

August 2009

Dear Friends,

Summer will soon draw to a close, and fall will rush upon us with all of its demands. Before that happens, I wanted to share some things God has had me thinking about during my “Sabbath” times this summer.

First let me set the context: I explained in my last letter that we run pretty hard for ten months a year here at Ransomed Heart, then sort of collapse and catch our breath sometime during June and July before we jump back into action in August. I also confessed what a particularly hard year this has proven to be. Brutal has the battle been.

So I was especially looking forward to a backpacking trip I had planned with my sons in July. We went deep into the Flat Tops Wilderness here in Colorado, and the scenery was stunning – sweeping vistas, soaring peaks, rugged cliff faces, a 100 foot waterfall. It was awesome; I loved it. But I found that what actually nourished my soul more were smaller, more “intimate” things – the dew drops on a single leaf, tiny flowers, a small brook.

It got me thinking about two words that somehow describe the Christian life – Epic and Intimate. As you think about it, you’ll discover that they describe God, and his creation, the Christian story, and our place in it. Epic and Intimate.

Sometimes the summer storms here are Epic – thunder and lightening, 30,000 foot clouds, torrents of hail. Sometimes the breeze blows so softly and intimately you can barely feel it as it caresses your face. Sometimes in the Gospels you see Jesus doing something Epic – like calming a storm, raising the dead, dying on a Cross. Sometimes you see him in the most intimate act – a touch, a tear, a kind word. Epic and Intimate.

As I trekked through the mountains in July, I remembered something that happened more than ten years ago, when my best friend Brent Curtis (co-author of *The Sacred Romance*) was killed in a climbing accident. That summer I also went to the mountains – to find solace, and solitude, beauty, and time with God. I was high in the Holy Cross Wilderness, surrounded by majestic peaks and valleys. But the grandeur – the Epic – did not meet me as it normally does. I walked; I wandered. As I was descending back to my camp one afternoon, I came across a very small patch of very small flowers, tiny little white flowers so delicate and intricate they could have been lace. The dam broke; the grief poured out; I wept for the first time deeply. Because what I found in those flowers was the Intimate – the love of God, the mercy of God, the tenderness. Intimately.

Sometimes we need the Epic. We got so lost in the details of life we forget what it’s all about. Just a few weeks ago Stasi had some music on the stereo when I got home. It was a soundtrack to a movie and it was very sweeping, moving, Epic. It stirred me deeply, woke me from the mundane, called my heart up. It was just what I needed. I was suddenly reminded of the Larger Story and the greatness of God and the fierce Battle we find ourselves in. My heart was ablaze.

Sometimes we need the Intimate – as in a time of grief, or a time of profound weariness.

Epic. Intimate.

I think you could take these two categories and find them helpful in many ways. Start with what kind of person you tend to be – notice your choice in music, and movies, and favorite places. Are you the kind of person that leans more towards the Epic, or the Intimate? How about your spouse, or friends, your children?

You could also use the Epic and Intimate to help you interpret your life – are you in a season of the Epic, or the Intimate right now? What is it that your soul needs? Those of us who tend toward the Epic need to balance that with the Intimate. On the whole, I tend to be an “Epic” sort of person (you probably knew that long ago). I love adventure; I love thunderstorms, sweeping vistas; I love grizzly bears more than humming birds. I also spend a lot of time in the Great Battle. So this summer, I found it was the Intimate that my soul most deeply needed. And I had to be *intentional* about getting it. It was good to simply walk through the mountains, slowly, and drink in all the little gifts God had for me in the Intimate.

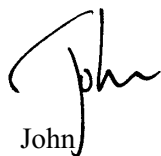
But the opposite is also true – those of you who tend towards the Intimate need the Epic. I know far too many Christians who think that life with God is only about the Intimate. The books they read, the worship they listen to, even the church they attend focus on the Intimate. They have not yet awoken to the Epic, nor to the Great Battle, and it is hurting them deeply, though some do not yet know it. The Intimate is beautiful, but we need the Epic. If you think life is only about the Intimate, you will be hurt and misinterpret why.

And the opposite is true – if you live only in the Epic you will be hurt and misunderstand that, too.

And so we are nearing the end of summer. Life here at Ransomed Heart is already kicking into a high gear. But I don't think I am quite ready yet. And so I would ask your prayers for us – that God would continue to restore us and renew us. That he would shield us from every attack of the enemy. That he would guide our every move, so that our lives and our work here would be fully ruled by the loving leadership of Jesus. We do need your prayers.

And, as God moves your heart, thank you for your financial support also. We're very grateful.

For the Epic *and* the Intimate,



John