

Transcendent Kingdom

by Yaa Gyasi



About the Book

Yaa Gyasi's stunning follow-up to her acclaimed national bestseller *HOMEGOING* is a powerful, raw, intimate and deeply layered novel about a Ghanaian family in Alabama.

Gifty is a sixth-year PhD candidate in neuroscience at the Stanford University School of Medicine studying reward-seeking behavior in mice and the neural circuits of depression and addiction. Her brother, Nana, was a gifted high school athlete who died of a heroin overdose after an ankle injury left him hooked on OxyContin. Her suicidal mother is living in her bed. Gifty is determined to discover the scientific basis for the suffering she sees all around her. But even as she turns to the hard sciences to unlock the mystery of her family's loss, she finds herself hungering for her childhood faith and grappling with the evangelical church in which she was raised, whose promise of salvation remains as tantalizing as it is elusive.

TRANSCENDENT KINGDOM is a deeply moving portrait of a family of Ghanaian immigrants ravaged by depression, addiction and grief --- a novel about faith, science, religion and love. Exquisitely written and emotionally searing, this is an exceptionally powerful follow-up to Gyasi's phenomenal debut.

Discussion Guide

1. How do Gifty and her mother use prayer differently throughout their lives, and especially after Nana's death? What variations of prayer do the two women discover in the novel?
2. How does Gifty approach the moral predicament of running her science experiments on mice? What elements of her faith and sense of connection to God's creations are evident in how she treats the mice?
3. Consider the stigmas surrounding addiction, especially opioid addiction, the rates of which are exploding in today's

society. What other stigmas and expectations was Nana responding to by not asking for help to deal with his addiction, and others not doing more to help?

4. In what ways does Gifty take on the role of caretaker for those in her life? Who, if anyone, takes care of Gifty?

5. Gifty admits that she values both God and sciences as lenses through which to see the world that both ?failed to fully satisfy in their aim: to make clear, to make meaning? (198). Why does she have to lead with the caveat that she ?would never say [this] in a lecture or a presentation or, God forbid, a paper?? How does the extreme belief in science mimic the faith of the religious zealots she turned away from?

6. What messages do Gifty and Nana hear about the intersection of race and poverty in their youth church meetings? How do the siblings respond to the conflation of the two --- and what does the assumption that African countries are impoverished or need saving by missionaries suggest about the colonial power dynamic engrained in our society?

7. Gifty refers to her relationship with her mother as an ?experiment.? Are there similarities in the way Gifty approaches her work and her relationship with her mother? How did the separate events of losing the Chin Chin Man and Nana?s death affect their relationship? Throughout the course of their lives, how does Gifty determine whether or not she and her mother are ?going to be ok? (33)?

8. Throughout the book, Gifty struggles to find a sense of community in places where people traditionally find it (school, work, family, church, etc.). What life experiences shape her understanding of community? In what ways does this affect her ability to build relationships with the people in her life (Anna, Raymond, Katherine, Han)?

9. Explore the idea of humans as the only animal ?who believed he had transcended his Kingdom? (21). How does this idea influence Gifty?s relationship with science? With religion?

10. Describe the difference between Gifty?s connection to Ghana and her connection to Alabama. In what ways does she feel connected to her Ghanaian ancestry?

11. How does Gifty feel when she overhears congregants gossiping about her family? How does this experience influence her relationship with the church? With her family? With God?

12. Gifty privately considers her work in the lab as holy --- ?if not holy, then at least sacrosanct (p. 92).? Explain her reasoning, and why she chooses not to discuss this feeling with anyone.

Author Bio

Yaa Gyasi was born in Ghana and raised in Huntsville, Alabama. She holds a BA in English from Stanford University and an MFA from the Iowa Writers? Workshop, where she held a Dean?s Graduate Research Fellowship. She lives in Brooklyn.

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