

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

February 2019

Dear Friends,

Nope—you didn't miss my January letter. I didn't get one out. (I almost missed February too!)

But let me say how grateful we are for all the love and support that came into RH at the end of 2018! You helped us meet our need, right at the 11th hour! Thank you!

I received a text the other day from a friend of mine. It began as a surprising intrusion of joy, which grew into a rescue of my soul.

First came simply a photo, taken from the window of a bush plane somewhere in the Alaskan wilderness. At first glance, I couldn't quite make out what I was looking at. All I could see was a massive mountain slope, angling down towards a river. The impression was something far North and exotic. There are no trees in the photo, only tundra in autumn colors. The picture was taken from probably 17,000 feet and something is dappling the surface of the tundra on both sides of the river. As my eyes adjusted, I realized I was looking at a massive assembly of living creatures, something out of Eden. While my mind tried to take in and sort out what I was beholding, the second text followed: "90,000 caribou stacked up for a river crossing." It filled my heart with joy—not only because I love wildness, and massive animal migrations, but because it reminded me of the God I love.

And O, how good it is to be reminded of the God we love—what he's really like, how generous his heart.

I had a similar experience a few evenings later when Stasi and I were watching a BBC nature series on the oceans of our planet. Richly filmed in high definition, intimate and epic, the vast, colorful beauty of the seas, coasts and coral lagoons saturating this planet was enough to evoke worship every time. This particular episode was shot in the open ocean (utterly breathtaking) when a massive pod of dolphins began to fill the screen. Fifty...one hundred...a thousand dolphins all racing along in the open sea, twisting, leaping, diving in a sort of organized, whimsical chaos, racing along in pure dolphin happiness. The narrator explained we were watching a "super pod" of atlantic dolphins five thousand strong. I was speechless; such things exist?! That encounter, that revelation was so holy it removed in the moment every doubt I had in the goodness of God. Right. This is the God I love, I thought to myself. And my heart came back to him in tender hopefulness and affection.

We need more of God. I assure you nothing, absolutely nothing, will bring you more of him than loving him. Turning our hearts toward God in love opens our being to receive him like no other practice. And it is a practice, something we consciously and actively engage in, in the moments of our day-to-day.

Life has a way of eroding our confidence in the goodness of God. What a ridiculous understatement; let me try again. Life is a savage assault, striking at random, poisoning our heart's assurance that God is good, or at least, good towards us. It's this that makes it so hard to find more of God, receive him in fresh and wonderful ways into our being. So it's here we must seek healing, and now is a good time to do so.

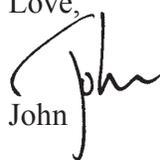
Start with something you love. The laughter of your child. Sunlight on the ocean. Your beloved dog. A favorite song; music itself. Perhaps a photo, like my caribou. A favorite spot—your garden, the cliffs at the sea, the family cabin. Someone dear to you. We begin with the things we love; this is the way back, the path home. For we don't always draw the connection—God made these specifically for you, and gave you the heart to love them. You'll be out for a bike ride in the very early morning, cool breeze in your face, all the sweet, fresh aromas it brings, the exhilaration of speed, and your heart spontaneously sings, I love this! The next step is to say, So does God. He made this moment; he made these things. He is the creator of everything I love. Your heart will naturally respond by opening towards him.

It's like throwing your faith a life-line: Every wonderful thing in your life is a gift from God, an expression of his heart towards you. All your precious memories, each and every one—your eighth birthday when you got that little red bike that awakened your love of riding, which carried right on into your adult life. That perfect powder day, when you and your fiance skied run after run, then warmed up by the fire in the edge. The vacation you still think about, how fun it was, how carefree you felt. Your wedding reception; the dancing; the inextinguishable joy of it all. Every moment you have ever been happy, thrilled, comforted, hopeful...that was God loving you. Such gifts come from no other source. "You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing," "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father" (Psalm 145:16; James 1:17).

No other act will bring you a greater measure of God than loving him, actively engaging your heart and soul in loving him. Because as we do, the flower of our being opens up to the sunshine of his presence, and all the goodness he longs to breathe into us. The best way to get there is to think upon the things we love, and remind ourselves, "This is from God; this is his true heart."

Reminding yourself that God is the one who brought into existence the very things you love is a wonderful reminder to your soul of the intimacy between God's heart and yours. You love the same things! Did you know that? Close friends love the same things; lovers love the same things. Go on and think of something else that delights your heart—laughter, beauty, your favorite things in nature, a childhood fairytale. Beginning with the things we love is the way back towards God.

In loving him, we are able to receive him. As we receive him, we realize again how wonderful he truly is. Our heart enlarges for him, our union is strengthened, and we can receive more of him.

Love,

John