

THE WHOLE MAN

**40 SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS
FROM BLACK MEN ON THE
HEAD, HEART, HANDS, AND SOUL**

**STUDY GUIDE WITH
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Thank you for downloading the discussion guide to accompany the videos and text of *The Whole Man: 40 Spiritual Reflections from Black Men on the Head, Heart, Hands, and Soul*, edited by Rasool Berry, Dr. Maliek Blade, and Pastor Jerome Gay Jr. We pray the videos, the book, and this guide will help you facilitate deep, transformational discussions to help men realize the wholeness available to them. To create this book, we've worked with more than twenty-five gifted brothers. They have shared their experiences and wisdom regarding faith and mental health, faith and love, faith and work, as well as faith and soul—in other words, faith and our whole being.

This guide is meant to serve as an outline and help as you work with other men to uncover their wholeness. If you're using this in a small group, we suggest you begin with "Soul." If you're using the videos and book individually, you can start wherever you feel a need or wherever you have a natural connection or curiosity.

We've included some guidelines below for group leadership. Use them to create a comfortable environment that promotes engagement, Bible study, and reflection as your small group journeys toward wholeness. Of course, feel free to add any that you think might be important to encourage honesty and vulnerability.

How to Create a Safe Space for *The Whole Man* Discussions

1. Establish Expectation of Confidentiality

The foundational rule for the group: “What is shared in the room, stays in the room.” It is crucial for men to know that they can be honest without it becoming gossip or their comments getting back to other people. Make sure men know that their stories, life experiences, and struggles won’t leave the discussion group. Prepare men who participate to respond in generic ways when someone asks, “How was the discussion?” Their responses can get into detail about their personal insights (for example: “I realized that I could bring my struggles to God.”) but must not describe other men’s testimonies. If there is a story or lesson that someone in the group believes will benefit others, then the person who shared should be asked if he is okay with sharing that testimony in another context. Remind the brothers: “Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered” (Proverbs 11:13 ESV).

2. Model Vulnerability

Be sure to let your small group know that you would like to create a safe place for everyone to be authentic and transparent. The best way to create an authentic environment is to set the example by being open and transparent as a leader. Share some of your personal story—some of the trials you have gone through in life and how the Lord was with you in and through them.

Sharing current struggles shows that you are not perfect, and it helps create a place where it is okay to share vulnerably with one another—a place where imperfect people can be themselves.

The more vulnerable/authentic you can be as a leader, the more open your group will be.

Be sensitive to the needs of the group while keeping the men engaged; if possible, have counseling recommendations readily available for those who need professional help in processing some of the information that surfaces. (Note: Dr. Maliek Blade’s organization, the Whole Brother Mission, has created a network of counselors experienced in reaching the *Whole Man* audience. Go to wholebrothermission.com for more information. While we support the efforts of the Whole Brother Mission, the organization is not affiliated with Our Daily Bread Ministries.)

3. Value Time

As a small group leader/facilitator, it honors the men in your group when you are sensitive of everyone's time. Be sure to start on time and end on time. If you run into a situation where you are behind on time, as a courtesy, stop the group at the closing time and let the group members know that if anyone needs to leave, they are free to go at that time.

Be sensitive to the move of the Holy Spirit to know when you need to venture off script or extend your time.

4. Facilitate Group Discussion

Remember that facilitating is not the same as preaching or teaching. Be sure that when you facilitate your group time, you spend less time teaching and giving instruction and more time asking questions and drawing the members out. As a facilitator, you are there to stimulate good discussion among the group members and encourage everyone to participate. Teaching may come out during the time, but be sure you are giving quality time for each group member to participate. That will involve being okay with awkward silence. Some men are internal processors and take time to form their opinions. Other men are external processors and will immediately respond. Let them know you are okay with silence to allow men to process. You can even do this right after screening the video. Allow for some time (2 minutes) for men to simply reflect.

Help men be aware of the need to create space for others to share as needed. This could be before the session or even during the session if you notice some men are dominating the conversation.

