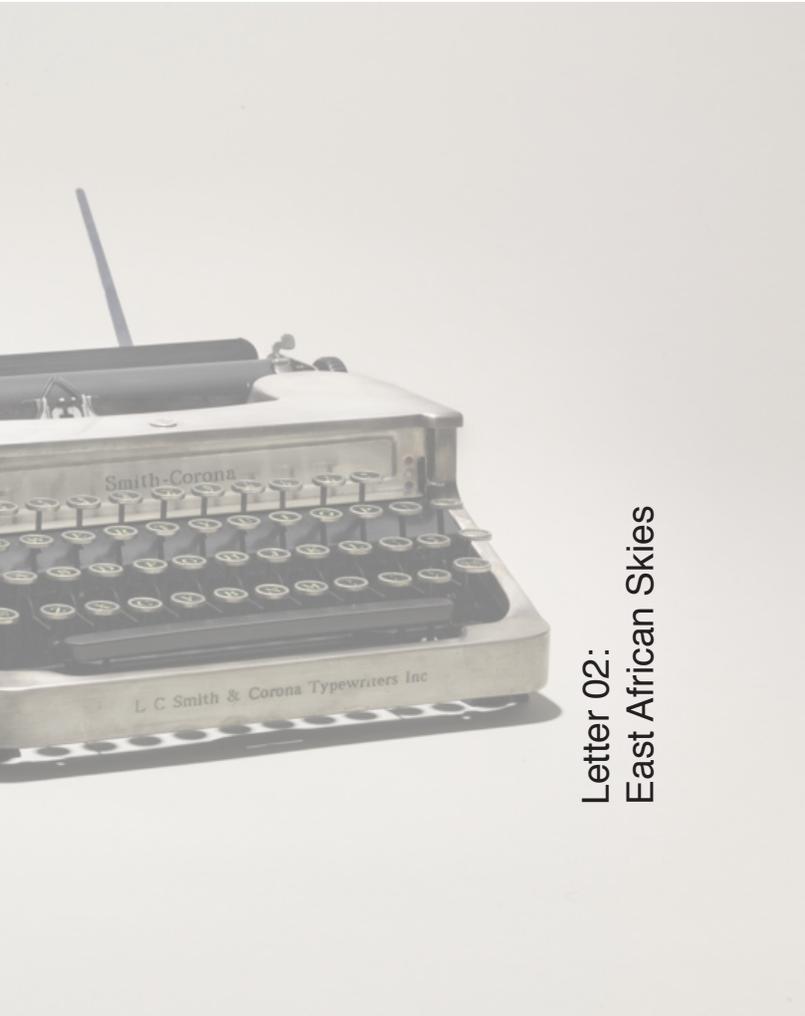




Letters To My Friends

Jay Winfrey



Letter 02:
East African Skies

Dear Friends,

Red kites rose high and swooped low in the east African sky. Young Kenyan boys running full tilt, laughing and shouting, urged their kites upward into the wind blowing from nearby Lake Nakuru. Members of our mission team were mixed among them flying kites of their own, taking photos of the joyful chaos, or laying flat on their backs in the grass soaking up the moment. That was my group; the back-laying, moment-drinkers.

What a moment it was! I did all I could to record every vivid detail in my heart. I remember the silhouette of young man standing atop an eight foot stone wall - one hand in his pant's pocket, the other extending to the sky holding the string of a kite soaring so high I could barely see it. My memory of that day is filled with shouts and laughter, leaping and running, and big toothy I've-never-had-this-much-fun grins on every face. I remember how the passage of time seemed to yield to a kind of protracted present. There was no past, no future, just present extending into more present. It was an aside, a parenthetical moment, added to the narrative of our missionary journey to reveal

rich detail about the heart of our Father. It was like the veil between earth and heaven grew thin enough to peek through. I'm pretty sure that moment is what eternity feels like. It seemed to be a dream. In fact, months before, it was a dream.

I turned my head as I lay in the grass and saw RG sitting on a low rock wall. Months before that red kite day, at a team preparation meeting, she shared a dream God gave her. In the dream she saw red kites, lots of them, filling the sky above the G.C.C. Boys Home in Nakuru. So in obedience to the Spirit's leading, kites were purchased, shipped from China to Texas, and flown from Texas to Kenya. Then, on that day, with the plastic wings of those red kites flapping in the African breeze, RG lived her dream - we all did.

