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“You [God] Gotta Go Through It With Me”: Black Women Navigating Spirituality During the Breast Cancer Journey

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Abstract

Background: Black women generally report high levels of spirituality. Less is known about Black women's spiritual coping with a cancer diagnosis. Persisting health disparities between Black breast cancer survivors and other racial groups necessitate examining whether spirituality can be a contextual and personal resource for Black women with breast cancer.

Aims: This qualitative study's goals were to: (1) characterize positive and negative dimensions of spirituality in a sample of Black women diagnosed with breast cancer; and (2) examine whether and how women used spirituality during their cancer experience.

Methods: Three Gatherings (i.e., culturally curated focus groups) were conducted as part of Project SOAR (Speaking Our African American Realities), a community-academic partnership. In these all-Black women Gatherings, participants ($N = 37$) discussed their breast cancer experience, including how spirituality played a role.

Results: Through reflexive thematic analysis, six themes were identified: (1) faith is central to my identity even through challenging times; (2) meaningful, ineffective, or non-existent support from my spiritual community; (3) grappling with spiritual discontent during breast cancer; (4) God is omnipotent; (5) spiritual anchors helped me persevere through the breast cancer journey; (6) breast cancer reflections enhanced my spiritual gratitude and growth.

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Author Contributions

Praise Owoyemi: conceptualization, formal analysis, writing—original draft, writing—review & editing, visualization. **Tammie Denyse:** conceptualization, methodology, resources, investigation, writing—review & editing, supervision, funding acquisition.

Yrvane K. Pageot: formal analysis, writing—review & editing. **Kimberly J. Martin:** methodology, formal analysis, investigation, data curation, writing—review & editing, project administration. **K. Denise DeLuz:** formal analysis, writing—review & editing.

Jacqueline H.J. Kim: formal analysis, supervision, writing—review & editing. **Annette L. Stanton:** conceptualization, methodology, resources, writing—review & editing, supervision, funding acquisition.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.

Conclusions: Participants' experiences highlight the complexities of spirituality when confronting breast cancer. Many Black women reflected on the centrality of spirituality to their lives and cited spirituality as a resource and effective coping process during their cancer experience. Findings have important implications for understanding how spirituality can be incorporated to support Black women with breast cancer.

Keywords

African American; Black American; breast cancer; oncology; religion; spirituality; women

1 | Background

Breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women in the United States [1]. In the U.S., Non-Latina White women have the highest breast cancer incidence, yet non-Latina Black women have a 41% higher breast cancer mortality rate [1]. Further, prior research demonstrates that non-Latina Black women experience a higher number of comorbidities and persisting psychological distress over time relative to Non-Latina White women [2, 3]. These disparities signal that greater attention to resources that can promote Black women's well-being is necessary. Historical and contemporary findings suggest that spirituality may be one such resource [4]. Accordingly, the present study aimed to characterize facets of spirituality in a sample of Black women diagnosed with breast cancer and explore the role of spirituality.

Although 70% of Americans consider themselves spiritual [5], spirituality is often considered a nebulous construct, partially due to its multidimensional nature and its frequent conflation with religion [6]. While some conceptualizations of spirituality center on God or a transcendent power, other definitions capture a more holistic element with or without a higher power [6, 7]. Integrating elements present in the different conceptualizations of spirituality, we characterize spirituality as a multidimensional process that (1) focuses on an individual's search for and source of meaning and connection with the sacred; (2) may or may not include a relationship with a transcendent being; and (3) captures the emotions, encounters, and experiences related to that sense of connection [8]. Sacred refers to objects, entities, or aspects of life differentiated from the ordinary, which an individual considers divine and revered [6]. Religion is the organized framework that captures more of the specific values, practices, and rituals of a particular spiritual community [7]. However, the present authors use religion and spirituality (R/S) interchangeably in the following review of the literature due to existing research on spirituality often incorporating religion-based variables as proxy measures (e.g., church attendance, prayer) [7]. Likewise, although there is a growing emphasis on incorporating a broader conceptualization of spirituality in research, much of the prior western literature on R/S utilizes measures with a bias towards Judeo-Christian faiths [9]; accordingly, the following brief review of R/S will include examples related to Christianity and the Black church.

