

LIVE THE LOVE LETTER

In the introduction I compared God's Word to the lyrics of His love song to you. When you know and experience God's active love in your life, you are naturally drawn to the words of the song. His lyrics are written in the form of a Love Letter, God's inspired Word in the collective work of the Holy Bible.

For many, the draw isn't there because His love doesn't feel real and personal. It will come in time if you are willing to take a step of faith and begin to read. There's a valid reason why each believer needs the Word of God: transformation.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2)

Your life experiences have shaped your mind and thoughts. The way you were raised, where you were raised, events in your childhood and young adulthood, all these life experiences tell you who you are and what you feel. Many are lies. The serpent has deceived, and you have eaten. Those lies need to be dispelled with truth. The Bible speaks truth over those lies and tells you who you are and Whose you are.

No matter how your mind, feelings, and emotions have been shaped, whether negatively or positively, your spirit hears one call: "Come to Me..." (Matthew 11:28). That one phrase of the love song tells you all you need is to run to Jesus.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1)

In the passage above, John is referring to Jesus as the Word. So when you read Scripture, you are in actuality getting to know Jesus—*The Word*. The divine Book is His introduction of who He is and how much He loves you.

Previously you were encouraged to pursue Jesus as the desire of your heart. That's impossible to do without getting to know Him. It's impossible not to love Him once you do get to know Him in Spirit and Truth.

Our verse from Romans about being transformed applies here. None of this makes any sense at all without your mind being renewed. The world-shaped, human brain can't grasp how we can have someone who isn't physically present as the desire of our heart. That's why this is difficult for women to believe. Our boyfriend, husband, children, parents, and all the others who vie for our heart's affection are living, breathing, walking-with-us beings. Horizontal love relationships are something we can much more easily wrap our minds around. But a faraway Jesus, how can we embrace Him?

If this was a natural process, I would stop here and list some bullet points on how to know Jesus as your intimate companion, but that's not at all how it works. The supernatural process of getting to know Jesus is something that happens over time. At least it did for me. My heart was only accustomed to accommodating human love, so it fought against spiritual love for way too long.

In my own experience, I found that getting to know Him was an incremental process that happened as I chose to meet with Him each day. I would read something from the Bible or do a day's homework in whatever Bible study I was attending and hope to hear something that would apply to me. I noticed that something happened more frequently. As I would read certain passages, it was like I couldn't move beyond those words. Even if I did continue to read, the words of what I was reading would never sink in because all I could think of was the previous passage that had caught my attention.

Sometimes, that captivating passage would make sense, and I could see how it applied to me in my situation then. Other times, a verse would strike a chord, but I couldn't understand why. Here is one such example:

“No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.” (2 Timothy 2:4)

I read this and couldn't read past it. I read it again and again. I fretted over what it might mean to me specifically since God seemed to have me stalled there. I prayed and asked, but revelation never came. A year or more later, I ran into someone who mentioned me coming back to work at my previous job. My first thought was that the spending money would be nice.

Bam! That verse came to mind. My understanding was finally opened. My call is ministry, in whatever form that takes. I knew I was supposed to pursue ministering to women and not that job. I wasn't to get entangled in the affairs of this life. When that passage originally caught my attention, God was giving me an answer to a question I wouldn't ask for another year.

Don't think I was some spiritual giant back when that verse stopped me in my tracks. Hardly! As a matter of fact, that was soon after my fall and return. I wasn't at all experienced in hearing from God through His Word, but that ended up being just one example of how He spoke to me through reading my Bible.

How did that help me to get to know Him better? I saw that He was actually present with me through His Word. He took an obscure verse and pinned it to my heart so that when the temptation came for me to take that job, illumination followed. I absolutely *knew* I wasn't supposed to say yes.

Though more than a decade has passed, when an opportunity comes up for me to consider a job outside of ministry, that verse comes to mind, and I know I'm supposed to keep doing what I'm doing.

Maybe that verse doesn't apply to you in the same way, but that isn't the point. I am hoping this was a practical example of living the love letter. As you practice this dance, you will have your own verses that grab hold of your attention and won't let go. It'll make sense when it happens but only to you.

When I think of the concept of getting to know Jesus, I think of a mail-order bride. Two people meet from afar and send letters back and forth in order to get to know one another until the time comes to meet in person.

