

EXCERPT

IVP Books

A Sojourner's Truth
Choosing Freedom and Courage in a Divided World

October 9, 2018 | \$16, 208 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4552-1

Women Are the Unsung Heroes in This World

She gently touched my shoulder, then took my hand to lift me from the brown folding chair under the funeral-home tent. My eyes had been fixed on the steel silver bars as I watched strangers lower my mother's body into the ground. My Aunt Janet said to me, "Come on inside the church, Tasha. There are some things you just don't need to see."

I don't remember eating the meal provided at the church that day. I don't remember what I did before or after the service. I don't remember whether I wore my midshipman service dress blue uniform or a traditional black dress—it wasn't exactly a day for taking pictures. I do remember entering the old Baptist church, filled with family and friends, as songs of praise rang out from a full choir loft where my mother used to sing. Those black people, my mother's friends, stomped, rocked, and clapped their hands as they sang praises to Jesus. As I walked down the aisle, I worried about my immediate family: How would we make it without my mother? Who would love and lead us now?

My high school principal was one of the officials who carried the ceremonial flowers to the small gravesite outside, and she was allowed to sit in the front of the church until it was time to perform her duty. She called me several days later and said, "You know, Tasha, I watched you that whole service, and the only time you cried was when you looked at your immediate family. Somehow, you knew you were going to be alright because your mother gave you enough love to last a lifetime."

The truth was, I first experienced God's grace to me through the love and sacrifices of my dear mother.

The most difficult thing about her death was knowing that she would no longer share the important moments in my life. She would not be there to see me graduate from the United States Naval Academy. She would not be there to see me marry. She would not be present for the birth of my children—the son lost and the daughter who remains. My heart's deepest ache was not having an answer for the questions, *Who is going to love me like my momma? How do you define a home without her?*

I was sad and lonely. I poured myself into work. For years I bottled my emotions and did not sufficiently grieve. But when I thought I would emotionally die, God was gracious. He sustained my life by bringing other women who continued to show up when I needed motherly support.

When I returned to the Naval Academy and resumed college life, it was my mentor, Mary Thompson, who provided a haven for prayer, home-cooked meals, and a safe place for my many tears. When I graduated, it was my godmother, Mrs. Joyce Garrett, and her husband, Pop, who threw my best friend and me a graduation party because our lives, our accomplishments, and our new careers in the military were worth celebrating.

When I got married, it was my other godmother, Sister Linda Jones, who managed the wedding. I was not anxious because she was running the show. When my bridesmaids left my hotel room to head to the church, two of their mothers remained to help me get dressed and drive me to the church on that bright spring day. As my dear friends were

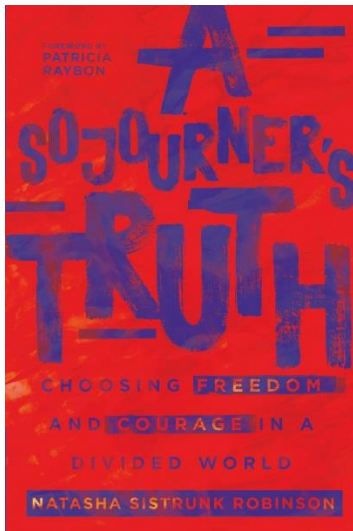


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preparing to stand as my witnesses, their mothers were taking care of me. I didn't ask them to do that; they just showed up. On that day there were no tears of sadness because I did not have my one and only mother. God in his grace had given me three.

One of Jesus' best friends, the apostle John, wrote of him, "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (John 1:16 NRSV). This truth I know full well.

God's grace sustains us through our beginnings and endings. Losing my mom when I was twenty felt like the end of being a daughter and the beginning of being a mother to my younger siblings—my sister and brother. I grew up very quickly in the four and a half years between my mom's funeral and my wedding. I became more responsible for myself—and for my father and siblings as well. There is a weightiness to becoming a matriarch. So, I learned to fully embrace that I am a strong woman and a leader.

I don't wear the "strong woman" title as a badge of honor, as if I had a blue leotard with a Superwoman emblem on my chest and a red cape flying in the wind—not anymore, anyway. I used to be the StrongBlackWoman that Chanequa Walker-Barnes describes:

[She] is the woman who constantly extends herself on behalf of others. In her intimate and family relationships, on her job, and in her church and community, she is the "go to" woman, the one upon whom others depend when they need assistance, counsel, or comfort. Driven by a deeply ingrained desire to be seen as helpful and caring, she is practically incapable of saying no to others' requests without experiencing feelings of guilt and worthlessness. As her willingness to help repeatedly reinforces others' tendencies to ask her for help, her very nature becomes defined by multitasking and over-commitment.