1.1 | Spirituality in the Black Community

R/S are significant aspects of Black life in America, with approximately 97% of Black Americans believing in a higher power [10]. R/S and the spiritual community (e.g., the

Black church) have been vital spaces for civic engagement, places of companionship, and sources of support, hope, and a sense of belonging for Black Americans [11]. Although churches and spiritual spaces have been a place of refuge, Black women in particular have faced gendered oppression in these places, necessitating the examination of the role spirituality plays for Black women specifically [12].

Black women hold multiple, intersecting identities, and they endure not only the effects of systemic racism, but also may have to navigate internalized racism and sexism within their racial and spiritual communities [13]. For example, sexism within the Black church is well documented [14, 15], highlighting the importance of adopting an inclusionary approach in examining spirituality. Accordingly, womanist theology provides a conceptual framework for understanding spirituality for Black women. It centers the lived experiences of Black women throughout history in understanding and reflecting on the nature of R/S, and their relationship to life and humanity [16]. Womanist theology addresses the limitations of feminist theology, which often excludes considerations of intersectional identities (e.g., race and gender), and Black theology, which typically does not attend to gender [14]. Instead, womanist theology honors the individual and intersectional roles of many identities including race, gender, and class [16]. As such, the present study integrated a womanist theological approach to examining the spiritual perceptions and experiences of Black women diagnosed with breast cancer.

1.2 | The Spirituality-Health Link

Spirituality and religion are seen as important coping resources and largely associated with psychological and physical health benefits for the Black community. In a study with 2967 Black Americans, greater R/S was associated with better cardiovascular health metrics and behaviors such as blood pressure, physical activity, and diet [17]. Likewise, in a sample of 2077 Black American women, spirituality was associated with better self-rated physical health generally, as well as fewer depressive symptoms when exposed to stress [18]. Importantly, Black women use and reference spirituality as an important coping strategy and internal resource when faced with health-related adversities [19]. For example, lack of religiousness predicted worse breast cancer survival for Black women compared to their more religious counterparts [4].

In contrast, the R/S literature yields more mixed findings regarding the health benefits of R/S in primarily non-Latine White samples [20-22]. Among other explanations, researchers posit that these conflicting findings are due to spirituality having both positive (e.g., positive reappraisals) and negative (e.g., punitive reappraisals) [23] dimensions. Accordingly, negative dimensions are associated with poorer psychological health [23, 24].

Notably, much of the research teasing out dimensions of R/S has not been conducted within the Black community, particularly in the context of health-related adversities. Moreover, the unique struggles and experiences Black women face, on top of a cancer diagnosis, call for adopting a womanist theological approach to examining positive and negative dimensions of R/S, and the role of the spiritual community. Therefore, the present study explored facets of spirituality in a sample of Black American breast cancer survivors. In light of the growing

number of individuals identifying as spiritual but not religious, we used “spirituality” as the more encompassing term, except when the idea of “God” was mentioned explicitly.

2 | Method

2.1 | Participants

Black women ($N = 37$) diagnosed with breast cancer were recruited to participate in Gatherings (i.e., culturally-curated focus groups) to discuss their unique experiences and perspectives as Black women with breast cancer [25, 26]. Black women, 21 years old, diagnosed with breast cancer, and proficient in English were eligible.

2.2 | Procedures

Research procedures were approved by UCLA's Institutional Review Board. Three Gatherings occurred in Sacramento ($n = 13$), Los Angeles ($n = 7$), and Oakland ($n = 17$), respectively, in Spring 2019. See the Supporting Information S1 and Denyse and colleagues' (2023) work [26] for the interview questions and a detailed description of Gathering procedures, respectively. The research team cultivated an entirely Black women space, in order to foster a safe, supportive environment for participants to share their experiences freely. At the start of each Gathering, the women provided informed verbal consent after reviewing an information sheet, completed a registration packet (i.e., demographic and medical questionnaires), and had breakfast (optional).