There are other memories of that day too. A few minutes before the jubilation of kite flying, these same boys were losing a battle with sleep as I spoke to them. Little heads were bobbing forward and backward then snapping up again as they tried to listen. Please understand, the tranquilizing effect of my oration wasn't completely my fault. We had played hard all morning. Soccer, basketball, dancing, and vacation bible school activities left the boys tired and famished. After the morning games, we ate lunch, which took care of the hunger but doubled down on the sleepiness.

Also, in the interest of full disclosure I must tell you, the subject matter of what I was sharing may have been equally to blame for the powerful drowsiness settling over the room that afternoon. It was probably pretty boring to bunch of boys between the ages of six

and sixteen. But, I wasn't really speaking to the boys sitting in front of me. I was earnestly trying to communicate with the young men they would become.

Sitting in our hotel early that morning, God spoke to me a letter for those young men. In it, He gave four pillars He hoped they would build upon as they grew: Live with honor before God and man, Trust God and His word, Believe God, and Love God. As He shared the letter, He made it abundantly clear that these would be the men shaping Kenya's future. I believe (because He can do this sort of thing) as I spoke to those sleeping children that afternoon, God was putting His handprint on the future of a nation. My prayer is that the Spirit brings these four pillars to their memory as they grow - that these words would be an anchor for them in the midst of questions and daily motivators in their relationships and careers. May God multiply the seeds planted that sleepy afternoon.

The following is the letter in its entirety. About half-way through you may think, "He read this whole thing to those poor boys? Of course they were sleepy!" No, I didn't read every jot and tittle - God is merciful after all. I shared with them only bits and pieces as God gave me utterance. Plus, I knew red kites were coming after I finished so I didn't want to prolong the suffering. I did send the full letter after we returned to Texas. Maybe it has been read again, maybe not, but it doesn't matter. What does matter is God is able to complete every good work He has begun in us. If the words of the letter are to be part of those boy's lives in the future, He will steer it to them. For you, I pray God uses this letter as encouragement and rein-

forcement in things I am sure you already know. And, if in the middle you find yourself getting drowsy, just remember, you can go fly a kite when you finish!

Letter to G.C.C. Boy's Homes

Young men of Langata, Nakuru, and Gombe, respected teachers, staff, and overseers, I thank God for you and for all that He is doing in and among you. He is truly a good God, rich in love and great in mercy toward those who place their trust in Him.

It was a great pleasure to meet you and spend time with you all. I will forever remember the joy and peace upon your faces because of the love you know you have received from our Father God. There is a scripture that says, "Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of Lights." (Ja. 1:7) You all are these good and perfect gifts. I was honored to walk with you for a few days and see the perfection of God's workmanship in you. I am filled with hope at the thought of who you will become. You hold within you the future of your nation, and the future of the kingdom of God.

My prayer toward you today is that you would be confident in the salvation Jesus has won for you. Under the direction of God and of love, Jesus bore a punishment that He did not deserve so that we may live free of sin and the pain it brings. Just as John the Baptist declared, "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29) Likewise our hearts rejoice when we realize Christ is extending His hand toward us.

Everything in life changes as the payment of blood Jesus made for our sin washes over our hearts. The Apostle Paul tells us, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." (2 Cor. 5:17) The transformation Christ brings is full and complete. We are no longer ruled by sinful desires. Old appetites for sin; to steal, to lie, or to commit sexual sin are expelled from us upon the entrance of the light of Christ into our hearts. It is true, darkness cannot exist where light is.

And, the very same light that saved us works through us, that we may be the light in a dark world. Jesus spoke to His disciples saying, "I am the light of the world, he that follows me will not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (Jn. 8:12) When we possess the light of life, our old desires are replaced by the desires of the Kingdom of Heaven. The light within us brings forth the fruit of His light. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus explained this further, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill that cannot be hid." (Matt. 5:14)

In order that you may walk with your light shining bright, you must receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus was crucified He made His disciples this promise, "...I will ask the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of Truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees Him not, neither knows Him, but you will know Him for He will be within you." (Jn. 14:16) In the same way you believe and receive the salvation of Jesus, you must believe and receive the indwelling of the Spirit of Truth. It is this Holy Spirit who instructs you and shows you

how to live in a way that brings glory to God. It is He that works “within us to will and to do of God’s good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:13)

With your eyes set upon this goal, both to will and do of His good pleasure, I place a charge before you. This charge is a loving challenge to rise up and commit yourself to principles of living that will protect you and bring forth the light and glory of God. By the leading of the Spirit and in the authority of the name of Jesus, I entrust to you these instructions: Live with honor before God and man, Trust God and His Word, Believe God, and Love God. These four statutes, walked out by faith, will establish you upon a firm foundation that cannot be shaken.

