

# RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

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August 2012

Dear Friends,

Well, I am sorry to report that summer will soon be drawing to a close. (Quick – get to the lake, the park, the pool; eat more popsicles; lay out under the stars.) This time of year is typically a big transition time, with folks shifting into a much busier mode come September and the fall. Our season here at Ransomed Heart kicks off with a men's event mid-August, and that ushers in a very full season through next May.

On a personal note, August is certainly a big month in the Eldredge household this year. Luke, our youngest, is heading off to college. Stasi would tell you that dropping Sam and Blaine off for their freshman years, and driving away, were two of the hardest things we have *ever* done. This year Stasi and I will drop Luke off and return this time to an empty house, where laughter and rowdiness and wrestling matches and family dinners have prevailed for many years. A beautiful season is drawing to a close.

Knowing this, in his immense kindness, Jesus gave our family a really sweet gift in July. You might recall from reading our books that the Tetons in Wyoming have been a special place for us over the years. We started camping there annually fifteen summers ago, when Luke was four. It is a place filled with memory and tradition. I didn't think we could get there this year, but during a morning prayer walk in June Jesus said, *Go to the Tetons*. So we did, and it was very sweet.

Fifteen years ago we picnicked at a place along Cottonwood Creek. The boys – then 4, 6 and 8 – ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and played in the stream. For some reason we've never been back to that spot in all our years of adventuring there. Not till two weeks ago, when we found ourselves picnicking along the same creek. Our sons, now young men – 19, 21 and 23 – were laughing, telling stories of their adventures, talking about girls and marriage (!) and it was as poignant and transcendent as a moment can get. Time stood still. Stasi and I looked at each other and smiled. *Remember?*

As our trip drew to a close, Sam headed back to his life in California and Blaine left early for a class he needed. We could feel the chill of the coming fall when our family will no longer be the same. As you can imagine, I was pretty tender and very ready for tears; feelings of sorrow and loss were beginning to break my heart. It felt quite natural, and appropriate. Then came a great surprise.

I paused and asked Jesus, *How do you want me to be looking at this Lord?* He replied, *This is a good season in your life John; you are not losing your family at all; your family is growing, maturing and it is a blessed time*. In a moment my entire state of being changed. Where I was ready for days of downheartedness and embracing loss as the fundamental truth of life, Jesus rescued me. Simply because I asked, *How do you want me to be looking at this Lord?*

Let me now connect a related thought. About three months ago Stasi and I were chatting one evening about new things she was reading and learning, one of which was the power of “naming” things. “We need to be careful what we call things, what we name them,” she said. “Adam was given the power of naming, and there really is power in what we name things.” We began to notice how often we were “naming” things – a phone call we didn't want to make, an event we didn't want to attend. As soon as we said, “This is stupid,” or, “This sucks,” our feelings and perspective played that out. So we would

stop, and “rename” it. We would say, “This is an opportunity to love,” or, “This will be good.” And much to our surprise, our attitude changed too.

Then came the wildfire in June. As the whole city was swept up in the drama, you could feel the spirits of sorrow, loss, fear and trauma swirling around, absolutely unchecked and unchallenged. It felt so “natural” to go with it, embrace it. Everyone else was. But we would stop, and ask Jesus, and he would say, *Nope, you don't need to go there. All is well. Fix your eyes on me.* And again, we would be rescued.

Now we are in this season of change for our family – and friends, all change initially feels like loss. But we are being rescued by a brand new thought: That what you “name” something has a very defining power over your experience. And we are being rescued by a new question: *Jesus, how do you want me to be looking at this?*

I can't say how important it is.

Too many times most of us just “go” with a feeling or a reaction or perspective, especially when it “feels” natural and just and appropriate. And friends, I am all for honesty, and allowing your heart the room to express itself. As a counselor for many years, I have urged people to be aware of what they are feeling and let it lead them back to how their heart is doing. Do not neglect your inner life. Pay attention. And I don't go in for Christian denial, where even though you are raging, you pretend you aren't by saying, “I'm rejoicing in the Lord.”

I'm talking about allowing Jesus to shape our perceptions of our life.

Has it ever occurred to you that your perception of things might not be accurate? Might not be the same as how Jesus is looking at it? Dear ones, we don't live in the Garden; we don't live in a “neutral” world. We live in a world swirling with all sorts of forces that are affecting our *interpretation* of events. We might not see the whole picture; we seize on the minor theme; our brokenness clouds our vision; we have an enemy who is a master of deceit. Jesus describes our situation as so vulnerable we are like sheep among wolves. While it might *seem* utterly realistic, or unavoidable, or appropriate to embrace certain feelings or perspectives, I simply want to encourage you to begin this practice:

Ask Jesus, *How should I be looking at this, Lord?*

Let him shape your perception of things – of people, events, crises, disappointments, change, and even loss. Allow Jesus into your way of looking at the world, the way you process your unfolding life. This is going to set you free.

With love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'John' in a cursive, stylized script. The signature is written over the printed name 'John'.

John