TD and KJM cofacilitated the semi-structured, two-hour group interviews, in which participants discussed experiences related to the Strong Black Woman schema (the broader study's primary goal [25]). The schema has been characterized as a suit of armor, where, given enslavement, racial, and gendered oppression, Black American women are compelled to display an image of strength, be self-sacrificing, and suppress emotions, among other features [27]. Participants were asked to speak about the relevance, if any, of SBW schema and its facets to their lives (primary aim of the broader project). In their reflections, women spontaneously raised the importance of spirituality (aim of this paper). The current study examines the women's responses regarding spirituality and their spiritual community, which were organically offered throughout the Gatherings rather than being specifically queried.

2.3 | Analytic Plan

The Gatherings' semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and imported into NVivo 12 [28] for analysis. Supervised by author JHK, coders PO, YKP, KJM, and KDD conducted reflexive thematic analysis [29]. Three doctoral psychology students and one radiation therapist analyzed the data by first individually coding for latent and semantic codes [30], then collaboratively discussing potential themes before finalizing them, in order to ensure accurate representation of the women's voices. Self-reflexivity was highlighted prior to and during the process. Specifically, coders candidly discussed their experiences and biases that could influence data analysis.

3 | Results

Participants were 37 Black women who had been diagnosed with breast cancer (stage 0–3) on average 105.62 months (approximately 8 years) prior (range = 2–343 months). They were 30–94 years old ($M = 59.27$), household incomes were less than \$25,000 to more than \$100,000, and education levels were some high school to advanced degree completion. See Table 1 for demographic characteristics of the participants.

Six themes capture participants' experiences with spirituality in the breast cancer context. Tables 2 and 3 contain brief descriptions of each theme and additional participant quotes, respectively. The following sections describe themes in depth and include representative quotes (names changed to maintain confidentiality).

3.1 | Theme 1: Faith Is Central to My Identity Even Through the Challenging Times

Participants described spirituality as a central aspect of their identities as Strong Black Women. More broadly, some women noted that spirituality was an important cultural component shared within the Black community.

And that to me is what's ingrained, that is ingrained. Our strength is in God, we have fought as women, a culture from slavery to now, it's our strength. It is nothing but God.

(Marjorie, 21-year survivor)

I would say that...along with this [scholarly definition of the Strong Black Woman] would be my relationship with God.

(Verna, 17-year survivor)

3.2 | Theme 2: Meaningful, Ineffective, or Non-Existent Support From My Spiritual Community

Participants discussed whether and how their spiritual community attempted to support them. Supportive attempts the women discussed included praying for them, giving them resources, and connecting them with breast cancer organizations.

I had people from my church, my family, I had support there.

(Janet, 5-year survivor)

Some participants also described less supportive and sometimes invalidating attempts, including spiritual platitudes and prayers without additional action. For example, when asked whether their support network asked them to be a Strong Black Woman during their cancer journey, one participant responded:

I'll say unintentional, but yes, the biggest piece was 'your faith in God should see you through and it will see you through, so go on.' And I say unintentional because I wanna believe that it was unintentional, although sometimes it didn't feel supportive...

(Gail, 21-year survivor)

Some women reported receiving no support from their spiritual community.

I didn't have the backing at that time, the church that I attended ... so I kind of went into it by myself with the Lord, that's, that's all I had.

(Brenda, 10-year survivor)

Some women discussed wanting more tailored support from the spiritual community, including emotional support, logistical assistance, distractions, or treatment-related guidance.