Live With Honor Before God and Man

As I sit and ponder this instruction from the Holy Spirit, I find myself wondering - What is honor? What does it mean to be honorable? And the biggest question, what do I have to say about it? I can recite for you the dictionary definition of honor, “Honesty, fairness, or integrity in one’s belief and actions,” but what do I really know of it? Many times in my life I have not been particularly honest, fair, or integrous. I have failed to act because of cowardice, and I have doubted my beliefs. I am intensely aware that I have nothing to offer you in regard to honor. Thankfully, realizing we have nothing, that we are unable, gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to speak.

Living with honor before God and man is first and foremost a question of identity. The Apostle Paul re-

veals to us who we are, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” (Rom. 8:14-16)

When you are born again, you are born again as His child. You are adopted into the fullness of His family. Everything that He has and is, He gives to you without hesitation. Your identity as His adopted son is the place from which your honor springs. He is honest, fair, and integrous. He never doubts and He never fails to act in His perfect time. Because He shares His nature with you, His nature becomes your nature. He is honorable so you are honorable.

It may help to understand the relationship between your identity and living with honor by comparing it to a tree’s roots and branches. The beauty of a tree is easy to behold as we look upon its trunk, leaves, and fruit. However, knifing through the soil below our feet the tree’s root system is its true glory. The roots daily feed the tree and supply it with life-giving water. In times when storms would seek to destroy the tree, the roots hold it firm. And, a tree will never bear fruit without the roots. You see, your identity as a son of God is the root and living with honor is the fruit.

To get a glimpse of how living with honor before God and man manifests in our lives, we need only to look to Jesus. Jesus, the Son of God, though never less than God, was never more than a man. Peter describes Him this way, “Jesus of Nazareth a man approved of

God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him..." (Acts 2:22). As a man, He was subject to all of the temptations that we face every day. He stood firm against strong opposition and never turned from His calling. Jesus' roots held firm.

It is profound to realize that within each crowd of people Jesus ministered to, were two groups of people: those seeking to receive His love and those seeking to kill Him. As one extended their hand for healing, another was reaching out to put Jesus in chains. Regardless of which group a person was in, Jesus loved them. He was the same toward everyone, friend or foe. Jesus lived with honor by remaining true to His identity. He knew He was the Son of God, and that knowledge freed Him from fear and brought assurance in every situation. Regardless of what or whom He faced, Jesus was always full of compassion and was unwavering in speaking the truth of God.

Living with honor means exactly the same for us. Undeterred by opposition, we stand strong as the sons of God, bringing forth God's goodness into a dark world.

Trust God and His Word

King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, said, "Trust in The Lord with all your heart, and depend not on your own understanding. In all things acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your path." (Prov. 3:5-6)

In times of blessing or in times of pain, God is faithful

and working on your behalf. Think about the Apostle Paul. He sat in a jail cell and praised God with singing. How long was he going to be in that cell? He didn't know. Would he be tortured or beaten? He didn't know. Yet, Paul praised God. Through all of his adventures before that moment in prison, Paul had come to know that God would never fail him. Paul was praising God because he trusted God.

As he was praising God, something amazing took place. An earthquake shook the prison! The shackles on all the prisoners' feet broke loose, and the prison gate flew open! Paul was free! He and his friend Silas, who was imprisoned with him, could have simply walked out of the darkness of captivity into the sunlight. But instead, Paul, Silas, and all of the other prisoners stayed where they were.

Why? Why would a man in prison, when his chains are broken and the doors are thrown open, not escape as fast as humanly possible? You see, Paul trusted God beyond his own personal freedom. God had a purpose in these events greater than getting Paul out of jail.

Because the jailer was sure the prisoners had escaped and that he would be killed by those over him as a result, he drew his sword to kill himself. But from the darkness inside the cell came Paul's voice, "Don't hurt yourself. We are all here!" The jailer was completely overwhelmed and fell down in front of Paul and Silas, asking, "What must I do to be saved?" In that moment, Paul and Silas shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with this man and he gave his life to Jesus. Then, the jailer took Paul and Silas to his home where

they again shared the gospel. Everyone in the house was saved and baptized!

