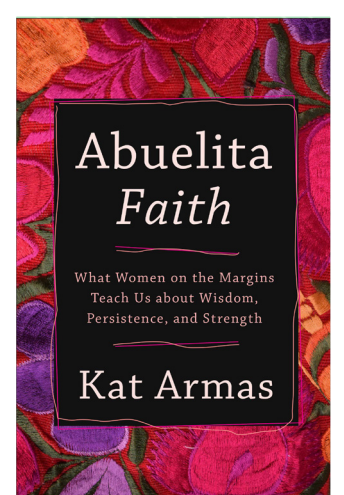




CBF Book Discussion Guide

by Alyssa Aldape



Abuelita Faith: What Women on the Margins Teach Us about Wisdom, Persistence and Strength

By Kat Armas

Introduction and Overview

What if some of our greatest theologians wouldn't be considered theologians at all?

This is the question that Kat Armas unpacks in her debut book *Abuelita Faith*. Armas is a second-generation Cuban-American who grew up in the Little Havana neighborhood of Miami. She comes from a long line of resilient mujeres who modeled for her what it meant to be a person of faith. Of note, her grandmother—her abuelita—was one of her early teachers of the faith.

For many people of color and more specifically for women of color, their teachers are the women who raised them. So why is it often the narrative that the foundation of theological thought and study is centered around a very specific narrative? What happens when we de-center one understanding of God and make space for and find God on the margins—in the spaces where the disciples often found Jesus to begin with?

Abuelita Faith is a collection of Armas' personal story alongside the biblical narrative she was taught as a young girl and beyond. She highlights the voices of those often dismissed, isolated, and oppressed because of their race, gender, socioeconomic status or lack of education. She invites us to rethink our greatest teachers of the faith. *Abuelita Faith* tells the stories of those who have

gone overlooked both in society and in the Bible, telling their stories in a light that shines on their goodness and prophetic witness—grandmothers, mothers, aunties, sisters and daughters. *Abuelita Faith* invites us to reimagine narratives often in control of those in power and asks us to reimagine that power.

Terms:

The author is unapologetic about writing in Spanglish and thus uses many Spanish words in her writing. As you read, I recommend that you highlight new Spanish words and have the Google Translate app at the ready. Go back and consider their meaning in the context of her work.

- Latine, Latino/a
- Liberation Theology
- Mujerista Theology
- Postcolonial
- Decolonization
- Divisive
- Truth Teller
- La Lucha
- Sobrevivir
- Lancha

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Book Discussion Questions

Chapter 1, Research Grief

- Armas writes about seminary being the place that broke open her understanding of theology. Discuss some of the early cracks she began to see.
- How does her identity as a Cuban-American Latina influence her understanding of theology?
- For Armas, who are *los humildes*? And why does their perspective matter?

Chapter 2, Abuelita Theology

- What are some descriptors of an “abuelita theology”? What is found in the ordinary that makes it profound?
- Who are the abuelitas who taught you about your faith? Who still teaches you?
- Discuss the creation of *Mujerista* theology and why it helps us all engage the biblical narrative.
- Who was Mama Tella?
- On page 30, Armas quotes botanist and citizen of the Potawatomi Nation, Robin Wall Kimmerer: “What does it mean to be an educated person? It means that you know what your gift is and how to give it on behalf of the land and of the people, just like every single species has its own gift.” What does this mean for Armas and her understanding of our abuelas?

Chapter 3, A Sabiduria That Heals

- Armas writes about the *refranos*—the refrains the women in her life taught her and have ultimately been life lessons. What are some refrains that the mothers and aunties in your life taught you that have now become cannon in your life?
- Discuss Armas’ understanding of wisdom and how we approach reclaiming wisdom.

- Who are women of wisdom in your life that have historically gone unnamed?

Chapter 4, Mujeres of Exodus

- Armas details her papi’s journey on the lancha from Cuba to the Florida coast. For her, water has deep symbolism; discuss its significance to her and to you, and the significance it has in our faith narratives.
- Armas quotes womanist theologian, Wilda Gafney, on page 54: “I don’t run from a fight or a hard text or a fight with a hard text. I believe in wrestling the bruising words until I squeeze a blessing out of them, no matter how down and dirty it gets or how out of joint I get.” What does this mean to author in the context of “exodus”?
- Discuss the role women and midwives play in this chapter and in the biblical narrative.

