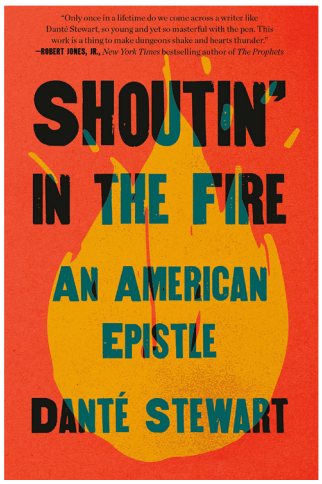
CBF Book Discussion Guide

by Alexis Weaver



Shoutin' in the Fire: An American Epistle

By Danté Stewart

About the Author

Danté Stewart is an award-winning writer and ordained minister. He was named "Georgia Writer of the Year" in 2022 by the Georgia Writers Association and as one of the "Ten Up-And-Coming Faith Influencers" by Religion News Service. Stewart's writing has appeared in major media publications including *The Atlantic, New York Times, Washington Post, TIME,* NPR, CNN and more. He graduated from Clemson University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and is currently studying at Emory University's Candler School of Theology in Atlanta.

About the Book

Shoutin' in the Fire: An American Epistle, published in 2021, is in many ways a memoir of author Danté Stewart's journey from Black Pentecostal faith to white evangelicalism, and then back to a deep Black theology. Personal stories from his past are woven alongside the murders of Black men and women, beginning with Alton Sterling and ending with the murder of George Floyd. He reflects on how close their bodies are to his body and experience. Stewart reimagines spiritual virtues like rage, resilience and remembrance and how these can serve as a work of love. Stewart draws heavily on the influences of Black theologians, activists and writers as he wrestles with the question: "How do I be Black and Christian and American?" (p. 6).

Alexis Weaver is a Cooperative Baptist and nonprofit and community leader focused on poverty transformation, sustainability, racial equity and food security.

Questions for Conversation

- An epistle is a literary form, usually a letter or series of letters. How does the framing of this book as an "epistle" impact the reader's understanding of Stewart's journey? Is there a particular "letter" from *Shoutin' in the Fire* that stood out to you more than others?

- The title of this book is *Shoutin' in the Fire* and the introduction is "the Fire." What is the fire to which the author refers? Did your understanding of "the Fire" change throughout the book?

- Stewart begins the chapter "Rage" with the question, "What radicalized you?" He answers it with "Jesus & James Baldwin," followed by "apathetic white people" (pp. 78-79). In this chapter, he also describes reading Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* —the first book Stewart read written by a Black person. He noted that it was Dr. King who introduced him to James Baldwin. Discuss the parallels in Stewart's story with Paul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus.

- Throughout *Shoutin' in the Fire*, Stewart extensively references and quotes Black writers, theologians and thought leaders. What is Stewart's purpose of weaving generations of thought within his story? Were you introduced to anyone whose writing you had not engaged before? Which voices stood out to you? Which voices do you hope to read more from?

- The themes of *terror* and *trauma* run throughout the stories in the book. Trauma has both psychological and physical manifestations, and Stewart emphasizes the impact of this trauma on the Black body. He references being a member of the "Trayvon Generation," and the way the constant threat and danger of being a Black person in American can lead to numbness (pp. 192-193). In what ways have you seen these themes in the world?

- In response to trauma, Stewart writes that "Black Lives Matter was not just a rallying cry of protest or Black bodies. It was a love letter, a monument, a testimony, a hallelujah, a yes lord, a sermon, a dream" (p. 194). What does it mean for Christians to "remember and love hard, and to love publicly and to love honestly, and to tell the truth, and to be better, for all of us?"

- In the penultimate chapter, "American," Stewart poses a series of questions that get at the heart of his epistle: "How do we live in a country and with people that claim your faith, but make claims on your body? How do we live in a country that does not believe you to be worthy of loving and surviving and being free? And how the *hell* do we love?" (pp. 229-230). How has this book influenced your answers to these questions?

- What is the "powerful myth" of America (p. 234)? In what ways have you seen American symbols of white supremacy in your community or faith journey?

- In the final chapter, Stewart describes the current state of America and the struggle for Black survival as both memory and dream—setting brutal acts of violence against resilience, family, hope and love. "The hope was in the struggle, God was in the hope, and these bodies will not always suffer....These bodies will live," Stewart writes (p. 254). What is your role in the struggle as a Christian?