

RANSOMED  
HEART  
ministries

February 2010

Friends of the Heart,

It's February. Which is, of course, the month of Valentine's Day. So let's talk about love.

But first, a confession. I hate Valentine's Day.

Most of the guys reading this just thought, *Yes! I can't believe he said that.* Most of the women just thought, *What a jerk. I can't believe he said that.*

Hold on, hold on – before you rush to judgment, let me be clear: I love romance. I love being with Stasi. What I hate about Valentine's day is the PRESSURE. On this arbitrary day you will be Romantic. Regardless of how you are doing and where you are with your loved one, on this day you will be Romantic and Amazing. You will Get It All Right. You will arrange for the most romantic evening the two of you will have this year. P-R-E-S-S-U-R-E.

Who wants to live under that?

It's like going to bed promising yourself, "Tomorrow, when I wake up, I will be happy. I will be kind. I will be generous. I will be an amazing person. Tomorrow is going to be the best day of my life." It might. You might. But I doubt it. There is a law of the soul that says when pressure mounts, the heart flees. You get opposite results. This could save a lot of relationships – including your spiritual life – so pay attention.

And now we've got a culture crazed with the upgrade of everything. Dinner and a card used to be a home run. That sounds so blasé these days, like you barely even gave it a thought. How boring. Now you've got to make it an all-day occasion – flowers in the morning, call and sing to her at work, write a poem in the card, dinner yes (and not the same place you went last year), but then something romantic afterwards like a hot air balloon or a drive in a rented convertible up sunset ridge. We have blown this day way out of proportion. It's taken all the fun out of it.

And the truth is, women feel the pressure, too – the pressure to be beautiful, to have just the right earrings to go with just the right dress, for their hair to be perfect – to achieve "sexy" without tipping over into "skanky." (Edith Head said your dress ought to be tight enough to show you're a woman and loose enough to show you're a lady). She feels the pressure to make all the right conversation, not to order too much at dinner ("I'll just have a side salad") and certainly don't eat it all. And they feel the sexual pressure coming – either to offer sex "because it's Valentine's Day" or because they want to win their man. (Have you noticed all the November babies? Count back nine months. I know one family where all their kids are November birthdays. It was one of the few "sex days" of the year).

Romance doesn't work like that.

Romance seems to happen not because we've turned our google-eyed attention to romance, but because we are focused on other things – a beautiful fall day, and a spontaneous walk in the woods.

An evening out “just because,” and we stumble on a great little restaurant and it all just becomes lovely. Or maybe the two of you simply rent a movie and watch it in your sweats, but it stirs both your hearts deeply and afterwards you have an amazing conversation and the intimacy makes you want to rip each other’s clothes off.

Romance requires free hearts.

Pressure, on the other hand, kills everything it touches.

This is true in every area of life. I love running. I do it for exercise, but I do it also because I simply enjoy it. I’ll start running regularly, but then, the pressure kicks in. *How much have I run this week? Am I running far enough? Fast enough? You know, friends of yours run a lot farther than this – you’d better push yourself.* And boom – the pleasure is gone, pressure takes its place and guess what – I stop running.

This happens all the time in our love affair with God.

I counseled a poor girl who thought that to be a good Christian she ought to read the Bible every day. What began out of desire and love became duty and pressure. Eventually, she came to resent it. “I hate the Bible,” she said. “Then stop reading it.” She couldn’t believe my advice. But she took it, and as soon as the pressure and guilt was off she found herself *wanting* to read again. The true desire was there; it simply got strangled by pressure.

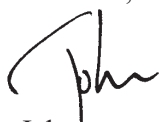
I believe the Gospel is a romance. No amount of religion can compare to loving God with all our heart. All the things we are called to do – to pray, and sacrifice, and help others – all of it is easy when it comes out of a love for God. But pressure is sneaky; it works its way in here, too, doesn’t it? *You’re not doing enough.* Let us remember then that, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). You are deeply and profoundly loved. As this seeps in, it releases us from guilt and pressure and frees our hearts to love God in return.

It also frees us to love on a human level. When you know you are loved by God, it lifts the pressure off your other relationships to come through for you – which then frees them to open up and let love come in. His life brings life. This is one of the secrets to life.

Stasi and I just released a book called *Love and War*. It’s not really a marriage book *per se* – surprise! – it’s a book about finding our life in God, and what happens when his life gets into our relationships.

If you haven’t grabbed a copy of *Love and War* yet, you are going to love it! Order one!! Rush to the store!! And while you’re at it, buy a copy for a couple you know. The redemptive power of this book will be one of the greatest gifts you’ve ever passed along!! After all, this is a love story. Long after Valentine’s Day is gone.

For Love, without pressure,



John