

EXCERPT



Mother to Son

Letters to a Black Boy on Identity and Hope

March 24, 2020 | \$20, 160 pages, hardcover | 978-0-8308-3276-7

"These letters are personal and yet applicable to us all. With child or without. Brown or white. Married or single. We may not all understand what it is to be her, a black mother with a brown boy, but we all understand what it is like to love. To care so deeply for someone that your affection becomes words."

—Taken from the foreword by Jackie Hill Perry

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It was my friend Karen Ellis who first told me to "use my Wynnspiration."

Wynn is my son. As I write this, he's just turned two years old. No one could ever be more loved by his parents than my husband, Phillip, and I adore our little boy. He is extroverted, inquisitive, fiercely affectionate, and staunchly opinionated. He's discovering so much about this world and has yet to grow jaded by the ups and downs of finding his place therein.

I am five foot eight. My husband is six foot six. So we are expecting a little giant. And we know that from a very early age, he is likely to be the biggest kid, the strongest kid, and the one least likely to be seen by outsiders as a kid. We know that he may be perceived as more threatening and aggressive than his non-black peers. We know that, like his daddy and me, he might grow up with stories of having been made to feel *other* because of the color of his skin.

We want him to walk through life cognizant of these facts without becoming jaded by them. We want to teach him that he has incomparable value in the eyes of the Father in spite of the way he will often be perceived. Though this life will sometimes make him feel less than human, he is more than a conqueror through his Savior. Against all odds, we want to raise an optimist. Someone who knows that he might receive the worst that this world has to offer and still believes the best. Someone who cultivates glorious respites from the cruelty of the world by the grace of God.

We also want to raise someone who will change this world so that by and by the narrative that he has to tell *his* son—or maybe that his son will have to tell *his* son, or son's son—will be different. We want to hold that tension of the *already* with the *not yet*. The already being that Walter Wynn Holmes is an image bearer, invested with identity, dignity, and significance and that in God's economy his brown skin is nothing more than a glorious display of the creative purpose of the Father. And the not yet being the fact that sometimes the world does not see this identity, dignity, and significance and that the results are often grievous.

—Taken from the introduction

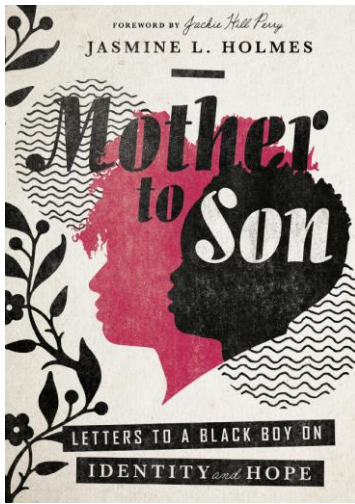


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"I know this wondrous little person has the potential to change the world—and I want him to know it too." In this collection of powerful letters to her young son, Jasmine Holmes shares about her journey as an African American Christian and what she wants her son to know as he grows and approaches the world as a black man.

You Are a Little Black Boy

Just this morning, I watched a video of two cops cuffing a young black man on the side of the road. He hadn't committed a crime. In fact, he was just sitting in the passenger seat of a car. He was riding with his (white) grandmother and her (white) friend and the police stopped them because they thought he might be robbing those poor older women.

When they pulled the car over, told him to put his hands in the air, cuffed him, and put him in the back of their squad car they saw a black man.

When I look at you, I see your brown skin. I see you in the face of the black teenager being cuffed for no reason. I see you when I teach my history class about the murder of Emmett Till. I see you when I hear people talk about black men in a way that questions their worth and humanity.

I see you everywhere.

But that is not the first thing I see when I look at you.

When I look at you, I see my son. I see the little jellybean whose heartbeat heralded more hope than I'd ever known in motherhood. I see the continuation of the family legacy that birthed me. I see the future of a biblical legacy that began before the dawn of time. I see my beautiful, bright-eyed, firstborn son.

I see a little boy full of joy. A tall-for-his-age toddler who is friendly, exuberant, and loving. You never meet a stranger. You love to snuggle, blow goodbye kisses, and flirt with any beautiful woman you see. You love to hold my hand while we're riding in the car and lift up my shirt to kiss your baby brother in my belly. Sometimes, you even wave at my bellybutton, as though he can see you. You love any song with a beat and you're addicted to *Moana*. You don't like to nap without a bed full of stuffed animals and you refuse to go to sleep without first saying goodnight to everyone in the room—especially your mama.

Your brown skin is the same tone as mine, but wrought of a deeper hue like your daddy's. You are a replica of my baby picture with an obvious dose of Holmes thrown into your mannerisms and personality.

But because of your brown skin, you won't just be seen as tall for your age. To some, you'll look like an adult long before you're grown. Your exuberance will sometimes be mistaken for recklessness, your passion for anger. Your affection will make some people nervous, especially if your flirtation veers in the direction of the wrong white man's daughter. Your joyous dancing will indicate to some that you're wild, even threatening. Some people won't even take the time to get to know your tenderness.

Sweet boy, I do not say these things to jade you. As I teach you these lessons, I pray that they don't come from a place of bitterness or a life ruled by fear. I want them to flow from a place of wisdom. I can't just see you as my sweet little boy. I have to visualize the man that you'll become and I must prepare you to face the world in his skin.

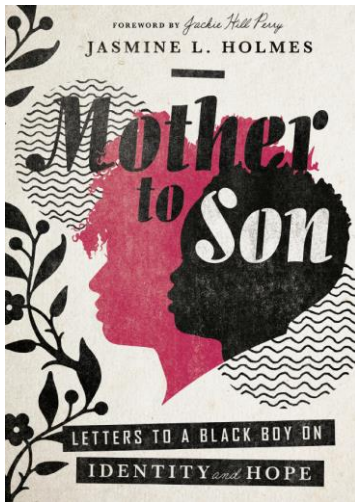


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"Jasmine Holmes's Mother to Son is written for a far larger audience than just her own children; she has delivered a literary benediction to grace our bookshelves, challenge our earthly cultures, strengthen our feeble hearts, and point us toward lasting hope."

K. A. Ellis, Cannada Fellow and Director, the Center for the Study of the Bible and Ethnicity at Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta

But there is no better preparation for that than to know that you are not defined by the cruelty that some in this world wish to offer you. You aren't even completely defined by your mama's love. You are defined by the God of the universe who purposefully gave you that beautiful brown skin for his glory. No matter how the world might perceive you, hold your head high knowing that you are matchlessly loved by your Father in heaven.

And you will be fiercely protected by your mother on earth for as long as I possibly can.

Love,
Mama

—Taken from chapter one



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