

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

April 2010

Taped across our bathroom mirror is a sign I made.

I put it there because I knew I would see it every day; it is literally “in my face.” Forced to see the sign, I would have to stop and take account of it. And therefore, daily, be reminded.

The sign says, “Do What Makes You Strong in Christ.”

Let me explain the “why” behind this reminder to myself, and then “what” I do in response.

If you haven’t noticed lately, the world we live in is draining. Utterly draining. We rush through our days with barely a moment of sanity. When we do pause, we don’t even have time for an email; we text, or twitter instead. It’s quicker. We get our coffee on the run, and after an hour or two when it doesn’t carry us anymore we grab an energy drink. Meanwhile, all day long, media is constantly in our face with a barrage of constant stimulus. Seriously – how spacious does your day feel? How many free moments do you have in a normal day – and do you feel free to enjoy them?

Even if you hate the pace of the world, you get caught up in it. You feel like you’re not doing enough unless every moment is filled with activity. And not just one activity; we multitask. We read email while on the phone. We make lists while in class. We text (even though we shouldn’t) when we drive. We watch the news when we exercise. Seriously – if you are not multitasking, it feels irresponsible, like you are slipping behind.

The world is an anthill after someone has given it a good kick.

And the *effect* of this is utterly draining, body, soul and spirit.

I noticed this awhile back, noticed that even when I go to get some “down time” what I usually did was run (to exercise) and so I tried to make a change. I started walking instead of running, because when I walk I notice life more and can hear my own thoughts and talk to God. It is a far more decent pace. It lasted three days.

The world is utterly draining, and when we are drained, we are vulnerable.

Vulnerable first to temptation. Isn’t it somewhere in the mid-afternoon slump when you most easily turn to crud you don’t normally eat? Isn’t it when you are fried at the end of a frantic day you turn to that second and third glass of wine? A soul that is weary and empty is a soul open to any form of relief, and that is always the moment our idols step forth offering momentary comfort. Which actually drains us even further.

When we are drained, we are also vulnerable to spiritual attack.

You don’t give way to despair when you’re having an awesome day; you fold when you are at your rope’s end. You don’t drop your guard right after a wonderful time of worship; you drop your guard when you are too tired to care. It is when we are drained that we give way to the assaults of the enemy – the lies, the accusations, the agreements with overwhelmed. It takes strength to hold your ground; it takes resolve to send the enemy packing. So he uses the frantic world to wear us down, then uses our flesh to make us even weaker as we give way to temptation, and then slams us with open assault.

And that is why I need to remind myself to do whatever it is that makes me strong in Christ.

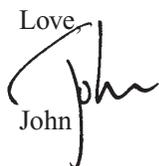
I was first moved to create my bathroom mirror reminder when reading something Chesterton wrote about Jesus' life – how he did not begin his ministry until he was approximately thirty years old, and how we have next to no record of what he did prior to that. Thirty years in obscurity. Chesterton observed that, “He who of all of us needed preparation least, seemed to have it most.” Wow – if Jesus needed that kind of preparation, do I really think I can do without it?

Which got me thinking about something Dallas Willard said regarding the wilderness trial of Jesus (his forty days of prayer and fasting). Willard changed my thoughts about the purpose of those days when he observed that Jesus was doing the very things that would prepare him most for the coming battle with the Evil One. He repeats this act of intentional renewal throughout his ministry. And this is Jesus we're talking about. If he thought it was vital, my goodness – how much more so for the rest of us?!

I don't want to give my soul over to an idol. I don't want to fold under discouragement or any other lie. I don't want to get taken out by the full-on assault of the enemy. So, I need to do those things that make me strong in Christ. Now more than ever. Permit me to name a few:

- Getting some measure of silence and solitude every day. (Even if it is only ten minutes – get out of the crazed anthill!)
- Taking in truth, whether by Scripture or the writing of the saints.
- Asking God to fill me with his love and life throughout the day.
- Cutting the constant hyper-stimulus of media. (For example: I no longer listen to the radio or anything when I drive. Years ago I gave up television as a category. Really – do you feel refreshed and renewed when you are finished watching?)
- Praying the Daily Prayer. Daily. (You'll find it on our website; a very powerful act of consecration we've developed over the years.)
- Listening to music that draws me to God.
- Turning off email notification on my computer. (I don't read every email I receive; I certainly don't read them all the moment they arrive, as if beholden to them! I take the same attitude towards the phone – even my cell phone!)
- Drinking in Beauty in some form – nature, especially, or art, photography.

I'm naming a few essentials – every person will also have those things that uniquely help you draw upon the strength of Christ to fill your body, soul, and spirit. Ask yourself, “What would I do, deliberately and intentionally, if I was serious about getting stronger in Christ each day?” Then, by all means, do it!

Love

John

PS – Join Stasi and me for a live webcast on leading couples small groups on Tuesday, May 4th at 6:00 pm (MT) – for more details go to www.loveandwar.net.