Paul trusted that God would work out His perfect purpose in his life. Paul's trust went beyond his own safety and freedom. His trust rested on God's perfect wisdom spoken to him by the Holy Spirit.

It is by the Word of God, both spoken and written, that we can understand God's perfect purpose in our own lives. In one case, we may be called to stay in the jail cell. In another, we may be instructed to escape. Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own, but will tell you what He has heard. He will tell you about the future." (Jn. 16:13 NLT). The way we know the will of God for our lives is by the revelation the Holy Spirit brings to us through the freshly-spoken Word of God and the divinely-inspired written Word of God.

The Bible is the living word of God. Read it. Read it with the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit as your guide and teacher, the Bible holds for you the revelation of the deep mysteries of God. It contains within its pages a living wisdom that will not fail you.

The truth of the Bible can be believed because it was divinely-inspired by a God that cannot lie. Each letter, word, chapter, and book was breathed by God Himself and is unassailable in matters of wisdom, personal conduct, and good judgement. It reveals to us the great love God has toward us. The Bible tells of the mighty promises God has given to us. Also, there

are prophetic foreshadowings of the events to come that will shape our future as we await the return of Christ. I urge you, take the hand of the Holy Spirit and go on a journey in God's word.

Also, always be listening for the spoken word of God released to you through the Holy Spirit. Make time to pray and listen to His voice each day. I personally believe that the Holy Spirit is always speaking to us in so many different kinds of ways. His voice will come to you as a thought that seems to suddenly appear in your mind. He will speak to you in dreams and in visions even when you are awake. The Holy Spirit speaks to you through the voice of those around you or through something you read. You must tune your ears and sharpen your eyes to see the revelation and instruction He is trying to bring you.

When you hear the Holy Spirit, and you will, you must do as He instructs. You can trust what the Holy Spirit says. Paul and Silas stayed in that jail cell because the Holy Spirit told them to do so, and through their obedience, the jailer and his entire house were saved. It is by the Holy Spirit's instruction that God releases His supernatural love and power into this world. By your obedience to the freshly-spoken word of the Spirit, God is healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, casting out demons, and raising the dead!

I also want to offer a word about confirmation. If you have questions about what you hear, ask God for clarity. The Holy Spirit will answer you. He has done so throughout history. He confirmed His will to Moses, Gideon, David, and so many others. You can also compare what you heard to the truth of the

Bible. What the Holy Spirit speaks to you will never contradict what is written. Lastly, seek wise counsel. Ask your teachers and ministers for their help in understanding God's will for you.

God is always moving and working to build your trust and faith in Him. He knows that when you trust Him and His Word, all things are possible.

Believe God

Greatness in the kingdom of Heaven is determined by one thing, our ability to receive from God. We are completely unable to live the life to which He calls us without being world-class receivers of His love and instruction. From this truth comes an implied but important mandate. The things we receive from God, we must also believe.

"Jesus said unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?" (Jn. 11:40) As He asks Martha this question, Jesus is standing at the tomb of His friend Lazarus. A moment before Jesus presented the question to Martha, He gave the command to "take away the stone" covering the entry to the tomb. Martha, Lazarus' sister, hearing Jesus' instruction, responds, "Lord, he has been dead for four days and by now he stinks."

When I read her response, I am forced to reflect on my life and see the moments when God was preparing to do something amazing and I gave the stinking response of disbelief. These are moments of which I am not particularly proud. God had intended to re-

lease His great love toward me or through me, and for some petty reason I could not believe.

It is an absolute imperative that you believe God and what He says to you through the Holy Spirit. To believe God is to open yourself to God's supernatural power and to accept His supernatural truth. Through the Apostle Mark, we are told "that all things are possible to those that believe" (Mark 9:23).

It is important to understand that even though they are closely related, faith in God and believing God are not the same thing. Faith is the raw material, that when present in us, God uses to bring into being things that were not. This is what makes prayer powerful. What you speak in faith, God partners Himself with your faith and the provision for a situation is created. The spiritual function of believing is to open the door for that supernatural provision to be released in this world.

Believing God acts like a contractual agreement between you and Him. Your belief of what He speaks is the agreement of your heart to His intentions. It is in essence signing on the dotted line or shaking hands to ratify the contract. The moment you believe, He has a legal right to do and be amazing in and through your life.

