

## Love God. Live Free.

July 2021

Dearest Friends,

Well, how is your summer going? How is your recovery coming along?

I hope I don't need at this point to convince you that we are in need of recovery. The world was absolutely mad and very draining before the pandemic. It was exhausting. On top of that madness, we then lived through 15+ months of global trauma, political unrest, social strife, and economic uncertainty. It had an effect on all of us, no matter how optimistic your personality may be. Trauma is trauma.

Have you noticed your fragmented mind? The inability to stay focused on one thing for more than a couple of moments? What did you have for breakfast two days ago? What did Jesus say to you back in May that was so wonderful? Have you noticed your loss of a sense of time, how easy it is to forget what day it is? Forgetting things so easily? Your search for some sort of relief? Those are some of the symptoms of trauma.

Yes, I believe we are recovering. But our recovery is like a young sapling—it's tender, vulnerable. It's just getting started.

Thank God summer is here, and we are all in one way or another trying to refill our tanks. Picnics. Barbecues. Gardens. Vacations. Movies. Dining out.

But my concern is a trend I see developing in my own life, and in the world, which I think we'd better name before it knocks our legs out from under us.

After so many months of "deprivation" of so many kinds, we are rushing out to get as much joy as we can. Binging, almost desperate to refill our famished souls. The problem is, a one-week vacation, no matter how wonderful, is not going to restore your humanity, refill your soul, or heal the effects of trauma. We cannot replenish our depleted reserves and heal the damage of the last year in a week or two.

Reserves are a really good barometer as to how you're actually doing, because most people have the ability to rise up and face a day. Especially when it's summer and it feels like joy is just around the corner. We can rally. Hope returns. But clarity comes when we tap into our reserves and assess what's really there—that's when we discover the depth of the depletion.

For example, how would you feel if you were suddenly faced with a heartbreaking situation in your life—someone dear to you dies, a major financial collapse, a fire burns down your home? Facing crisis reveals how depleted our reserves are and how long it actually takes to replenish them.

Stay with me now. This isn't a bummer of a letter. I have some real rescue for you.

Stasi said to me the other day, "I feel like my reserves are beginning to come back. I feel like most days I'm doing pretty good. But the problem is, it only takes one crisis and suddenly I'm back to feeling very little in the tank."

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I'm realizing that we've got to take a long-term view of our recovery.

The trend I see unfolding continues like this: We all rush out to get as much joy and "normal life" as we can. Our Eden hearts are trying to find Eden moments with a kind of desperation. We then return to our day-to-day lives and discover that the vacation wasn't enough; summer passed too quickly. Disappointment sets in. Because what do we do now?

This is the moment of real vulnerability. Because our Eden hearts are so famished, and our recovery has only just begun, disappointment sets us up for disillusionment, and Desolation.

I don't mean discouragement, a few bad days. Desolation is a major dark force in the world today, a spiritual force, a foul spirit that is really causing people to lose heart, lose faith—even mature believers. I've had two close friends tell me that when they were "under it" (Desolation, that is), they felt like they weren't even sure they believed in God anymore. So we've got this predator out there, looking for any crack to usher in various expressions of disillusionment and desolation, and we've got to be very wise in this moment.

Right now we are in the rush to get joy, desperate for Eden. It doesn't really deliver; it's too short, and it's not enough. We are still so depleted. Then the enemy pounces. That's the trend I want to expose for you.

Now for three things that will help.

First, we've got to take a long-term view of our recovery. This will take the pressure off summer and the good things that are there to enjoy. We savor them, but we don't expect a quick resurrection, a bounce-back. We set our sights on a longer recovery.

Second, we guard our heart against Desolation in every form, however it is trying to get in. Now, because this is a spiritual force, it needs a spiritual answer. The answer is the Glory of God—his "Eden Glory." Because Desolation is like a desert, and Eden is the lush beauty/love/joy/life we are craving. Eden was generated out of the Glory of God, and so we have found it VERY helpful to pray, "I bring the Eden Glory of God my Father against all Desolation, in the name of Jesus." I'm telling you, it works.

Third, when we feel those intense "Eden longings," when we find ourselves dreaming or grasping for some sort of joy, we shepherd our hearts back to God. "I give my Eden heart to you, Father. Right here, in this, I give this Eden longing to you."

The world doesn't process life—or pandemics—in terms of God, the war with evil, and the fight for the human heart. It's just naively rushing out to grab joy, pretending we are nearly back to normal. It denies the trauma.

But we, the friends of God, take a different view of things. Broad is the path that leads to destruction, narrow the road that leads to life, as Jesus said. Let's choose life by taking this all much more seriously than maybe we have been.

Offered in love, and because I began to experience the "trend" myself.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'John'.