5. Prioritize Prayer

Prayer is a vital part of any ministry. Spend time praying for each of your group members by name. Pray for clarity, transparency, healing, and wholeness as you embark on this journey together.

Adding a time for prayer to each group meeting is something to consider and is a way to bring the group closer to one another.

6. Study the Bible

Encourage the group members to read and review the scriptures introduced in the videos and the devotional for each section. Utilize some of the group time to read the scriptures and answer questions the men may have. Remember that the men will be at various places in their biblical knowledge and some teaching may need to be done to help some men understand the concepts. Be prepared with a central passage to pull from. Review the primary scriptures in the discussion guide below for the sections on "Head," "Heart," "Hands" and "Soul" for helpful examples of key Bible verses for a particular topic.

Soul

The “Soul” section of *The Whole Man* examines the struggles we have with God in the innermost part of our beings. Watch the video featuring the editors of *The Whole Man*: Rasool Berry, Dr. Maliek Blade, and Pastor Jerome Gay Jr.

Read Psalm 77, Psalm 46, Philippians 4:8, and 2 Corinthians 10:5.

How can you relate to the writer of Psalm 77? How can you pour your heart out to God? What would you say? Spend five minutes now writing a prayer like Asaph did in Psalm 77.

Jerome, Maliek, and Rasool shared about the importance of the practices of the soul: not suffering in isolation, prayer and meditation, pausing a busy life to rest (Psalm 46:10); rejecting negative prophecies over our lives (2 Corinthians 10:5), meditating on what is true and good, (Philippians 4:8), and reaching out to others for support (Proverbs 15:22). Which of these practices come naturally for you? Which are more difficult?

For more information on reading Scripture using the Lectio Divina method that Jerome mentioned, search the internet for a Lectio Divina guide.

Rasool and Jerome shared about the various voids left in their relationships with their biological fathers and how those gaps were filled through God as their Father. In addition, other spiritual fathers have helped them foster healthy relationships while still unpacking the impact of those foundational relationships (fathers, mothers, others). Has your relationship with your father helped or hurt you in your life? How? How has spiritual fatherhood (of God, spiritual fathers, and mentors) supported you in your life?

Jerome talked about the temptation we can have to “prophesy our own doom,” speaking negatively or in a defeated way about our futures. We might say, “I can’t get this degree because no one else in my family went to college” or “I can’t have a healthy relationship or marriage because all the relationships around me have failed.” How might that negative self-talk impact us?

Why is it important to remember that being a “whole man” is a progressive journey, not simply a destination?

In what ways does our culture define “wholeness?” What are the counterfeit paths of wholeness we see in our culture? What do you believe can truly make you whole?

Ask others: How are you seeing or experiencing me? Who do you trust to tell you the truth?

Read Colossians 1:15. Reflect on Jesus as fully human and fully divine. How do you see Jesus as a whole man? How does loving God with our heart, head, hands, and soul help us become whole?

Head

The section called “Head” focuses on our thought life and mental health. Watch the video featuring *The Whole Man* book contributors James Perkins, Dr. Nii Addy, and Amisho Baraka, hosted by Dr. Maliek Blade.

Read Philippians 4:8–9, Romans 12:1–2, Proverbs 20:5, and 2 Corinthians 10:5.

Maliek mentioned that the phrase “mental health” conjures up a variety of thoughts and emotions. What comes to your heart and mind when you hear the term “mental health”?

James mentioned that many men in his practice have felt shame about needing help and like they are “the only one” going through stress, anxiety, and emotions. How have you observed that in yourself or other men?

Dr. Addy identified two extreme perspectives about how to care for our minds and mental health. One reaction from people of faith is to reject that medical science or mental health professions like psychology can be helpful. The other is to reject that God can supernaturally heal us. How have you seen those extremes? Which side of the spectrum do you tend to lean toward?

Sho talked about how people can sometimes let us down because they have never learned how to support someone who needs mental health support. What can we do to better equip ourselves when someone shares that they are struggling with their mental health?

Dr. Addy described how being in community is necessary to be whole, especially with our mental health. How important is being in a tight-knit community to you?

