



Let the Church Say Amen

By ReShonda Tate Billingsley

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Award-winning author ReShonda Tate Billingsley delivers a bold and heartwarming story of family and faith about a man who has succeeded as a reverend and failed as a father.

Reverend Simon Jackson has always felt destined to lead and he's done a good job of it, transforming his small Houston church into one of the most respected and renowned in the region. But while the good Reverend's been busy tending his flock, his family's gone astray. His nineteen-year-old daughter, Rachel, gives new meaning to "baby mama drama." Crazy in love with her son's father, she's wreaking havoc on the man's life, even though he's about to marry another woman. David, Simon's oldest at twenty-seven, has been spiraling downward ever since a knee injury ended a promising football career. These days he's seeking solace in drugs—even feeding his habit by stealing church offerings. Blessedly, twenty-three-year-old Jonathan, a college graduate and the apple of Simon's eye, is poised to take his father's side as associate pastor—or so everyone thinks. Loretta has been a devoted wife to Simon, but she's beginning to realize that enabling him to give more to the church than to his children was her biggest mistake. As things begin to fall apart and secrets are revealed, will Loretta be able to help her husband reunite their tattered family before it's too late?

Let the Church Say Amen is a powerful journey through one family's trials—and a remarkable story of reconciliation and love. When things are down to the wire will Reverend Simon Jackson choose to fight for his family or the congregation?

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Editorial Review

From Booklist

It's hard to imagine a more dysfunctional family than the Reverend Samuel Jackson's, Billingsley's creation in *Let the Church Say Amen*. The oldest son, David, had a promising career in the NFL but was injured and now steals from the collection plate to support his drug habit. Nineteen-year-old Rachel has had two babies by different fathers. The middle child, Simon, is poised to become assistant pastor and might seem like a chip off the old block, but he has a secret that will prove rather awkward. Reverend Jackson himself pastors a black church he built up from nothing, but what kind of minister is he to his own family? Can his stalwart wife bring healing to this mess? Is prayer any good at all? Though Billingsley drifts toward self-parody, her community of very human saints will win readers over with their humor and verve. *John Mort*

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About the Author

ReShonda Tate Billingsley's #1 national bestselling novels include *Let the Church Say Amen*, *I Know I've Been Changed*, and *Say Amen, Again*, winner of the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work. Her collaboration with Victoria Christopher Murray has produced three hit novels, *Sinners & Saints*, *Friends & Foes*, and *Fortune & Fame*. Visit ReShondaTateBillingsley.com, meet the author on Facebook at ReShondaTateBillingsley, or follow her on Twitter @Reshondat.

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Chapter 1

The choir was cutting up.

Reverend Simon Jackson enthusiastically clapped as they sang "Stomp" by Kirk Franklin.

Loretta Jackson beamed as she watched her husband swing jubilantly to the music. She knew Simon wasn't too keen on these newfound gospel hip-hoppers, as he called them, but the choir had the church on its feet. Even he had to admit they sounded good.

The choir began winding down and Simon stood and approached the podium. He was radiating with pride as he looked out at his members. And as she did every Sunday just before his sermon, Loretta gave him a reassuring smile. It made her happy to see her husband doing what he loved best, being pastor of Zion Hill, one of the best churches in Houston, as he always proclaimed.

"Let the church say amen!" Simon yelled.

"Amen!" the congregation replied in unison.

"Let's give our outstanding choir another round of applause because they sure spread God's message today."

Simon led the applause as the choir members settled in their seats. Loretta was sitting in her usual front row seat. Good music always rejuvenated Simon, so she knew they were in for a rousing sermon.

Loretta opened her Bible as she glanced around. She sighed deeply because Rachel hadn't yet made it to

church and she knew Simon would take notice.

"Now, if you will, turn your Bibles to Proverbs twenty-eight, thirteen. I know everyone has their Bible, right?" Simon sang.

Several people chuckled.

"Of course we do, Pastor," an elderly woman named Ida Hicks shouted. Simon nodded at Sister Hicks, who was sitting in the front pew as well. Sister Hicks was decked out from head to toe in white, from her huge hat that looked like wings coming off the side of her head to her white stockings and scuffed-up white pumps.

Loretta tried to stifle a smile, because Simon often complained about Sister Hicks, saying she was like the student in class who always had the answer to everything. Loretta had to admit Sister Hicks drove everyone at the church crazy, but she was the original pastor's widow, so people still gave her respect.

