

**Charles Porter, Macedonia Baptist Church, Kansas City, MO**

I don't think I would have ever packed up the family and planned a summer trip to Alabama. But I'm glad I got the opportunity to go with this group of people. There was so much history that I thought I knew but learned so much more. As far as racial reconciliation, I would have been willing to meet anyone who was on that bus anywhere in the world and we still would have become friends. I am so thankful for the opportunity.



**Debbie Williams, Abyssinian Christian Church, Fort Collins, CO**

I was so blessed by participating in the Sankofa Journey. I now know why I was so persistent in asking God to make a way for Denese and me to join the group after having missed the flight.

I took time to process the experience after being on information overload. During that time, I asked myself a few questions:

1. At the very core, who am I?
2. Do I feel I have to cease being who I am in order to merge into a different culture?
3. Do I feel the need to deny my own beliefs in order to discuss hard racial topics with someone of a different ethnic group?
4. Do I realize that I was created by God in a very wonderful and unique way?

What I realize is:

1. Through all life has thrown my way, I have always stood up for myself and others who can't find their voice.
2. I don't let others define me or give them the right to "should" on me regardless of who they are.
3. I am willing and open to understand those who are not like me, but I also seek to be understood.
4. I am free to see color, embrace differences and celebrate togetherness in a world that seeks to divide.

Conclusion:

I am even more passionate about the Black Lives Matter movement after really thinking things through and digesting all that I have learned from the journey. It just makes good sense when I read Matthew 18:12 that if Christians are to make a difference in the face of injustice we must leave the 99 and go after the 1.

I will "be the bridge" as I seek to make a difference in this world, and I invite anyone to join me in continued dialogue who isn't afraid of getting dirty in order to be clean.



**Pastor Jon Black, Countryside Covenant, McPherson, KS**

If I'm honest, I was a kind of nervous before my Sankofa experience (primarily because of the long bus time). But from the very moment I stepped onto the bus until we returned, I experienced the perfect peace and joy of the Lord. The bus became our sanctuary for our time together. The sense of authentic community shared with my many new friends was something that only the Lord can accomplish. My experience taught me Kingdom truth that wasn't even on my radar. Truly life changing for me and

my ministry. You don't know what you don't know . . . until it is revealed by God and others.

**Rose Williams, Macedonia Baptist Church, Kansas City, MO**

I am thankful for the opportunity and the blessing to have experienced this Journey. Initially I was apprehensive about what I was getting myself into. Meeting my new friend Kristin King was a joy. She has the gift of making everyone feel comfortable, welcome and at ease. It was as if we were old friends reconnecting. The icebreakers at the church made it easy to ride the bus and engage with total strangers. The onboard movies were hard to watch, but necessary. The discussions were never confrontational or finger pointing. Every single place we visited and each speaker touched my heart. Growing up a black kid in the 60's didn't prepare me.



Rev Jean's words gave us so much to think about. Visiting both the Civil Rights Museum and 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham opened so many wounds that I thought were healed long ago. Anthony Ray Hinton's story of 30 years in prison and his treatment by the system even now was very sad to hear.

Seeing the actual place where Dr. King was assassinated, and Slave Haven. I was impacted emotionally and spiritually. I saw teary eyes of fellow Sankofa Journey members. Both black and white, male and female. The most unexpected words from white men, "I am so sorry for what has been done to people of color!"

This experience shows me that there is so much to be done and a long way to go for racial reconciliation. It also shows me that most people just don't know history. If they knew, they would not allow it to be repeated. I recommend the Sankofa Journey for everyone, especially young people. They have no idea how much better life could be without hatred.

**The debrief at the end of the journey showed me what God intended for his church to look like . . . black, white, male, female together . . . no judging, just love all around the room. I will cherish the new friendships and continue to do whatever I can to show the love of Christ to everyone.**



**Travis Nordstrom, MWC Executive Board/First Covenant Church, Omaha, NE**

Sankofa was in many ways a transformative trip and experience for me. Visiting the historic locations of the civil rights movement, walking through the museums, watching the videos, and having open, honest discussions . . . it has forced me to wrestle with and change my former perspective and the lens through which I see and understand racial injustice. It was also a joy to get to know many of the wonderful people on the trip!

**Regan Espinosa, Crossroads Covenant Church, Loveland, CO**

I did not know what to expect from the Sankofa Journey. I left home with uncertainty and returned with clarity. Through deep conversation with my prayer partner, Aisha, I was able to heal from some things I experienced in my past.



Growing up, I was bullied for having friends that were not white. I did not fit in the small town, and when I wanted to meet people different from me, it was not accepted, and I was ousted by friends and family. I did not realize those wounds were still there, and I was carrying pain and even guilt for what others had said about people of color. Aisha helped me heal.

