

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

January 2015

Dear Friends,

I am among the millions who have fallen in love with the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

We shared them as a family when our boys were young, and we continue to love them as adults. In fact, Stasi and I are currently reading aloud book six, *The Silver Chair* to each other in the evenings. I'm struck this time around by how just how dangerous an adventure the children are tasked with. In chapter two, they meet Aslan on his own mountain, and Jill is told why he has summoned them:

And now hear your task. Far from here in the land of Narnia there lives an aged king who is sad because he has no prince of his blood to be king after him. He has no heir because his only son was stolen from him many years ago, and no one in Narnia knows where that prince went or whether he is still alive. But he is. I lay on you this command, that you seek this lost prince until either you have found him and brought him to his father's house, or else died in the attempt, or else gone back into your own world.

Wait—that second piece: *died in the attempt*?! My goodness. These are grave orders for a couple of ten-year-olds. Aslan is the best, kindest, most Jesus-like figure you'll ever meet in literature. *This* is the sort of story he has for them? Would you send your fifth-grader off to Somalia? And yet, I think Lewis was onto something very true about the character of God. The children are being *called up*.

You see a similar theme in *The Hobbit*. Gandalf arranges for young Bilbo Baggins to join a company of dwarves on their quest to recover the Lonely Mountain, and the treasure that lies buried in its halls. The young hobbit has never held a sword, never slept outdoors, never even been beyond the borders of the Shire. He loves books, tea time, his armchair, and he always carries a handkerchief. Furthermore, Gandalf does not know for certain whether or not the dragon Smaug—“chiefest and greatest of all calamities”—is lying there in dreadful malice. Now remember, Gandalf loves Bilbo, loves him dearly, yet he is sending him on a very dangerous adventure. He says to Bilbo that if he does return, “You will not be the same.”

Which brings me to one of the most important truths we can hold onto as we try and interpret our lives: *God is growing us all up*.

“...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature...” (Ephesians 4:13).

As George McDonald assured us, “What father is not pleased with the first tottering attempt of his little one to walk?” *And*, God is absolutely committed to your growing up: “What father would be satisfied with anything but the manly step of the full-grown son or daughter?”

It helps us to understand why Jesus keeps changing the picture in our lives; he keeps introducing “new frontiers” to each of us. Just when you think you've got parenting down, your kids enter into

a new stage; just when you think you've got a pretty good grasp on your inner world, Jesus shows you something that needs healing. Relationships are always changing; church life changes; your body, your income—my goodness, can you think of anything that *doesn't* change?

And have you wondered why—why does God arrange for new frontiers to always be cropping up in our lives? Because *God is growing us all up*.

But here is the problem—most of us do not share God's fervent passion for our maturity. Really, now, if you stopped ten people at random on their way out of church next Sunday and polled them, I doubt very much that you would find one in ten who said, "Oh, my first and greatest commitment this afternoon is to mature!" Our natural investments lie in other things—lunch, a nap, the game, our general comfort. Like Bilbo.

God is growing me up changes your expectations. When you show up at the gym, you are not surprised or irritated that the trainer pushes you into a drenching sweat; it's what you came for. But you'd be furious if your housemate expected this of you when you flop home on the couch after a long day's work. Bilbo hesitates; he's not sure he wants this new frontier being offered him. I think we can all relate.

And that is why, as I was praying for you, and asking Jesus what he wanted to say, he said this: *Will you come with me?*

God almost always has some "new frontier" for us—something he is inviting us into, new ground he wants us to take, or a new realm of understanding; maybe a move in our external world, or a shift in our internal world; might be a new "spiritual" frontier. Sometimes those new frontiers are thrust upon us; sometimes we choose them willingly. Either way, God is taking us into new frontiers because he is growing us up. This will help you interpret what's going on.

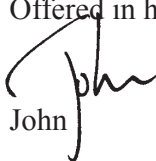
Where is Jesus inviting you here in 2015? Have you asked him? Maybe he's already put it on your heart—what new realm would you like to grown into? We are finishing a four-part series on "New Frontiers" on our podcast this month; I think you'll find it very helpful as you (perhaps reluctantly) accept yours.

Now for a word of hope: towards the end of their adventure, Jill is brought to tears by the redemption that unfolds. And the next line in the book brought me to tears:

"Their quest had been worth all the pains it cost."

That will help you answer Jesus when he says to you, *Will you come with me?*

Offered in hope and love,


John