I think probably the one thing that was, kind of a dual street is that when you go to your church or you tell so many of your friends that may be, church members, they always tell you to pray. Well, we all know about praying, but you need a little bit more than that. And so, one of the things that I did find my- Besides my sister who was trained in clergy and she's a, she works for the city, and my other girlfriend who was a, [name of city redacted] clergy person. ... They were very helpful because they had training outside of just praying. They knew what to say in addition to that. Sometimes they would call and just say, 'Hey, are you up, what are you doing? Let's go out for a walk', or something like that. And not, 'Oh, well have you prayed this morning?' Because like we all know about praying and reading a Bible or listening to music. But at times you need someone to just say, 'What do you want to do today? Let's go do this, or let's go do that.'

(Wendy, 1-year survivor)

3.3 | Theme 3: Grappling With Spiritual Discontent During Breast Cancer

Participants discussed how breast cancer challenged their relationships with spirituality and God, sometimes in quite negative ways. Some participants discussed how navigating challenges during their breast cancer journey introduced emotional struggles and questions about the role of God in their lives. Some women reported feeling angry early on in the breast cancer journey and greater acceptance and trust in God and/or their faith as time went on.

Why would you [God] pick on me [to have breast cancer], you know I-I-I couldn't get that until I said, okay, you [God] gave me three beautiful children... My main point, you know I never questioned all the good things you [God] done for me ... You're [God is] watching out for me, I'm not doubting you [God] anymore.

(Tina, 28-year survivor)

I asked God, 'Do I have enough of your word in me (begins crying) to get through? I trust you, 100 percent, that you're going to. I'm going to survive.' But he told me my journey was going to be difficult and it was...I was angry at first. But he sent, God sent me so many angels to love me and love on me. I just said to myself, 'It's okay,' Because I know you got me... And I'm like, 'Lord' (laughing) And so, you know, and you gotta... I, I couldn't say, 'Why me?'

(Annie, 16-year survivor)

Participants also highlighted cultural norms about spirituality and God that they had been taught throughout their lives. Importantly, breast cancer led some of the participants to question God, which conflicted with these norms.

So, I was gonna do it up for my 50th but, I found out [the breast cancer diagnosis] on the day that I turned 50. And it was like, 'okay'. I never ask God 'why me?'. My mother always taught us okay, whatever God gives you, there's a reason he's giving it to you, so you - You have to-it depends on how you react to what he gives you. So, I had to take it.

(Brenda, 10-year survivor)

3.4 | Theme 4: God Is Omnipotent

Participants referenced experiencing God as all-powerful and having complete control over their breast cancer journey and survival. Many women emphasized how their perception of God as all-powerful enabled them to leave their worries with God and to overcome their cancer experience by continuing to trust in God.

But I've prayed for [other cancer survivors] and encouraged them. I never said, 'You're leaving.' I never said, 'This is until death.' You have to encourage them, even though it may not look, you still never speak that over someone's life until God has the final say.

(Violet, 2-year survivor)

So, when I was diagnosed, ... It was for me to be able to be a light for other people ... And not only to show them how to get through it as a strong Black woman, but to be able to show them who God is and what God can do... Because, I know that in the end, God will get the honor, and I will be victorious, no matter what.

(Roxanne, 4-year survivor)

3.5 | Theme 5: Spiritual Anchors Helped Me Persevere Through the Breast Cancer Journey

Participants discussed using spiritual anchors to get them through the cancer experience. These anchors included (1) belief in God as the provider of personal strength; (2) prayer as a tool of connection and communication between the participant and God as well as with other breast cancer survivors; (3) acting on faith (i.e., behaving in a manner that demonstrates trust in God despite current circumstances); and (4) spiritual "peace" resulting from the exercise of faith in God, coupled with prayer and hymns to build and strengthen faith.

And I just remember ... cowering in the shower and just crying. You know, and at that moment I didn't have any armor on, at that moment I didn't have any strength on, like everything that came from me came from, all my strength has come from God. But when I was in that shower by myself and it was only God and me in there, like I was not strong, I was not, I was just like 'God, I need you to help me through this.' And look at God. He did.

(Maxine, 2-month survivor)

I prayed. I said, 'Okay Lord, I'm going through it. You gotta go through it with me.'