At first they are perfect strangers, but the more they read each other's words on paper or talk on the phone, the closer they become. They learn to recognize their intended's handwriting or to detect certain inflections in tone. Anticipation and excitement builds until both can hardly wait for the day they begin to share a life together.

Jesus is called the Groom, and we collectively as believers are the Bride. There will come a day when we will all meet Him face-to-face. I don't want to meet a stranger. I want to know Him, what He sounds like, what it feels like to be with Him. That can begin now, even when it seems impossible as our Groom is with us only in Spirit.

Will you arrive in heaven someday and hardly know the One who laid down His life so that you could be His? If so, then you have to shift your current approach to your walk of faith. You absolutely must invest in getting to know your Groom through His Word.

If you don't currently spend time reading the Love Letter because you consider it intimidating, take a step of faith and begin. He will lead the way and help you get to know Him. The supernatural part is His part. You don't have to figure it out. Girl, your only job is to show up each day. Allow Him access to your heart. Read. Study. Apply what you read to the best of your ability. Divine encounters will begin to happen. The first verse that speaks to an exact situation will blow your mind. Then it'll happen again. And again. There will come a time when you open your Bible with the sure knowledge that Jesus will show up through His Word.

I can't remember where I read this phrase, but I think it's beautiful: breathless anticipation. There should come a day when you approach your time with Him with breathless anticipation. Isn't that what every longing heart desires, to come together with the one they love in breathless anticipation? This topic requires more depth than can be covered here, so this concept of expectation will overflow into our next section.

For now, let's shift our focus to a contrasting view of the Love Letter, your letter back to Jesus.

Years ago I began journaling. I'm not sure how others use a journal, but in mine I'm basically having a conversation with God. I address Him as "You" since I'm writing directly to Him. It's a focused way I pray. I also use the journal space to make note of things I've read and how He has spoken to me through His Word.

If I tried to express the hundreds of ways He has led me to a perfect verse at the precise time I needed it, I would never be able to do it justice. There are times when I think a particular thought or have a question

come to mind, then soon after, through some chain of events, I land at the exact verse that responds to that thought or question. That's no coincidence. I know it the moment I see it. I love to record those encounters.

I remind myself of the forgetful Israelites. I have these Wow! moments over the years and ask myself how I can ever doubt His intimate presence in my life again. Before you know it, I'm faced with a new challenge and find myself wondering if He will come through. Those are the times my journal comes in most handy. Since I often actually write the word *Wow!* beside some of my most notable God-sightings, when I glance back in my journals, those are the entries that catch my eye. Joshua would call those Stones of Remembrance, a subject we will touch on later.

This was my sixth book to write and publish. The others, being fiction, were entirely different animals. I didn't have much reason for doubt, other than questioning if they would be well received. This book, however, keeps me doubting myself daily. I wonder if it will all come together as I envision it. I wonder what I'm thinking for even attempting it. I am on a mountain of inspiration one day and in the valley of doubt the next.

Recently, I have found myself so tossed back and forth that I have learned a new method of maintaining my resolve. I read back over one of my journals, the one that most represents this *You. Are. Loved.* journey. When I'm on the borderlands of doubt, I open my journal to some random page and begin looking for Wow! moments, those times when the Lord was so clearly leading the way toward this journey that doubt can't hinder me. It renews my strength so that I can soar again in belief.

I often ponder if other people are as bipolar in their spiritual moods as I am. It's easy to see that King David was if you read the Psalms. Maybe that's why I retreat there often. When you read the chapters he penned, you will ride along with him through his highs and lows. Like David, I see the evidence of God and never, ever stop believing His goodness. Still, I need a glance back at times so that my current day's difficulties won't suck the wind out of my sails.

I can't recommend journaling enough. I recently had a friend say that she wished people would stop trying to get her to journal. She says it becomes a checklist for her, something she feels like she needs to do in order to check the box. The way I journal is nothing like that. If I have something I want to record, which is most days, I do. If not, I never feel bad about not writing.

Recently, I was trying to remember something from several years ago. I began to sift through old journals and scan the entries looking for that one particular thing. I came across one entry that got my attention. The date was there with this one line: "I'm hanging on by a thread here." That was it. I remember the season but not my exact woe. I just know that even when I was at my most discouraged, I wrote out my desperation in the form of my own love letter. I knew Who could pull me up from hanging off the ledge. He did.