For example, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, he that believes on me, the works I am doing he will do also; and greater works will he do because I go to my Father." (Jn. 14:12) If you never believe that Jesus was talking to you when He made this statement, then it is impossible for God to do the "greater things"

through you. By taking hold of this promise through belief, you respond to Jesus, "Here am I, use me."

Let's return for a moment to Jesus and Martha standing in front of Lazarus' tomb:

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard me. I know that You always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent me."

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." (Jn. 11:41-44)

When my father teaches this passage, he asks the congregation a question, "Who do you identify with in this story?" There are some that respond Mary or Martha, the sisters of Lazarus. There are some that identify with Lazarus, the man raised from the dead. Invariably, no one responds with the correct answer.

The one we should identify with in this story is Jesus. Knowing and believing God, Jesus spoke and the dead man arose. When you believe and obey God's living word, spoken to you by the Holy Spirit, you too will call the dead from their graves.

Love God

Above all, love God. It is the highest command. When asked which is the greatest of the Ten Com-

mandments, Jesus responded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of you mind." (Matt. 22:37)

Love is simultaneously the simplest part of God's kingdom to grasp and its deepest mystery to be sought out over our lifetimes. We are first touched by God's love when the Holy Spirit brings to our attention the difference between that love and the sin in our hearts. God, in His love for us, reveals to us the separation from His love our sin creates. And by love, He provided for us a way, in the salvation of Jesus, to be reunited with His great love. But He not only loves us, He is love.

This is a deep mystery. How can something so simple to feel and know, be the very identity of a never-ending God?

We often call 1 Corinthians 13 "The Love Chapter." The verses in this chapter bring revelation of the nature and power of love. Because God is love, this passage is a description of God Himself. As you read the following quotation if you will replace the word "love" with "God" you will see how these scriptures disclose who God is:

Love [God] suffers long, and is kind; love [God] envies not; love [God] lifts up not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love [God] never fails... (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

Because He is love, everything He does and says reveals His love. Love, in the form of Jesus' blood, is the lens through which He views those who believe. Love causes God's heart to weep for those who are lost and captive to their sin. His love is the source and goal of every miracle healing, every word of wisdom, every prophetic utterance, and every majestic moment when our lives are touched by His power. Love is the reason He hears our prayers and fulfills them in abundance. Because of His love, He wraps His arms around us and refuses to let go.

When you open your heart to His kind of love, you will be divinely inspired to share that love. His love and loving Him in return, will transform you and become the highest aspiration and motivation of your life. God's love for you will become the treasure of your heart and from this treasure will come good fruit. The proceeding instructions: Live with honor before God and man, Trust God and His word, and Believe God, will flow naturally from you as you love Him. You will treat all men, women, and children with kindness and grace. The speaking of your lips and work of your hands will show the overflow of His love for you.

Love will be the reason you flee from sin. Sin is a hindrance to the exchange of love and because you love God you will desire to be free of sin. A desire for holiness and purity will grow in your heart. Love will guard your heart from unwise paths and cause you to cling to the narrow way that leads to Christ. His love for you and yours for Him in return, will protect you all your days. "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities,

nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God..." (Rom. 8:38-39)

To love God truly is the highest command. It will compel you to walk as Jesus did. Jesus told His disciples if you want to see the Father, look at the Son. By the leading of the Spirit, everything Jesus said and did revealed the love and nature of God. Because Jesus is alive in us, the same calling has been inscribed upon our hearts. As you love God, you will make known a loving God to the world around you. Your life will be the revelation and expression of His mighty love.

Young men, be aware there are many voices in this world contrary to the goodness of God. Speaking the lies of the enemy, they will seek to take your ear away from the voice of the Father and to rob you of your identity as a son of God. You must cast away every lying tongue the enemy sends your way.

Claim and hold tight to the things you know to be true. This simple measure has powerful effects. Each day, when you rise from bed, put your feet on these two truths: God is good and God is love. These truths will be a guidepost and encouragement to you. They will aid you in discerning lies and resisting temptation.

Lastly, walk always in the instruction of the Spirit. Do not waver in speaking the truth in love, extending to those weaker than you the grace of God. Love one another - for to love one another is to love Jesus. Complete with joy each task set before you, persevering in the way of Christ with courage and wisdom.

“Following after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and humbleness, fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto you are also called, and have spoken a good testimony before many witnesses.” (1 Tim. 6:12)

You all will live in my heart and are continually mentioned in my prayers. May God bless you and keep you.

To my friends, JW