

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

July 2012

Dear Friends,

We had a mild winter, with very little snowpack in the mountains; spring followed, marked by drought and record-high temperatures. By June I began to be concerned about wildfires in the West. Last summer I read Timothy Egan's book *The Big Burn*, a harrowing account of one of the costliest wildfires in US history. As weeks of 100 degree days and hot winds hit us in June, I thought to myself, *O no – these are the very same conditions of that devastating fire of 1910.* I could sense God saying, *Be ready.*

Then it happened.

A wildfire began just west of Colorado Springs. We watched with prayer and concern over the days, as several Ransomed Heart families were put on "pre-evacuation" notice. Then, Tuesday June 26, the "perfect storm" hit.

I was sitting in Chipotle having lunch with an ally; we were talking about the wedding of Brent Curtis' son. (Brent and I wrote *The Sacred Romance* together; he died in a climbing accident on the very first RH men's retreat in 1998.) Our eyes filled with tears as we talked of our joy watching Drew marry Brianne, the daughter of Brad and Lisa Beck (Brad is executive director at RH). After so much sorrow, here was such beautiful redemption. I asked my friend, "What do you think Jesus is saying through all this?" We paused, and then we both said, "Trust the Larger Story."

Trust the Larger Story. That was at 1:00pm.

Three hours later the fire blew up. Sixty-five mile an hour winds exploded the fire from 5,000 acres to more than 18,000 in what felt like moments, fanning most of it towards Colorado Springs. Sitting at my desk in our offices (we call it The Outpost) I saw flames crest the last ridge and begin sweeping toward our homes and Outpost on the west side of town. Broken arrow.

Over the next week we shared in the drama of a city under siege. Half the staff was evacuated with 30,000 others. The Outpost was shut down by the fire lines. Our homes were veiled in smoke and chaos; bears and other wildlife roamed the streets looking for refuge; most people sat gripped to the TV waiting for reports. Though the fire did not reach any of our team's homes, in the end nearly 350 homes were lost. We knew several of those families personally.

There is just too much to share in a short letter, so while I focus on one thing here I want to recommend you listen to our podcast on the fire (the July 16 edition).

As the smoke clears what I am most left with is the startling difference between those who live in a Larger Story, and those who do not. (And you may not, even though you are a Christian; you can tell by how you handle crisis, among other things).

As we evacuated our home, I could see flames and smoke engulfing the mountainside in my rearview mirror. I thought, *It would be awful if our home burnt to the ground. Jesus, why is this happening?* I felt him say, *I will interpret this for you later.* Let me pause here and say, in the midst of crisis, heartbreak or tragedy, you can seek God or you can seek understanding but you rarely get both. In time, usually after some time, God can help you sort things out. But not in the midst of the storm. In the maelstrom, seek God. Interpretation comes later. Trust the Larger Story.

Then Jesus said, *if you really believed this is a world at war, what would your reaction be?* Suddenly my outlook changed. I realized of course we could lose our home; that happens in war. What am I invested in, really? What am I living for? Happy little home?

But O my goodness, the city was swept up into the drama as if it *were* the Larger Story. Crisis rushed into a “Story vacuum.” Now, I really do understand this for those who do not know the Gospel. But Christians acted as if this was the most dramatic thing that has ever happened in their life. How can that be? If we are truly living in an epic battle, wildfire ought to pale in light of our stories of advancing the Kingdom, and the dangers we have faced, the miraculous answers to prayer. But if you do not *live in* the Larger Story, something will fill the gap. Crisis especially loves to become The Story, and then you are swept up into it. Notice how easily fear or “drama” can take you out. You lose the treasures of your life as a citizen of heaven.

Recall the story of Jesus sleeping in the boat while a storm raged (see Matthew 8). The disciples were ruled by the immediate crisis, and they freaked. Jesus was ruled by something else, and he slept. A mighty powerful image. Your reaction to crisis reveals what story you are living in.

Further, if you don’t have a Larger Story, you will be shocked by crisis. But Jesus was never shocked; he had the amazing ability to maintain perspective (and therefore hope and joy and love) in the worst of it. Hear me now – there are legitimate feelings of sorrow and loss in this heartbreaking world. I am *not* minimizing that. But friends, Jesus slept while the disciples freaked. Was Christ insensitive? Hard-hearted? Or did he know something we MUST know?

There is a Larger Story. Trust the Larger Story.

There was an incredible rising-to-the-occasion that took place after the fire. How wonderful to see the concern, the neighborliness, the outreached hand. The city rallied. But honestly, it also felt at times like a Larger Story vacuum. Good grief – the world is on fire. We live in a massive war with eternal repercussions. How I wish that all the passion and concern and fervent prayer would be the norm for a Church advancing the Kingdom of God. The world is on fire; let’s rush to the Front. That is a Story worth living for. That is the only Story worth living for.

Once the Larger Story becomes your “normal,” no crisis can take you out. You get to “sleep through the storm,” while everyone else freaks out. You get to offer love and strength, hope and courage; your heart gets to be well, and from there you can rescue the hearts of others. THAT is our story.

John 