(Brenda, 10-year survivor)

Relatedly, participants' comments reflected how spiritual anchors, like prayer, could foster and reinforce care, interconnectedness, and community. For instance, two participants (who previously never met) realized they were connected by prayer during the Gathering.

My name is [redacted] and this, it's very nice to meet you [another participant]. I pray for you, every morning. ([The two participants] were looking at each other and they were both crying, as were others). [Name redacted] referred your name to me and I've prayed for you every single morning (whispering). It's very nice to meet you.

(Toni, 4-month survivor)

3.6 | Theme 6: Breast Cancer Reflections Enhanced My Spiritual Gratitude and Growth

Participants reflected on the ways in which God and/or their faith facilitated important, positive lessons throughout their cancer experience. These lessons helped them navigate their journey and make sense of and find purpose in their experience.

It was God telling me to take time to love myself (voice cracking, crying). We don't stop, we don't stop when we have small children and you take care of them by yourself. We don't stop to say, 'Hey, let me go sit over here and get some me time and check myself mentally... And I think for me to find peace, like someone [another participant] over here said I had to, I didn't want to feel like I was being mean to people who were offering me help or checking on me, but I had to explain to people, "I just need my 'me' time. Let me process this and see what message God has for me in this.'

(Courtney, 1-year survivor)

You just overlook all the little things, He [God] does for you, everyday [emphasized] but, you know that strength that came from that, you know just made me appreciate life and what He does for you. The little things He shows you every day. He guides you and if you just let Him -He will guide you... I'm glad that I learned that, and learned how to use my own strength. He's a good teacher.

(Tina, 28-year survivor)

Participants also described how these lessons enhanced their gratitude to God and their spiritual community.

I'm just grateful. I'm grateful for every day He [God] gives me. And I think it inspired my first lady [wife of the pastor of my church] to start celebrating survivors in our church. And it meant the world to me to be celebrated for something so difficult.

(Annie, 16-year survivor)

4 | Discussion

This qualitative study characterized the role of spirituality, highlighting positive and negative aspects of spirituality in a sample of Black women diagnosed with breast cancer. Despite spirituality not being specifically queried during the Gatherings, many participants spontaneously reflected on how spirituality and their faith influenced their breast cancer journey. Participants emphasized the significance of spirituality and the enduring benefits that spirituality and spiritual coping methods offer. Consistent with prior research regarding spirituality as central for Black Americans [32, 33], participants described the meaningful aspects of spirituality: an increased sense of strength and peace and a decreased sense of powerlessness. Thus, the participants' stories and experiences support the assertion that spirituality can be a resource and provide a sense of control [34].

Alongside describing the relevance of spiritual coping on the individual level, participants highlighted various communal aspects of spirituality. Specifically, they referenced the generational transmission of spiritual beliefs and the emotional support some women felt from their spiritual community. Similarly, participants expressed a sense of connection and companionship during the Gatherings themselves (e.g., saying “amen”, gesturing towards other participants). These behaviors align with prior findings that spirituality for Black women is inherently relational [35, 36]. For some participants, however, support from the spiritual community was inadequate or non-existent. Given the evident prominence of supportive spiritual connections, experiencing a lack of the needed or wanted support from one's spiritual community may be particularly harmful to Black women diagnosed with breast cancer.

In addition to varying experiences with the spiritual community, participants described a range of positive and negative emotions towards a higher power. Participants' experiences reflected spiritual or divine struggles [23] including anger and doubt. Participants also referenced how they had been taught to never question God, illuminating Black cultural norms. And yet some of the participants' stories highlighted a shift in traditional norms around spirituality, a change—from revering a higher power without ever questioning—to feeling empowered, telling the higher power they were upset, and showing the full range of emotions as part of their spirituality. Participants' reflections on these aspects of spirituality, alongside the noted shift in how they interfaced with a higher power, mark a significant contribution to the spirituality literature.