Maliek described the various tiers of communication that people tend to live in:

- Tier 1: cliches
- Tier 2: facts
- Tier 3: opinions
- Tier 4: emotions, and
- Tier 5: sharing who you are.

What tier do you typically live in? Where would you like to be?

What’s one step you can take to strengthen your mind and mental health?

Heart

Next, we focus on the “Heart”—the seat of our emotions and the core of all relationships. Watch the video on heart featuring Dr. Eric Mason and Pastor James White, facilitated by Pastor Jerome Gay.

Read 1 Samuel 18:1–4, Exodus 18:1–27, and Acts 16:1–5

Dr. Mason mentioned that culture has various ways of talking about men, including “alphas” and “betas” (Note: not referencing fraternities, but pseudoscientific terms that describe men based on hierarchies in animal behavior). These categories of “types of men” differ from biblical frameworks (godly and ungodly). How have you experienced people defining “manhood?” How have those definitions been limited?

How does being made in the image of God (Imago Dei) shape our understanding of manhood?

Pastor White shared that the idea of men expressing emotions as “soft” comes from a culture of hiding vulnerabilities to be the “hero.” How have you seen the error of “emotions = soft” show up in the lives of men?

Jerome talked about the “necessity of relationships.” He presented several categories of healthy male relationships in the Bible:

- David needed Jonathan (friendship and support) and Nathan (accountability).
- Moses needed Jethro (an older man to give him advice).
- Paul needed Timothy (a younger man to mentor).

Which of these relationships do you have in your life? Which do you need the most?

Pastor White said vulnerability requires a safe space, but we need to be in a courageous place. Do you feel more in need of safety or courage to build deeper connections with your brothers?

Dr. Mason mentioned that disloyalty can prompt us to avoid trusting our emotions and internal world with other brothers, but that the gospel helps us heal through faith and forgiveness. Read Luke 22:54–62: How did Jesus experience this disloyalty with Peter?

Read John 21:15–19. How did Jesus respond to Peter’s disloyalty? How does being forgiven and restored help us move forward? How does forgiving and restoring others help us?

All three men talked about the importance of sharing all of our stories to create “real rooms.” How can the room you’re in become a “real room” right now?

Dr. Mason mentioned we need three C’s: Companionship (friendship), Community (network of people to help you), and Counseling (therapists to help you lay your story out). What do you think about the three C’s? Which can you pursue?

Hands

In this section titled “Hands” we turn our attention to the works of our hands: the importance of our work and rest. Watch this video featuring Aaron Carr, James Seaton, Chaz Smith, and facilitator Rasool Berry as they talk about the importance of hands.

Read Genesis 1:22, Colossians 3:23, Ephesians 4:28, and Psalm 90:17.

James shared how he struggled with finding joy when he chose his area of study and his first career to “be a big shot” instead of a career based on his gifts. Reflect on how you chose your work or how your work chose you. What would you do differently? What would you tell younger men?

Chaz discussed the “pressure” he felt from others and himself to do certain work in order to find affirmation, which resulted in the constant question: “Is it enough?” How have expectations of yourself (either others’ expectations or your own) shaped your perspective of work?

Aaron worked a job that he was previously ashamed of. However, he learned that his role was crucial to save a life and that “no matter where you go, you can grow.” How can you grow in your current work?

Aaron discussed experiencing “lazy guilt” when he has vacation or rest. Have you ever experienced “lazy guilt”? How can the practice of “sabbath rest” help us stop overworking?

Rasool observed God did not create “human doings” but “human beings.” How can the reminder that we are to simply “be” with God, our family, and ourselves help us value and live out rest?

Chaz discussed how he is living out his calling through storytelling that inspires hope and even through making people laugh on social media. How are you living out an aspect of your calling where you are right now (even if it’s not where you ultimately want to be)?

Aaron shared that he has struggled with knowing “the Father loves them” as something he and so many others need to hear. Take a moment to tell yourself and others in your group, “You’re doing a great job. You’re enough.”

Rasool mentioned Ephesians 2:10: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (ESV). How does this verse reinforce how God sees you and the work you do?