

Love God. Live Free.

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - August 15, 2021
(Based on the reflections of John Eldredge in a July letter to the *Wild at Heart* ministry audience.)

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

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

Have you noticed your mind become at all fragmented? With 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 a 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, we are recovering. But our recovery is like a young sapling - it's tender, vulnerable. It's just getting started.

Thank God for summer. We've all been trying to use it in one way or another to refill our tanks. Picnics. BBQ's. Gardens. Vacations. Movies. Dining out.

But I'm concerned about a trend that is 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 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 bumper of a sermon. I have some real rescue for you.

John Eldredge's wife Stasi said to him recently on this topic, "*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.*"

What does this mean? We have to take a long-term view of our recovery.

The trend that's been unfolding is 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 crave *Eden-beauty/love/joy/life*. 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*. That's a word I'm going to use a few times. It seems something more than depression is at work in our world.

We're not looking at discouragement, or just a few bad days. Desolation seems to be 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 Christians. Have we heard any friends or family say they're not even sure they believe in God anymore? Again, what's going on is more than a few bad days, or

discouragement. 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, we're desperate for Eden. But it doesn't really deliver; it's too short, and it's not enough. We are still so depleted. Then the enemy punches. That's the trend I want to expose for you.

Now for three things that I hope will help.

First, we've got to take the long-term view of our recovery. This will take the pressure off summer and the good things that are here 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 appears to be 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 you may find it very helpful to pray something like, "*I bring the Glory of God my Father against all desolation, in the name of Jesus.*" We can fight this spiritual force with a Spiritual weapon: prayer.

Third, when we feel those intense "*Eden longings*," as John Eldredge calls them, when we find ourselves

dreaming or grasping for some sort of joy, it will be good to shepherd our hearts back to God. We can pray, "*I give my Eden heart to you, Father. Right here, in this, I give this Eden longing to you.*"

Why do this?

The world doesn't process life - or pandemics - in terms of God, in terms of the war against evil, and the fight for the human heart. At this time we need to fight for the hearts of those we love, that they, and we, will not lose heart. It frankly seems a bit naive to now rush out to grab joy and pretend we are nearly back to normal, because it denies the trauma.

But *we, the friends of God*, take a different view of things. Narrow is the path that leads to Life, says Jesus. Let's choose Life by taking this recovery much more seriously than maybe we have been.

Offered in love, and because I began to experience this "trend" myself. Let's care for each other. We have been given the gift of this wonderful, loving church family. Let's care for each other at this time as we take a long term view of our recovery, as we guard our hearts against the evil one, and as we shepherd our *Eden hearts* back to God. He's knows the cries and longings of our hearts.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, We bring the Glory of God our Father against all desolation, in the name of Jesus. We give our Eden hearts to you, Father. Right here, in this time, we give our Eden longings to you. In Jesus Name, Amen.