I still multitask, but I have learned to say no by establishing boundaries, setting aside the responsibilities that do not belong to me, and asking for help.

I have also learned that strong is not always the opposite of weak. Strong is knowing your own power and exercising it humbly. In his book *Strong and Weak*, Andy Crouch writes, "What we truly admire in human beings is not authority alone or vulnerability alone—we seek both together." Being a strong black woman is knowing quite deeply that the two—strength and weakness, authority and vulnerability—can coexist. This knowing is often born out of much suffering and sorrow.

Strong is knowing your own power and exercising it humbly.

—Taken from chapter two, "Grace: Truth is, women are the unsung heroes in this world"



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An Interview with Natasha Sistrunk Robinson

What experiences in your life brought about *A Sojourner's Truth*?

Natasha Sistrunk Robinson: After nearly twenty years of being in higher education and diverse professional settings, I was motivated to write this book because of the systemic challenges I observed as both a woman and racial or ethnic minority. The injustices were the same whether I was leading in a professional space or ministering in the church, and I wanted to give a historical and cultural analysis that was both deeply personal or relatable, and deeply theological or spiritual. When these elements come together, I believe we are in the better position to embody the redemption of Christ to a broken world.

What is *A Sojourner's Truth* about?

Natasha: This book tells my story as an African American woman leader alongside Moses' and the Exodus narrative. It allows me to show how God raises up an ordinary person from a marginalized people group to equip and challenge them to live as citizens of a new kingdom.

What messages are at the heart of *A Sojourner's Truth*?

Natasha:

- If we want freedom from this fallen world and its brokenness, and if we want to take bold and courageous actions, then we must first learn to tell the truth!
- Reconciliation conversations that do not include convictions and repentance from racial and systemic injustices stop short of the kingdom of God.
- Listening, learning from, and honoring the contributions of people of color and women in the church allows for a deeper theological understanding and true unity in the body of Christ.
- The intentional personal reflection and transparent sharing of our stories with "the other" gives space for the spiritual, emotional, professional, and character-shaping moments that help a person realize who God is and what he has purposed and positioned them to do.

What do you hope readers clearly hear from you in this book?

Natasha: We need to hear more stories that originate with and feature the voices and experiences of people of color. We need to see more women and men working and leading together across generations to advance the kingdom of God.

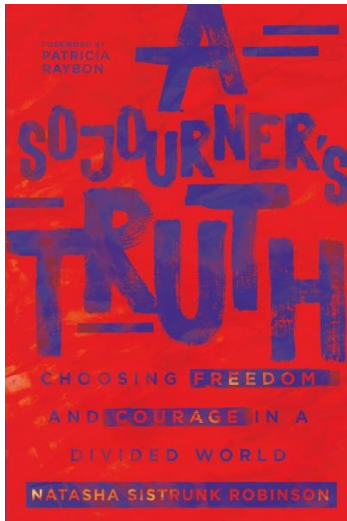


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While I was attending Gordon-Conwell, God began preparing my heart to write, so I started my blog, *A Sista's Journey*, and began publishing professionally in 2010. I specifically write about being a servant in God's kingdom with a focus on leadership, mentoring, reconciliation, and biblical justice. Attending seminary was personally transformative as I learned and practiced spiritual disciplines, explored the practical elements of mentoring and discipleship, and completed independent studies on the topics of prayer and fasting, racial reconciliation, and biblical justice.

Recent years have given me the opportunity to write regularly while serving my community and championing causes of passion. This work includes anti-human-trafficking advocacy, promoting education, and raising up the next generation of faith leaders. The latter work is a goal of Leadership LINKS, Inc., the nonprofit organization I founded with a team of like-minded friends and leadership experts.

When I am not working or ministering, you will find me at home living a slow and quiet life with my husband and little girl. My joys of solitude include reading, writing, watching movies, and spending quality time with family and friends. I also love dancing, celebrating theater and the arts, listening to life-giving music, having a great laugh, partaking in intelligent conversations, and eating delicious food!

Read more at NatashaRobinson.com. Follow her on Twitter: @ASISTASJOURNEY.



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