4.1 | Study Limitations

With regard to study limitations, one Gathering took place in a church, and one Gathering leader was a reverend, perhaps priming some women to think about spirituality or contributing to participants' hesitance about revealing that spirituality was not important. However, many women expressed how the uniqueness of the Gatherings facilitated their comfort in sharing a range of experiences with spirituality. Furthermore, holding two Gatherings in a non-religiously affiliated location and having a non-pastoral cofacilitator may have reduced such effects. Additionally, all of our Gatherings occurred in California and while this allowed us to explore participants in-depth, unique experiences, these findings may not generalize to Black breast cancer survivors outside of California. Similarly, our

sample skewed older ($M = 59$), with participants on average, receiving a breast cancer diagnosis 8 years prior to the study. Accordingly, findings may differ for younger or more recently diagnosed participants. Finally, we did not collect data on the religious identification of the participants, limiting our ability to specify whether there may have been a bias towards a particular faith group.

This study also has multiple strengths. Using a qualitative analytic approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the nuances embedded in spirituality among Black women with breast cancer. Additionally, the Gathering leaders never explicitly queried spirituality; rather, spirituality was organically discussed among participants of varying lengths of survivorship. This observation underscores the centrality of spirituality for Black women during a substantial stressor.

4.2 | Clinical Implications

Findings have important implications for incorporating spirituality to support Black breast cancer survivors. Given the important relational aspect of spirituality as well as the guidance and social support spiritual communities can confer, health care providers and organizations can partner with spiritually affiliated groups. Of note, health care providers should not assume all Black women approach spirituality in the same way, but rather work to understand the important role spirituality may play in their lives during the breast cancer journey. Recognizing that spiritual community support was inadequate for some participants, interventions could provide spiritual communities (e.g., church) with logistical and informational resources regarding cancer, to enhance the types of support they offer. Future studies can explore whether different aspects of spirituality are more or less effective at different phases of cancer survivorship. Research is needed to understand how some women dynamically navigate experiencing spiritual struggles and doubt as well as faith and gratitude, whereas others turn away from spirituality during a health stressor.

5 | Conclusions

The current findings elucidate the protective as well as less helpful functions of spirituality for Black women contending with profound, uncontrollable stressors amid breast cancer survivorship. Spirituality can be a critical component of the coping process, a way to alleviate the negative consequences of significant stressors on well-being [37]. Spirituality may also help Black women maintain a sense of meaning despite uncertainty, engage in behaviors that help them feel grounded (e.g., praying, listening to hymns, connecting with others), and ultimately feel supported and seen (whether by a higher power and/or a spiritual community).

Notably, although spirituality was a constant, positive resource for many participants, there was variability in spiritual struggles, levels of spiritual community support received, and complex reactions to spiritual coping strategies such as prayer. These complexities illuminate how spirituality is not static, but rather a process [34]. Indeed, this study illuminated spirituality as a process of searching and finding sacred connection with others and/or a higher power and demonstrated the extent to which that sacred connection is sustained in the face of adversity.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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Data Availability Statement

Currently, we do not plan to make the qualitative data and coding available on an electronic platform. We made this decision because: (1) consent forms did not explicitly include any mention of making the data, transcripts, or coding available and we decline to make the data available without the participants' informed consent (current contact information is not available for every participant), and (2) other individuals (including healthcare professionals) may be able to recognize specific participants, despite deidentification, based on the participants' responses regarding their breast cancer experience or speech content. We want to uphold the privacy and trust of this group of breast cancer survivors.

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TABLE 1 |

Demographic characteristics of project SOAR participants.