"Well, wonderful. Has everyone found the verse?" Simon said as his gaze made its way to the back of the church. Loretta gently turned to see what he was looking at. She shook her head. Their nineteen-year-old daughter, Rachel, was trying to sneak in late -- again. That meant there would be a big argument right before Sunday dinner. Simon was just about fed up with Rachel. She'd stay out partying all Saturday night, and then couldn't drag herself out of bed to make it to church on Sunday morning. Simon always complained that if it weren't for Loretta keeping Rachel's two kids every weekend, his grandchildren probably wouldn't make it to church either.

Loretta tried not to let Rachel's entrance sour her mood, but she couldn't help but exhale in frustration. Not only was Rachel late, but she had the audacity to come into church with sunglasses on. Simon was going to blow a gasket. Not that it would do any good. Even though Rachel was raised in the church, getting her there before the benediction was almost impossible.

Loretta snapped back to the sermon, which Simon had begun as he tried to mask the scowl on his face. "All right, I want to talk about how what's done in the dark will come to light."

"I know that's right! You preach, Pastor!" Sister Hicks exclaimed.

Simon looked at Sister Hicks and forced a smile. Loretta knew exactly what her husband was thinking. He wanted Sister Hicks to shut up and let him preach. They went through this same routine every Sunday. Loretta had thought Simon would have been used to it by now, but he still complained about it after every service.

"As I was saying, many of us do things we think nobody else knows about. But God knows!" Simon bellowed.

Loretta hoped Rachel was listening, because Lord knew she had done more than her share of dirty deeds. Simon near 'bout had a heart attack when Rachel turned up pregnant at fifteen. Then she went out and had another child three years later. Simon would barely speak to her the entire time she was pregnant. Not only was he thoroughly embarrassed, but he was extremely disappointed in their daughter. But more than anything, Loretta knew Simon was hurt by his daughter's actions, feeling that he had failed her. Although that's something he'd never, ever admit.

Loretta tried to get thoughts of her family drama out of her mind and focus all her attention on her husband. He was getting worked up now; beads of sweat were trickling across his brow. She admired his strong physique. For 55 years old, he was stunningly handsome with a commanding presence, like he belonged in

that pulpit, born to lead people down the path of righteousness.

Simon continued with his sermon, urging his congregation to lead meaningful and fulfilling Christian lives. For twenty-five minutes he continued to speak the word, putting emphasis where needed, shouting when the urge came over him and delivering a rousing sermon. Loretta could always tell how well he preached by the number of people who got the spirit during his sermon. Usually, it was only ten or fifteen people, not counting Sister Hicks, who always got the Holy Ghost every Sunday. (In private Simon had once said that he thought it was all an act, but Loretta had told him, who was he to judge.)

As the organist began playing, Simon extended his arms as if opening the doors of the church, and invited people to join him near the pulpit. He smiled down at Loretta again. She gave him the standard "you did good" nod, as she began swaying to the sounds of the music.

Loretta could feel the powerful love of her husband as he glanced around the room, his gaze always coming back to her. Simon always called her the saving grace in his family because she helped him keep it all together when it seemed like he just couldn't take any more. And in between the problems with their oldest son, David, and the drama surrounding Rachel, it seemed Loretta was having to do a lot more saving these days. But she didn't complain. She loved her husband and her kids and would do anything for them.

So far, no one had made their way to the front of the church.

"The doors of the church are still open. Don't be afraid. Come now. Let the Lord be your guide," Simon said.

Sometimes it took a while for anyone to come up, so Simon would usually keep his arms outstretched as the music continued to play.

Loretta stole another look at Rachel. *I know she is not asleep!* But that wasn't true. She quickly turned her attention back to Simon, hoping he wouldn't notice. Of course as luck would have it, he noticed it about the same time he was wrapping things up.

Simon took a deep breath, trying not to let his disgust show to the entire congregation, but Loretta could see it clear as day. Although she would never give up on any of her kids, Loretta knew Simon was about ready to write Rachel off, just as he'd done David. Loretta sighed. If only they could hold on two more weeks. That's when Jonathan, the one child who had made Simon proud, would return home. Simon was already so excited, it's all he'd talked about the last month. Simon was always a little more tolerant of Rachel and David whenever Jonathan was around. Loretta hated how Simon differentiated between the kids. But she knew his relationship with Rachel and David was something he'd have to work through in his own due time. But that didn't mean she'd stop trying to pull her family back together. Heck, she *couldn't* stop trying even if she wanted to. She believed with all her heart that she'd been blessed with a wonderful family, despite their shortcomings and she'd do whatever it took to hold them together.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jordan Weatherspoon:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Sure, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time

to take a go walking, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book eligible Let the Church Say Amen? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time together with your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with their opinion or you have other opinion?

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