Maybe looking at journaling differently will help you too. When God speaks to you through His Word, it can't hurt to respond in kind through your own love letter back to Him. Not only can you narrow in on your thoughts as you write, but you also are recording His goodness for later use.

I spoke on this topic recently, and a woman asked how I write personal things without fear of others reading what I write. Most of what I write anyone can see. For things more private, I'm vague in a you-know-who did you-know-what kind of way. When I read back later, I almost always know what my cryptic entries mean. I can tell by all that surrounds the season I was writing about.

She was wise to ask that question, and you would be wise to consider what someone would uncover if they read your journal. What if they find your love relationship with Jesus growing? That wouldn't be so bad.

Here is one more thought: There's this girl I know, After-Nine Lisa. She's so negative and spends the last hours of the day trying to drag me down. I've learned to try and tune her out when she says I'm crazy for pursuing this writing ministry. Some nights, though, her voice is so loud that I believe the things she says.

I can hardly believe I'm on the mountaintop with Jesus at seven a. m., then listening to After-Nine Lisa insult me later that same night. I guess being tired after a long day makes me vulnerable. A new way I've found to combat her when she's her loudest and meanest is to scan my morning journal entry. It serves as a reminder of all the Lord spoke to me that morning. If I have nothing from the morning to read, or if my entry was on the negative side, then I have found that ending my day with a quick entry of thanks for the day can hush After-Nine Lisa.

Journaling doesn't have to look like anything in particular. Find what works for you. I just know from experience that having a record of all that God has done, your prayers and praises, and how your closeness with Him has grown, can have power over doubt.

Scripture along with prayer and journaling back to Him have explosive power. His Word to you and yours back to Him are like singing a duet, a beautiful new love song every morning. If you don't feel naturally drawn to read, give it time. Until you do, you will have to walk (and read) in faith that He will whisper His love over you.

Chapter: Live the Love Letter

Key Point

When you experience God's active love in your life, you are naturally drawn to His Love Letter.

- 1) When you first began walking with Jesus, did you feel naturally drawn to read the Word? Do you feel the draw now?

- 2) Read John 1:1. When you read the Word, who you are encountering? _____
When you read Scripture, you are getting to know Jesus, *the* Word.

- 3) Read Matthew 11:28-30. He is always saying, "Come to me," not just when life is hard. Are there only certain circumstances that drive you to the Word? Give examples.

Key Point

While the enemy's lies have misshapen our hearts and minds, we are transformed and renewed through the Word.

- 4) Read Romans 12:2. Why is it necessary for our minds to be renewed?

- 5) While the enemy has done all he can to keep you from the truth, God wants you to know who you are and Whose you are. Over time, who has the world (the enemy) convinced you that you are?

- 6) We act out of what we believe. If we are convinced that intimacy with Jesus isn't something we can attain, then we will never seek Him with our whole heart (Psalm 9:10). What heart attitudes and mindsets do you believe need to be transformed within you?

Key Point

We, like a mail-order bride, will someday come face-to-face with our Groom.

- 7) Do you know what Jesus sounds like and what it feels like to be with Him? Is His presence real to you? If so, what does it "feel" like?

- 8) What emotions or desires does the imagery of Jesus as your faraway Groom evoke? Does it stir your heart and inspire you to grow in intimacy with Him?

- 9) Have you ever gotten to really know someone better through written words, for example, old-school letters, cards, or texts? If so, what was special about those communications?

Key Point

Read. Study. Apply. Divine encounters will begin to happen as you watch with breathless anticipation.

- 10) Do you have examples of when Bible passages spoke directly to you? What are your Wow! moments?

- 11) What verse(s) have grabbed your attention over the years and may speak personally to only you?

Key Point

Journaling and prayer are our responses to Jesus, our love letter back to Him.

- 12) Has maintaining a journal felt like just another checklist item to you? If yes, how can the idea of it being your love letter back to Him change your perception of what it can be?

- 13) In what ways can recording your praises and His goodness help you grow in your current walk of faith?

- 14) Through your journal or even notes written in your Bible, how might God use your Wow! moments now to Wow! you later on down the road?