Characteristic	<i>M (SD) or n (%)</i>
Age (years)	
Range	30–94
Mean (SD)	59.27 (14.27)
Gathering location (%)	
Oakland	45.95
Los Angeles	18.92
Sacramento	35.14
Breast cancer stage (<i>n (%)</i>)	
0	3 (8.11)
1	12 (32.43)
2	9 (24.32)
3	7 (18.91)
4	0
Unsure	6 (16.21)
Months since first breast cancer diagnosis	
Mean (SD)	105.62 (96.89)
Range	2–343
Educational experience (%)	
Some high school	2.70
High school graduate	2.70
Technical/vocational	5.41
Some college	40.54
College graduate	21.62
Post-college graduate	27.03
Annual household income (%)	
Less than \$25,000	12.50
\$25,000–\$49,999	31.25
\$50,000–\$74,999	6.25
\$75,000–\$99,999	12.50
> \$100,000	37.50

Note: A similar version of this table appears in two other Project SOAR publications [26, 31].

Themes capturing the role of spirituality for 37 Black women diagnosed with breast cancer.

TABLE 2 |

Theme	Brief description
Faith is central to my identity even through the challenging times	Participants described spirituality as a significant aspect of their identities as Strong Black Women, highlighting the cultural and historical relevance of spirituality within the Black community.
Meaningful, ineffective, or non-existent support from my spiritual community	Participants discussed the ways in which their spiritual community tried to support them, with some participants noting the more ineffective support (e.g., spiritual platitudes) and others describing more meaningful support (e.g., emotional support, distractions).
Grappling with spiritual discontent during breast cancer	Participants discussed the spiritual struggles they experienced following their breast cancer diagnoses, reflecting on the various emotions they felt (e.g., doubt, anger, acceptance, trust) within their spiritual journey during their breast cancer experience.
God is omnipotent	Participants shared how viewing God as all-powerful empowered them to believe that they would overcome their cancer experience by having faith in God.
Spiritual anchors helped Me persevere through the breast cancer journey	Participants shared the spiritual anchors and tools they utilized in navigating their breast cancer journey, including their belief in God as their source of strength, prayer as a way to connect with God and other breast cancer survivors, finding a sense of peace through faith and spiritual hymns.
Breast cancer reflections enhanced my spiritual gratitude and growth	Participants described the meaningful lessons they learned through God during the breast cancer journey (e.g., prioritize self-care, appreciate life more, encourage others) and reflected on how these lessons, in turn, strengthened their gratitude to God and their spiritual community.

TABLE 3 |

Additional participant quotes.

Theme	Quote
Faith is central to my identity even through the challenging times	My first thing about a Strong Black Woman is the independence, you know, that God gave me that strength to be independent to see myself do this [cancer journey]. (Yvette 3-year survivor)
Meaningful, ineffective, or non-existent support from my spiritual community	So, I've been able to share my experience- and help, and point [other breast cancer survivors] to resources, the Women's Cancer Resource [Center]. And so, I wanna say that God chose me, us, to be able to help and care for others...I had a great support system. Church, my business, but more so my business. People from all around the world sent cards. (Violet, 2-year survivor)
Grappling with spiritual discontent during breast cancer	As a matter of fact, that's when I used Sister [name redacted] and she said, "I'll pray for you", and I said "Well, go right ahead 'cause obviously, he ain't listening to me." (Kristina, 13-year survivor)
God is omnipotent	I think that, you know, that prayer and knowing that there is a higher power did help me get through this and not feel like I was going to die 'cause I just never accepted. I was like, "It's not time for me to die yet, I'm not dying of this." (Delia, 10-month survivor)
Spiritual anchors helped Me persevere through the breast cancer journey	So, it's like, okay- how Lord, okay... If you bring me to it, I know you're going to bring me through it...So, by that I just want to be able to let everybody know, you know, what God can do and what cancer cannot do to you. (Brenda, 10-year survivor)
Breast cancer reflections enhanced my spiritual gratitude and growth	I was talking about my diagnosis, and I said, I- I- but I didn't mention the song that I sang that gave me so much peace. And it was, "I had a little talk with Jesus, and I told him about all my troubles. He heard my fervent prayer, and He answered by and by." (Yvette, 3-year survivor) I'm just thankful to God for the journey and along the journey you end up, like what you're doing, is you reach out and you help others. (Verma, 17-year survivor) I thank God that I am a survivor. (Regina, 2-year survivor)