Sharing my experiences with her, while going to the different stops on the prayer journey, I felt a big weight off my shoulders. This weight of guilt or shame for where I came from now, gave me freedom. This freedom gave me clarity. I had a deep spiritual awakening visiting the Equal Justice Initiative and Slave Haven. I saw a map at Slave Haven that showed the routes for the Underground Railroad. The route could have gone straight through the area where I grew up in Indiana, and yet it was a clear U-shape to go around that area. I asked about it, and our guide said, "Well, there were no safe houses in that area that you grew up in." The guilt would have sunk in . . . thoughts of "What can I do about that, that is so horrible and sad to me." But I had clarity. God reminded me of the Equal Justice Initiative and the Community Remembrance Project. I cannot change the history that I am not happy about, but I can bring awareness of it. With this project I will be collecting soil in January from an area in the Pueblo County of Colorado of a lynching. I will learn the history and the events the person went through that took place up to the event. I will be sharing this experience with my family and my community. My goal is to collect soil this year for this project in Indiana, as well, where I grew up.

God used the Sankofa Journey to heal, restore and focus on action. The Community Remembrance Project brings awareness of lynching in America. This prayer journey brought so much awareness in so many ways for me. A release of guilt . . . an understanding of what it is like for black Americans and people of interracial backgrounds in the world today. In all honesty, I would have not gone to the places we traveled on this journey unless I went on this trip. And now, I have a goal to return on a family trip with my husband and children to the places I went so they are aware and see what some history books do not share, and allow God to speak to them about racial injustice. Thank you for allowing me to take part in this experience. I am grateful for God and his grace and divine intervention to speak to me through my partner Aisha, the people on the Sankofa Journey and the places we visited.



**Aisha Thomas, Crossroads Covenant Church, Loveland, CO**

My journey to Sankofa began in November 2016, a full year before I knew Sankofa even existed. God began prompting my heart to take stock of my life and how I was using it to advance social justice in this world. He sent me the word "freedom" and I clung to that word like a spiritual lifeline throughout 2017. God continually guided me towards opportunities to learn, seek the truth, and strengthen relationships so when one of my church Pastors invited me to attend Sankofa in November of 2017,

I was ready in heart and mind. The format of the trip is genius. Fly to a new city, take an overnight bus ride into the deep south, while being paired with a person of a different ethnicity, "hip to hip for the whole trip." It's the fastest 72 hours I'd ever experienced, and perhaps one of the most influential in allowing God to speak to my spirit. It was truly a prayer journey of suffering, remembrance, and mourning. Sitting on the steps of the 16th Street Baptist church in Birmingham, AL, where four young girls died in a church bombing moved me to my knees as a mother. My daughter is the same age now as one of the bombing victims when she died. God broke my heart open that morning and called me to protect the children of the world as if they were my own. The opportunity to process, cry, and pray with my partner, Regan, throughout the entire trip was healing and awakening. In Romans 5:3-4, Paul says that "we also rejoice in our suffering, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope." The partnership with Regan was like this scripture. We couldn't change the past, but we could rejoice in the truth of the suffering and hope for our reconciled future. During the trip, my feet touched the ground where MLK, Jr., was murdered, where runaway slaves hid in a cellar on their way to freedom, where an impoverished community comes to pray and be rich in the Lord, where the enemy ran free on a bloody Sunday, and where a coalition of lawyers are working to free innocent men, women, and children from

the crimes that lie within our prison system. Sankofa was a spiritually-tasking, yet life-emboldened adventure! I recommend anyone seeking God take this trip. Be open to what He is calling you to do. My word of "freedom" came full circle after Sankofa, as I realized real freedom is the freedom to be who God has made us to be as we bring Him glory by loving and freely obeying Him. Thank you to Crossroads Church Loveland, Midwest Conference, and Sankofa for making this opportunity possible for me and my partner, as we both move to let our light shine in this world.

**Lori Anderson, MWC Business Manager/Community Covenant Church, Omaha, NE**

This was my second time to go on Sankofa. I had a different outlook going into this trip than I did on my first Sankofa trip. The first time I was very nervous and apprehensive. This time I was excited to experience Sankofa with more of an exposed awareness. The first time I was in a state of embarrassment, sadness, and ignorance. I thought, "How could I be so unaware?!" There is a great deal of history that I never learned in school or was never exposed to. I understand now what white privilege means and what "black lives matter" signifies.



On the Sankofa Journey there is real dialogue and fellowship between partners and participants. You spend a lot of time digging deep into the hard stories in history to understand where we are at in society today. Now the question becomes, "How do I engage and continue this journey today in my own community?"