimes, to live like a moral Christian is to invite abuse and disrespect.

What does God say about it?

Read Matthew 16:24-27. This is what Jesus said about being a Christian, a follower of Christ.

"Deny yourself": this means to put aside the things you want in order to do the things Christ wants you to do.

- What is a "something" you have to stop doing, to follow Christ?

"Take up their cross": this means to follow Christ's example. The cross was the method by which Christ died. To take up the cross means to surrender our own lives to be the person God wants us to be.

- What are some things in your life you may have to give up to be more like Christ?

"And follow me": to follow Christ is to be obedient to his teachings.

Read Hebrews 13:5-6: “*I will never leave you or abandon you.*” If you give your life to Christ, he will be with you to help you—always—even in the hood.

You are never alone and you do not have to be afraid, because God is with you!

Chop it up!

There are many dynamics in the inner city that make it difficult for young Black men to live a godly life. The presence of gangs, crime, street violence, police abuse, domestic violence, and drugs breed fear, pride, greed, racial discrimination, and sexual temptation.

- How can these things keep a person from following Jesus?
- What makes a Christian different from anyone else? How does a Christian act?

What did Jesus say? **Read John 13:34-35.**

- Is it difficult to live the Christian life among your peers? If so, why?
- What about at home?
- Have you ever been in a situation where the behavior expected of you by your family was in conflict with how a Christian behaves? Describe the situation.

Think about it!

- It's not easy to follow Christ. So why should you do it?

I'm down with Christ!

So in the midst of the unique struggles facing you as a young Black man in the city, God calls you to be a follower of Christ. To live right, to have integrity, and to follow his teachings. He does not say it will be easy, but with God's help, are you up for the challenge?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation.”

If we surrender our lives to Christ, he will help us be the person he wants us to be.

Chop it up with God!

Lord, help me to surrender my life to you, help me to make good choices and live the way you want me to; in Jesus's name. Amen.

NOT FORSAKEN

SESSION FIVE: JUST WANNA BE HAPPY

Let's go!

Watch the first part of the video, "Just Wanna Be Happy."

- When asked what would make them happy many of them referred to finding purpose for their life. What do you think they meant by that?
- What is your purpose in life?

What does God say about it?

What is the meaning of life? The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes asks this question. This guy was rich and young; he had everything you might want, but he did not have a sense of fulfillment. He needed purpose in life, so he went to find it. We see in the first two chapters of Ecclesiastes he tries everything. Wisdom, pleasure, work.

He tried knowledge and wisdom. He studied everything. He says he was the smartest guy around, but yet he wasn't happy. Today he would've been a scientist or a doctor. He would've had the respect of everyone. He would've written a bunch of books. He might've been a professor or started a library. He must've been the most important person in his world, but he did not find fulfillment or purpose.

He tried pleasure—doing stuff that makes you feel good. Anything that could make you feel good, he did, but it didn't give him satisfaction. Partying, getting drunk, using drugs, having sex with a bunch of different girls, all kinds of things that give people

momentary pleasure and make your body feel good—but he was miserable.

He must've been very wealthy. This guy built houses and buildings and all kinds of enterprises and big projects. He was large and in charge, very powerful. He bought a lot of stuff, trying to be happy. In today's terms he probably had houses, cars, game systems, clothes, you name it. But he didn't find fulfillment. He says, "When I observed all that happens under the sun, I realized that everything is pointless, a chasing after wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

"Everything is pointless," he says, nothing matters (Ecclesiastes 1:2). He tried to discover the meaning of life through wisdom, pleasure, and power, but it only made him empty and miserable.

A lot of times we think money will solve all of our problems, but it doesn't. It didn't for him!

We all need purpose in life. Purpose gives us a sense of fulfillment. Fulfillment is that what makes you happy and content.

- What gives you satisfaction in life? What makes you feel content or happy?
- Is it material things?

Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10. You may have heard that the Bible says that money is the root of all evil, but what it actually says is that the *love* of money is the root of all evil (v 10). We can extrapolate the meaning of this verse to say that it is not money itself, or possessions, that bring happiness to a person, but gaining a sense of satisfaction and peace. This is what makes a person happy. On the contrary, the Bible says that if we make those things our primary goal in life, it will bring us unhappiness.

