

RANSOMED
HEART
ministries

June 2008

Dear Friends and Allies,

I'm so sorry I've let a few months lapse since last I wrote. You were *so* gracious and *so* encouraging to tell me to "keep these letters coming," and we were just delighted to hear how God has been using them in your lives. Then a very busy spring swept in, and I sort of got swept away in it. Part of the busy-ness of the spring was the launch of *Walking with God*, and the Tour. It was beautiful, and exhausting. And filled with greater meaning. Something really important is taking place. Something really big.

I want to tell you a story from a few years back, when Ransomed Heart was just getting going. (I mentioned this in my blog at walkingwithgod.net, but I know many of you haven't had a chance to read that, and it bears repeating and a bit more explanation).

Several years ago I was backpacking, alone, in the Collegiate Peaks Wilderness in Colorado. It's something I try and do once a year, that is, head to the high country for some time alone with God. I usually go for three days or so. Anyhow, this year I was camped on a high shelf in a high mountain valley, just beneath peaks called the Three Apostles. It was June, and there were still patches of snow all around. The days were warm but the nights were cold. One evening after dinner I was just sitting in camp as the sun set, not really wanting to go to bed but too cold to enjoy the evening. I was sitting sort of hunched over, my arms wrapped round my legs, trying to get warm, when God said,

Build a fire.

Now, I don't normally build campfires when I'm alone; usually when it gets dark I'm in my sleeping bag in the tent, reading by head lamp. But I clearly heard him say, *Build a fire*. My first thought was, *Where on this mountain am I possibly going to find dry wood?* I stood up, and turned toward a line of tall spruce trees about thirty yards behind me. Though it was a long line of trees, my eyes went immediately to one tree in particular, to the base, and there, under a canopy of boughs, was a pile of firewood. Stacked. Under the tree. Out of the snow and rain. Not broken, or gathered, but actually cut with a saw. How, in this remote valley, in this secluded spot, under one of a hundred trees, was it possible I would find an abundance of dry wood neatly cut and stacked??!!

I slowly, slowly turned around, to look behind me, around me, fully expecting Jesus himself to be standing there, smiling. You can understand, I was blown away. I felt like Abraham who just found the ram caught in the thicket, a God-appointed provision for a God-directed moment. I gathered some of the wood, and made a fire ring. But I made it small, like an Indian fire for one person, and the wood God had provided did not fit. It was too big. He spoke again. *Build a bigger fire*. I pushed out the stones, made a bigger ring, stacked the wood and let 'er blaze. As I sat by the fire warming myself, I knew the whole event was filled with greater meaning. It felt prophetic, like an illustration from God, like the ones you find in Jeremiah (a linen belt, a potter's wheel, a basket of figs all conveying a deeper message).

That was years ago, and I believe it has come true. There is now a much bigger fire. You, sitting here right now, reading this letter, you are that bigger fire. The Advanced Boot Camp we did in May, where I met so many men whose lives have been rescued not by our ministry but by the ministry of men we

have touched, they are the bigger fire. Standing on stage each night during the tour, looking out at the bright eyes and earnest faces eager to connect with God, eager to live this life he is calling us to live, eager to share it with others, I realized, here is the bigger fire. You are the bigger fire. It's come true.

I wanted to share this story for several reasons. One, because it is a picture of how God speaks to us in many ways, creative ways, and all we have to do is turn our hearts his direction and keep our eyes open. God is speaking. The whole world is filled with his voice. When something weird or unusual or "momentous" seems to be happening, pause and ask God, "What are you saying, Lord? Help me understand." Don't ignore it, and don't leap to conclusions, either. Stay with it, and ask for understanding.

I tell this story also as a reminder that this bigger fire is something you share in, something so beautiful and powerful, and something we share *together*. How much have all our lives changed since we discovered that the heart is central – central to us and to the Christian life. How much has changed since we realized we are at war, and if we would find the life God offers we must deal with the thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy. How much has changed since we found that this is a great love story we live in, and since we have begun to learn to walk with God. It changes everything.

And there are so many hearts yet to be rescued. A bigger fire yet to be built. The story on the mountain has come true, and is *coming true*.

A friend shared the most encouraging story with me yesterday. He was having lunch with his pastor, who asked him if he had heard of a book called *Walking with God*. My friend simply said, "Yes, I have," not sure where the conversation was headed. The pastor, who was not beforehand sympathetic to the things we teach, went on to say something to the effect of, "How did I miss this? How did I come to believe something else? This is true. It is transforming my life." This pastor has just arrived at the circle of this fire, and he is warming himself by it. What I love about the story is that it is entirely beyond the reach of our world at Ransomed Heart. This was the effect of someone else's life, sharing the message life by life. Building a bigger fire.

It is June now, and I hope you are making plans to get away and find beauty and rest this summer. And, perhaps, to find a pile of dry wood under a tall tree in a forest on a mountain where you never, ever expected to find it. Or better, God's version of that story uniquely written for you. Speaking to you what you need to hear.

The way to find it, of course, is to walk with God. Listen for his voice.

Your friends on this side of the fire,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'John' written in a cursive, flowing style.

John