

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

August 2019

Dear Friends,

Well, summer is nearly past, though I hate to admit it. The neighborhood kids are all back to school. Our team here has returned from their family vacations. The local pool closes on Labor Day. Our grocer no longer has watermelon. But I'm eating peaches every day, ripe summer peaches, because I know that soon they too will vanish for a whole year. I love summer peaches.

Summer passes way too soon, before we've really had a chance to relish the gifts of it. I didn't get the time with my grandchildren I hoped for; Stasi and I didn't get to our beloved Tetons, either. I always enter summer with higher hopes than can possibly be met. Lest we despair, God has given us a grace to rescue our hearts when lovely moments pass too quickly, or when we haven't had the chance to get the Sabbath we need. This grace is found in a surprising practice.

But before I name it, we need to be honest about this common occurrence of loss so near to us, so constant we've grown completely numb to it. It is our inability to make time stand still. And we can't do it, not even for a moment. No sooner have we stepped into some wonderful life experience—a birthday, a wedding, that Christmas morning when you were six years old and the pond had frozen and you got your first pair of skates—but in the next breath it is completely swept away in the unceasing river of time, swept far downstream and out of reach.

Every precious moment will suddenly be last week, last month, last year before you can blink.

Few of us remember the taste of our first ice cream (what flavor was it?), the first book we read ourselves, our first kiss. We can barely recall that vacation we planned for so many years; it was over in mere weeks.

I name this loss because it is loss—tragic, sweeping, and expansive. Your entire life, every dear moment, is currently being swept downstream from you even as you read this sentence. It does such harm to the soul, and our life with God. “All good things come to an end.” I hate that phrase, hate it like the sound of sirens, or dirt falling on a casket.

To rescue us from despair, God has given us “a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). To be specific, it includes the restoration of every precious day of our lives. But I wrote more fully about that in a book called *All Things New*, so I will only mention it here. All good things do NOT come to an end. Not even close.

In the meantime, God in his mercy has also given us a grace for this recurrent, incessant, unavoidable, daily experience of loss, and that gift is memory. Through which—if we make use of it—we can go back and drink more deeply, savor, take in the full gift of wonderful moments great and small. (For the full gift can never be taken in during the moment.)

I was in-between errands yesterday, between picking up some groceries and getting a tire replaced. The temptation was to grab my phone (this is what we all do now, without even thinking) and scroll through news, posts, messages, my inbox. But that wasn't what my soul needed, and I knew it. My soul needed summer; it needed joy and happiness. I needed to choose not to just surrender to the mad pace of life, but to go back and drink more deeply of a sweet gift of summer that passed too quickly.

I set my phone down, and let my heart go back to a day on a creek I loved.

It was high in the mountains, in an evergreen forest. The stream was cascading down in fall after fall, filling the canyon with the wonderful rushing sounds of roiling waters. There were small pools now and then where trout lived, and I snuck up on them and caught a few. But mostly I just hiked, and drank it all in, sat by the waters and dunked my sore feet in their bracing iciness.

As soon as I began to remember this day, this gift, my heart settled down. I let out a deep sigh. I was aware of the goodness of God again. Thank you for this day, I whispered in prayer. Thank you for this sweet gift. I was seeing again so much goodness in it—the butterflies, the smell of damp moss, the contrast of hot day and cool forest by the stream. I remembered how tired I was—not stress tired, but that healthy been-in-nature-all-day tired. What a wonderful gift it was.

And the beautiful thing is, more of the gift came to me through this intentional practice of memory. I could go back, linger, enjoy it again.

Memory allows us to savor the many gifts God has given. I suggest you establish a practice of it. (Here's a redemptive use of your phone—it's a library of memories in photos. Pull out your phone during a break, but instead of checking the newsfeed, browse your photos, let them take you back into precious moments. Linger there, savor the gift.)

Hope this brings you a kind of rescue as we say goodbye to summer.

Love,

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

PS. By the way, this letter is more fully unpacked in a new book I have coming out in February called *Get Your Life Back – everyday practices for a world gone mad*. I think you're going to love it!