Think about it!

- Can money make you happy?

Chop it up!

Unfortunately, the acquisition of wealth and material possessions is a prevailing characteristic of our American lifestyle. But this will not bring you contentment or happiness. Those of us who grow up in humble circumstances often fall into the trap of believing that being rich would solve all of our problems. That it would make us happy.

- Do you think a person can be happy in spite of living in difficult circumstances (for example, being poor or sick)? Explain.
- According to 1 Timothy 6:8, what does a person need to be content in life?
- Which would you choose: happiness and contentment, or wealth?
- Can a person have both? How?
- Which is more important to you?

- God's plan for you is to be happy, content, and at peace. Regardless of how much money you have or where you live.

Read Hebrews 13:5-6. Remember, there is nothing wrong with wanting to be rich, but we cannot let our love of money or possessions come before God or other people. In life, you can gain long-lasting happiness and contentment, regardless of your circumstances, by living a life for Christ. If you have Christ, you have everything you need to be happy.

I'm down with Christ!

Read Ecclesiastes 3:12-14. So the writer of Ecclesiastes discovered that the true meaning in life is to be happy and do good. This sounds too good to be true, too simple, but it's true. It's the way God made us.

We can find happiness in the things God has given us: family, relationships, our jobs, hobbies, and other things; and we can do good by helping others. This is how God made us. If we commit our lives to serving God and doing good, God will give us everything we need. God promised.

Read Philippians 4:19: "My God will meet your every need out of his riches in the glory that is found in Christ Jesus." Now isn't that better than just being rich?

Chop it up with God!

God, help me to be happy and do good in my life. Help me to accomplish the dreams you have given me; in Jesus's name. Amen.

NOT FORSAKEN

SESSION SIX: FITTING IN

Let's go!

Watch the video, "How Do I Fit In?"

Everyone has a basic human need to belong—to have a place where they feel like they fit in.

- Does the young man in this video feel like he has a place where he belongs? How can you tell?
- Do you ever feel that way?
- Do you have a place or places you fit in? family? friends? school? your neighborhood? other?

We all have a basic need to fit in, a need to belong. You can't survive without it. If it isn't met in positive ways, it will be met in negative ways.

- What are some negative ways your peers try to fit in?

These are often stereotypical behaviors young Black men in the inner city engage in to find a way to fit in. But you don't have to, because you belong to Christ.

What does God say about it?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.

You belong to God! You don't have to follow someone else to feel like you fit in. You don't have to try to be like someone else to try to fit in. You don't have to do something you don't like or that you are not sure about in order to fit in. You are fine just the way you are. You belong to God!

Read Psalm 139:13-18.

God made you, and he made you special and unique. Take a moment and look at your fingers closely. See the pattern of swirling lines on your fingers? That is your fingerprint. You are the only one in the world with that print. There is no one else like you. No one else in the world has your unique DNA. When God made you he broke the mold!

- How does that make you feel about yourself?

Think about it!

God made you special! You are one of a kind!

If you recognize that you belong to God, you are part of a special community, like a family. The community of God. The Bible calls it the Church, the body of Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26: The body of Christ is the Church.

- What is the main characteristic of this community?

Read Ephesians 2:19-22.

You are not a stranger who does not fit in. You belong to God's people. You are a part of God's family!

- In the video, there is an image of a police officer firing a gun. How does that make you feel?

There have been far too many instances of the police shooting young Black men in our urban neighborhoods. There are far too many instances of gang violence and shooting as well. It promotes a sense of fear and lack of safety among inner-city residents. Fear and the threat of violence is a fact of life for many young Black men.

- How do you live with it?
- What is the opposite of love?

If you said hate, you are wrong. The opposite of love is fear.

Read 1 John 4:15-18: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear."

God is love, he is perfect love. If you are in God (living for God, loving God) you do not have to be afraid. You do not have to be controlled by fear or fearful things, because you belong to God. If you live your life to serve God and help others, even if you live in a dangerous environment, you don't have to live in fear. You can live in love. You can live in Christ.

