

April 2021

Dear Friends and Allies,

If you've ever had to care for your body through some sort of recovery, you know how beautiful and vulnerable these vessels are. I've been through physical therapy a number of times over the years as various injuries have required, and every time I am struck by the created order God wove into the world—how we must pay loving attention to our care and recovery and not just ignore the signs when care is needed. When I accept the recovery *process*, and follow it through, I'm always grateful. When I ignore it, or drop it prematurely, I always regret it and have to start over.

The same is true of your heart and soul. There are periods when they need intentional care, too.

We are now emerging, in some places sooner than others, from a year of global trauma. Your soul needs some tending to.

And to be clear, it has been trauma. To be robbed of your normal routine for months upon months; to be kept in a state of uncertainty; to face serial disappointments large and small; to be bombarded by bad news; to face death; and never clear on when the finish line would appear. May I point out that this is exactly what is done to prisoners under interrogation, when their captors want to break them down?! The past twelve months have been rough on our humanity.

Now is the time to begin planning for your recovery.

Because you are now, or soon will be entering, the phase of rehab and recovery.

Oh yes—there will be joy in simply going out to dinner, watching your kids play sports, seeing your family face-to-face, going to church, ball games, concerts. It will be lovely. May all those things come to you by summer!

But simply getting a hot dog at a baseball game, or going to a movie is not sufficient to address the trauma you have been through.

So what I'm recommending is that you begin to map out for yourself a “rehab and recovery plan” for your soul.

For example, most of us have done a pretty good job of “rallying” over the past year, and congratulations for it. Well done, everyone! Good job! But rallying for months and months required tapping deeply into our *reserves*, and they are tapped out. Don't think so? Feel like that's just for others? How would you feel if I told you another pandemic is coming next month, and we are starting all over? I bet the very thought of it takes you to the brink. There's not a lot left in the reserve tank.

Now, in order to replenish your reserves, you need a period of time where more is coming “in” than is going “out.” That's the simple math. You can't replenish your reserves if you are still spending 100% or more in your weekly output. This is why, for most people, vacations are so wonderful.

We downshift; we go get some joy; we let go of most demands in order to drink in beauty, fun, rest. We find ourselves doing better, feeling better, because we are receiving more than we are *burning*.

I hope you'll give some careful thought as to how you'll be spending your vacation time this year. It's an important part of your recovery plan. But it's only a part, dear friends. One or two weeks off is not going to address the harm your soul has been through over the course of an entire, unprecedented year of global tension, lockdown, and loss.

So you need a recovery plan. And I think it will be a wonderful exercise for you to get some time with Jesus over the course of the next few weeks to allow him to talk to you about your plan.

For example: one of the genuine disappointments Stasi and I suffered last year was losing an overseas trip we had been looking forward to for five months. Naturally, as it began to look like travel might be an option for the second half of 2021, we thought we should reboot that trip. But as I prayed and thought and listened to Jesus, I came to the realization that international travel, however much we love it, is not what our souls need this summer. We need simple rest; working in the garden; sunsets on the deck; picnics and swimming—things that are close at hand and don't require major effort to get to the joyful parts. *More coming in than is going out.*

My sons call it the “Cost to Joy Ratio.”

Every outing, adventure, party, vacation, and undertaking has a cost to it. The question you want to ask is this: Does the joy that the event brings you outweigh the cost it requires to make it happen? Is more coming in than is going out? (If you need a vacation to recover from your vacation, you've got the cost/joy ratio all wrong!) This is important to consider anytime, but essential to think through in a year like this when we are all recovering from global trauma and need to take our recovery plan seriously.

So here's what you do:

Give yourself several opportunities in the next few weeks to sit down with a pad of paper and just noodle on the idea of a recovery plan. You know yourself—what would you recommend if you were counseling you over a three month recovery plan for your soul? How would you arrange for periods where more is coming in than is going out?

As you do this, invite Jesus in; let him speak. Ask him what he recommends. What he says often surprises me (like “don't travel yet”), but always makes sense in the end.

As your plan takes shape, write it down and post it somewhere you'll see it often. If you are living with your spouse and/or family, let them in on the plan. Talk about it openly, so you can help one another in good decision making.

More coming in than is going out; more joy from the effort than the cost of making it happen.

Offered in love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'John' with a stylized flourish.