

Note: I reshaped the epistle to confront the Spector of race and face a truth all parents of African descent face that our children are not safe in this nation nor valued by institutions that profess “allegiance” and “love” for Christ. The following is an actual letter I gave to my son with a few updates.

Dear Elijah,

What shall I tell you?

Shall I tell you that your rights are protected, and racism is a scourge now banished from society?

Shall I tell you that in this country, you are entitled to act and live as any other teenage boy, to dance playfully with minor mischief, and to speak with a quick, immature tongue?

Shall I tell you that your body is safe, your mind valued, your future free?

If I tell you these things, my words will be perjury before God and an assault upon the memory of our ancestors. So, today I must share a hard truth with you. The truth, my son, is that you are not safe. You are not valued by certain others because of their persistent melanin phobia. There is nothing wrong with you, but there is something wrong with adults who cling to myths created to maintain power and control. You do not yet have the right to be a frolicking teenager like other children in our community, for your boisterous actions might

be misconstrued as a fearful threat by people who refuse to remove the racialized lens from their eyes.

I am sorry I must write this to you, but it is the duty of every Black father to share the stories of this battle with his son. It is unfair, but your capacity to handle the weight of this truth is evident through your spiritual maturity. And while I am bound by duty and love to share this truth, it is not the only truth you must know. What is often forgotten and deleted from your primary and secondary curriculum are these simple truths: You are a beautiful boy of color, a child of African descent, a magical creation of God.

There will be days that tempt your spirit to run to the room of despair and play the chords of cynicism, but do not shy away from the pain. Do not become a modern pessimist afraid to act, or one who believes that hope is nothing but a fairy tale. Dare to lean into the storm, son, and draw strength from the history you hold and the faith you profess. Not the faith others claim you hold, but the faith in which justice, protest, intellect, wonder, grace, righteous fury, and love do battle against the dragons fashioned by old men. Never let your anger become unchecked rage, scratching at the lining of your heart. I tell you often, you are loved and designed with purpose and immeasurable potential. You carry a lineage of women who refused to bow and men who dared to live. Never forget who you are and the legacy you hold. The world we live in will attempt to steal your essence and drain away every ounce of your beautiful life from your soul. Never allow the external noise to disrupt your inner life. The practice of silence, meditation, prayer, reflection, community gathering, and healthy grieving will serve to strengthen you on this journey.

You and your generation are the gifts God has sent to victims of an old story. You are the prey of this nation's dying wolves who want yesterday always to be tomorrow, yet you are the solution to this nation's deepest problems. You are their fear, yet you are our joy.

One aspect on this journey many who hold the banner of "Christianity" forget, ignore or truncate as a footnote is the power and revolutionary nature of "love connected to justice." Never forget, love without justice is mere sentimentality and justice without love as your grandfather stated, on many occasions, easily slips into the realm of brutality without a sacred anchor; but Love, when married to Justice will stand before God's altar and publicly consummate a relationship that shall produce a child named "transformation" and an elusive sibling named "liberation." Our ancestors shared it in this manner "*it is how we love that is more important than any other skill, we learn*" the apostle Paul reiterates this ancient African wisdom in a statement to a church in conflict in the region known as Corinth "let all you do be done in love." This Love is revolutionary at its heart, courageous in action when facing systems, false beliefs, cruelty, ignorance, and sinful supremacy shaped by socially constructed myths that haunt our nation.

I wrote the following blessing/poem with you in mind may it be tethered to your heart for future reference.

*May you never lose a sense of wonder,*

*May you forever embrace the power of laughter.*

*Your greatest strength shall be found within.*

*When you prepare to leave this place of flesh and bone the only thing that shall remain is love and the residue of intention.*

*Love large,*

*Love without conditions,*

*be courageous enough to love when it is unpopular. Speak truth to power even if your voice shakes. Never shrink your voice,*

*never hide your light,*

*never apologize for bringing the fullness of you and your ancestors into every space.*

*Love God,*

*Love self,*

*and work for generations not yet born.*

I shall always be with you, though it is my prayer that my physical body shall precede you in death. This is the silent request of all parents, especially those of us who still wait to sip fully from the cup of democracy. It is my prayer that I will leave you the best fuel for this struggle for justice – my love. I love you and shall always fight for you and with you. Be well and be strong. Better days are ahead if you choose to fight with your head and heart.

With Love,

Dad