I'm down with Christ!

The Church is any group of people who come together in Jesus's name. The Church can be your group of friends, your family, or your sports team. If you share a connection to Christ, this is your family. This is where you belong, with God first and with others who belong to God. The Church is where you find belonging. The Church is where you find love. Whatever else you do in life, this is your essential connection. Your relationship with Christ is the most important relationship in your life. It gives the rest of your life meaning. If you know who you are in Christ, then you will know where you belong. No one can make you feel left out, no one can make you feel small, and no one can tempt you to do something that you know is not right. You are a child of God!

Chop it up with God!

Thank you, Lord, that my life has meaning because I belong to You; in Jesus's name. Amen.

NOT FORSAKEN

SESSION SEVEN: BEING BLACK

Let's go!

Watch the video, "What Does It Mean to Be Black?"

- What do you think of their responses?
- Anything you would add?

Think about it!

- What does it mean to you to be Black?

What does God say about it?

In the video the young men alluded to the power, strength, and confidence that come with being Black. One person pointed out that those qualities come from enduring pain and suffering. This is resilience, the ability to adapt to and overcome adversity. This is a critical part of our heritage and what it means to be Black—enduring suffering and struggle, building resilience to be strong and confident in pursuing our life goals. This resilience is what every Black person needs to succeed in life.

Read James 1:2-4. God uses suffering and trials in every person's life to bring us closer to God.

Read 1 Peter 3:17-18. Black people, like Jesus, have often suffered even though they have done nothing wrong. And because of it, we, too, may be made alive in the Spirit.

Blackness comes from God. God made us. God is the author of Blackness. The Bible tells us that everything God created is good (Genesis 1:31). So whatever else it is, being Black is good. Being Black can be difficult sometimes, a struggle, maybe even an inconvenience. Being Black can be a stumbling block to other people, but that is their problem, not yours. Our Blackness comes from God, and it is good.

Blackness is biblical. Some of the most influential people in the Bible are Black, or dark skinned, having come from Africa.

- Moses is one of the most important people in biblical history. He was the leader of his people whom God used to lead them out of slavery, and God used him to give the Israelites the laws and bring them to the Promised Land. And Moses was married to an African woman (Numbers 12:1).
- Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus's cross, was a Black man from Africa (Matthew 27:32).
- Some of the leaders of the first organized church in the Bible were from Africa (Acts 13:1—Simeon called Niger [the Black man], Lucius of Cyrene [in Africa]).

For that matter, most all of the people in the Bible, being in the ancient Near East, were people of color. Everyone in that region of the world was a mix of African and Asian cultures. Therefore, one could make the argument that most people in the Bible are Black.

Black people have a spiritual heritage. Enslaved Africans somehow discerned the truth of who God is from their hypocritical “Christian” masters, practicing and living out the gospel of Christ in a dehumanizing existence. Prayerfully waiting for deliverance while at the same time actively struggling toward their own freedom. This spirituality sustained them through emancipation and the subsequent Jim Crow-era in which the dehumanizing of African descendants continued. This spirituality enabled them to take the higher road in the civil rights struggle that delivered civil freedoms although paid in blood. Black people must depend on that innate spirituality today as they continue to suffer from discrimination and racism resulting in disempowerment and poverty.

I’m down with Christ!

In order to not just survive but thrive in the world today, young people need resilience. Resilience is the ability to adapt to and recover from adversity, stress, or trauma. Young Black men can find resilience in Christ. Through biblical teachings and their own cultural heritage they can find a strong moral code to guide them in life. Through identification with Jesus and trying to live for him, they can overcome the stress and pressures of prejudice and racism, which they may encounter at every level of society.

Being Black is good! Being Black means to be spiritual, connected to God, and trusting him to take care of you through the hard times. To be Black means to be strong, to endure through suffering. To be Black means to be moral, to do what is right, and think of others before yourself.

Chop it up with God!

Lord, thank you for making me who and what I am. Help me to honor you by being the best me I can; in Jesus’s name. Amen.

NOT FORSAKEN

SESSION EIGHT: IN CHRIST

Let's go!