Chapter 5, Telling La Verdad (Truth)

- Truth telling, it seems, is divisive. But what does it mean for Armas? What does it say about disrupting norms? Disrupting white supremacy?
- What are the bigger implications of Hannah’s story? What power does her narrative hold?
- How would truth telling transform your life? Your community?

Chapter 6, Cosiendo and Creating

- Discuss the spiritual significance of *cosiendo*-sewing?
- Who are Tabitha and Joanna? What roles did they play in the Gospels? Why are their stories often overlooked?
- How does the creation of clothing and textiles tie into Armas’ broader understanding of an abuelita theology?

Chapter 7, *Sobreviviendo*

- For many who emigrated to the U.S. from Central and South America, Catholicism is a common faith tradition. A frequent narrative however is that many will become evangelicals-converts. While many do so in an authentic exploration of faith, some convert as a way to assimilate. What was lost for Armas? What did she lose as she navigated her new faith community?
- How did her new-found faith shape how she understood “suffering”? What harm can this definition cause in the Christian faith? What harm has it caused?
- Discuss how Ruth and Naomi used their power to gain autonomy. What role does the trickster or the *joderones* have?

Chapter 8, *Protesta and Persistence*

- Who is Rizpah? What significance does her story hold?
- This chapter is all about persisting and resisting oppression. And it seems that foremothers have historically played a role in organizing the movement. What does this say about the overlooked power of women in our communities? How have you seen this at work in your churches? In your communities?
- What power does the persistent widow in Luke 18 hold?

Chapter 9, *Desesperación*

- In this chapter, Armas writes about the desperation of women on the margins. She opens with the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15. We see Jesus respond to her in a way we don't like to admit as hateful. Discuss what this story means for the author and for our understanding of the foremothers' desperation and persistence. What does this bigger story say about the character of Jesus? Of God?
- Armas' theology of the table is beautiful. What happens when we assume we hold the power to welcome “people on the margins” to a table?

Chapter 10, *A Divine Baile*

- Discuss the significance that a *baile*—a dance—has for Kat, for the Latine Diaspora and in the biblical narrative.
- Kat writes on the hypersexualization of Latinas and, more specifically, of Black women in response to two specific Super Bowl halftime shows. Discuss how this is deeply rooted in white supremacy and colonialism.
- What does this say about the Church and how we as the Church navigate sexual misconduct from leaders?

Chapter 11, *Madre of Exile*

- For people of a Latine diaspora, Armas writes that the land of refuge is also the land that created their reason for exile. How does this change how you view immigrants coming from the southern border?
- Discuss the religion birthed in the home. What significance does this play for those in exile?
- What role does La Virgen play in liberation? What does it mean when she manifests in ways attainable to people on the margins?

Chapter 12, *Resolviendo in La Lucha*

- Who are Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah and what roles do they play in Armas' understanding of “la lucha”? Why is it important to say their names?
- Discuss Kat's understanding of *resolviendo* and vocation/calling. Why is it important to recognize the contexts in which we use these words? How has our western Christian understanding of “calling” influenced our views on survival and struggle?
- Where do you see women struggle—*luchando*— to create life, lineage and hope out of nothing? In the Bible and in your own life? How do these women embody a theology of God's abundance?



Further Reading

The God Who Sees: Immigrants, the Bible, and the Journey to Belong

by Karen Gonzalez

Beyond Welcome: Centering Immigrants in Our Christian Response to Immigration

by Karen Gonzalez

Quest for the Cuban Christ

by Miguel De La Torre

Afro-Cuban Theology

by Michell A. Gonzalez

Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality (Latin America Otherwise)

by Gloria Anzaldua

Book for Children and Young Adults

Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation

by Duncan Tonatiuh

Dreamers

by Yuyi Morales

Planting Stories: The Life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpré

by Anika Aldamuy Denise

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter Audible Logo Audible Audiobook

by Erika L. Sánchez