

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

December 2018

Dear Friends,

A very Happy Advent Season to you!

Last month I reached out to you to ask your help meeting our budget by the end of the year, and I wanted to thank all of you who are able to send in a financial gift! We are so grateful for your generosity!

And now all of us are, one way or another, navigating the coming holidays.

I don't like the pace that I'm running at this morning. I didn't sleep well last night, and so when I finally did conk out, I overslept, woke up late, and ever since I've felt behind on everything. I rushed through breakfast, dashed out the door to get to some meetings, and now I'm rattled. I don't like the feeling of being rattled. And I don't like the consequences of it. When I'm rattled I'm too easily irritated and frustrated with people. I don't have the patience to listen to what my wife was trying to say this morning. I find it hard to hear from God when I'm rattled, and I don't like feeling untethered from him either.

I notice now in my rattled state that I want to eat something fatty and sugary; I want something that is going to make me feel better. And it's the holidays, so there is fatty, sugary stuff everywhere. (Nobody sends out boxes of carrots or alfalfa sprouts as Christmas gifts.) When we are rattled, it's human nature to seek some sense of equilibrium, a sense of stability, and I wonder—how many addictions begin here, just wanting to feel a little bit better? Soothe ourselves.

The fruits of being rattled are not good, but honestly—I think most people live in a state from “slightly rattled” to “fried” as their operating norm.

And so we who would want to find a better life in God would want to make it a practice to avoid living rattled.

Which is especially difficult around the holiday season.

Late morning, I finally do what I should have done from the beginning—I pause. I get quiet, settle down. I give myself some breathing room to come back to myself and to God. My breathing returns to normal. A little bit of space begins to clear around me, and in that space I know I can find God. Suddenly, somewhere outside, someone has just fired up a leaf blower—one of the great pariahs of the human race, the enemy of all domestic tranquility. My body tenses, the stress is returning, and because I am paying attention I can see that the constant stimulation causes us to live in a state of hypervigilance. And thus we look to all our “comforters” to calm down.

But I know my salvation is not in the eggnog frappuccino, nor the peppermint fudge.

So I close the window against the screams of the leaf blower, and return to a practice that has become an absolute lifesaver for me: The One Minute Pause. (I mentioned this briefly back in March, but maybe you've forgotten it since then.) I simply take sixty seconds to let everything go, and be still.

As I enter the pause, I begin with release. I let it all go—the meetings, what I know is coming next, the fact I'm totally behind on Christmas shopping, all of it. I simply let it go. I practice “benevolent detachment” as I pray, *Jesus, I give everyone and everything to you.* You'll know in the moment what to give to God—a person, a conversation, a project, the world. *I give everyone and everything to you.* I keep repeating it until I feel like I am actually releasing and detaching.

And then I ask for more of God: *Jesus, I need more of you; fill me with more of you, God. Restore our union; fill me with your life.* We all need more of God. Whatever our circumstance may be, if we had more of God in our life right now, I guarantee you things would turn out better. It follows that if we can receive the grace God is providing us for the restoring and renewing of our souls, we will both enjoy the fruits of happy souls (which are many and wonderful) and also be in a place to receive more of God (which is even more wonderful). We would find the vibrancy and resiliency we crave as human beings.

So I practice the pause a few times each day. I begin with release. *Jesus, I give everyone and everything to you.* I keep repeating it until I feel like I really am releasing. Then I ask for more of God: *Jesus, I need more of you; fill me with more of you, God. Restore our union; fill me with your life.* Honestly, you can do this in a fairly simple pause—in your car, on the train, before and after you get on your phone. Especially after Christmas shopping. And the fruit of it will be *wonderful!*

I could have written about Christmastide, or the Incarnation, the faith of Mary and Joseph, the joy of the shepherds. But I know that what will prove far more helpful to you this month is to set before you again The One Minute pause. Because it will rescue you, and bring you back to your own soul and to God. From there, you'll be much better situated to navigate the holidays.

May I also suggest making time this December to listen to our Advent podcast series? It's one of my favorites from years past—with Craig McConnell and I sharing the disruptive, holy invitation of God in this season.

On behalf of the entire team, a very Merry Christmas to you, friends. We love being partners with you in this great hour!

Love,

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

John