Listen to and watch the video, "Who I Am in Christ."

Listen to the poet and pick out the themes that touch you personally.

- What do you hear him saying?
- Is there anything that you identify with?

Being a Christian is all about faith. It's not about what you do, it's about what Christ did. It's all about your position in Christ. When Jesus died on the cross for us, he opened the way for us to be positioned in him as a child of God. It affects who we are in relation to God, in relation to the world, in relation to sin. If we are in the right position, nothing can move us. And that position is being in Christ. Knowing who you are in Christ gives the Christian advantage, strength, and power for life's struggles. It's a knowing that comes by faith.

What does God say about it?

Read Ephesians chapter 1 (NIV). Paul repeatedly speaks to the benefits and effects of being in Christ for the believer.

- Verse 4: In him we were chosen to be "holy and blameless."
- Verse 7: In him we have redemption and forgiveness.

- Verses 11-12: In him we were chosen "for the praise of his glory."
- Verse 13: We are included in Christ, marked "in him" for the promised Holy Spirit.

These things are ours simply by virtue of our position in Christ. The believer does not have to do anything to be forgiven, to be holy, to be chosen by God, to receive the Holy Spirit. It has already been done for us by Christ! We do not have to do anything but believe it and own it. We have not earned it—it is given us by God. We are saved by grace, through *faith*.

Grace means to incur God's favor. It cannot be earned, no one is good enough. We don't get God's grace because we are good, or because we go to church or because we don't do bad things. We receive it because, and only because, we believe in Jesus (faith). It is a gift from God.

You have been chosen by God. Not because you've earned it or deserve it in any way, but simply because he loves you. Describe how that makes you feel about yourself and your life.

Read Ephesians chapter 2.

- Verse 5: Instead of being dead in our sins we are "alive with Christ."
- Verse 6: We are raised up with Christ and seated with Christ. [Where is Christ? At God's right hand, and we are with him.]
- Verse 10: We are created in Christ "to do good works." We are on this earth for a reason.
- Verses 12-13: We were separate from Christ (spiritual death), but now by his blood we are in Christ.

- Verses 19-20: We are no longer strangers, but members of God's family, in Christ. We are not lost and alone, in Christ we belong!

Now how do these truths apply to the life of a young Black man living in the inner city? The young man who embraces this truth of being in Christ and internalizes it will revolutionize his life. He will never be the same. Nothing and no one may stand against him. No problem cannot be solved, no obstacle cannot be overcome, no person can hold him back, the devil cannot defeat him. God is for him, who can be against him (Romans 8:31)!

Chop it up!

What is your greatest struggle in life right now?

The main thing holding young Black men down in our society is not racism and prejudice. The main thing holding young Black men back from being the men they are created to be is the belief that we are subject to our circumstances. The belief that we have no control over our lives.

You have control over your life!

Young Black men respond to problems in their family, problems at school, problems in their community, problems in society. We believe that our choices are limited by our problems, that we have no control over our lives. But we do!

You have control over your life!

Many young Black men believe that the locus of control is external, that they are controlled by circumstances around them. It is not. It is our own choices that control our lives. The locus of control for young Black men is internal, not external. If you surrender your life to Christ's control, nothing can hold you back.

You have control over your life!

In order to have success in life, young Black men have to shake off the shackles of seeing yourself how the world and society sees you. You have to see yourself how God sees you: as being strong, intelligent, capable, and full of promise and potential. You have a calling in life—to believe in Christ and to do good works! Giving Christ control of your life is accepting freedom to be the man God created you to be and rejecting the bondage of this world.

I'm down with Christ!

Being in Christ gives you purpose as a young Black man.

Being in Christ gives the young Black man community and a sense of belonging. Being in Christ gives the young Black man control over his circumstances and potential for his future. Being in Christ gives the young Black man power to be the person God wants him to be.

- Now that you know who you are in Christ, how is that going to make your life different?

Chop it up with God!

Lord, help me to know who I am in Christ— that I am a child of God, that I belong to you. Help me to give my life to you completely so that you can have control of my life. Jesus, come into my life. Take over my life so I can be the man you want me to be; in Jesus's name. Amen.