

Heart

to

Heart



THE CHARMING VIDEO shows my lovable great-nephew cradled inside the arm of his dad. The two are in the living room, nestled into a comfortable recliner, with a children's book open before them. The handsome child (I say this with authority, since he looks very much like me at that age) uses his small fingers to track the words in the simple sentences. As he does, he sounds out the letters, shapes the words, and puts them together to sound out the whole sentence, before moving on to the next page.

Throughout the exercise his dad encourages and helps the boy sound out each word and complete each sentence. When dad hears his son make the correct pronunciation he affirms the accomplishment and encourages even more. Each of them—little boy and adult father—understand each other perfectly.

But to the ears of this aging and unprogenerated great-uncle, the sounds spilling from the lips of the boy are mostly just that: sounds. All I hear are vowel sounds, and since they are mostly soft “a”s, each sentence, to my ears, sounds like little more than “a—a—a—a—a...” But the boy's dad understands perfectly each word spoken by his son.

Speaking Feline

To most people who live with children instead of cats—and to many who live with both—the average feline is an enigmatic, opaque creature. They saunter about at will, offer only a disdainful sniff to most anything that crosses their path, and present little more than a cold shoulder when beckoned. To many people cats are uncommunicative, ungiving beasts that are skilled in only two areas: eating and sleeping.

For the entirety of our thirty-five year marriage we have lived with

cats—usually in multiples. In that time I have emptied so many cat boxes that my olfactory sense no longer acknowledges the aroma; like oxygen, it just “is.” We have played with them as kittens, shared their joys and sorrows, nursed them back to health when sick or injured, and buried more than a few.

As their “dad,” I have known them as individuals—each with a distinct, often unique, personality. Because I have invested my life into theirs, and theirs into mine, I understand them. I know how they think. Cats that are part of our family are not at all enigmatic or opaque, but happily communicate with us. When one of them is doing something they shouldn't, and I reprimand, he or she understands me perfectly. Sometimes they even obey.

When one of them says something, I can tell if she is expressing joy, sadness, submission, anger, hunger, pain, inquisitiveness, loneliness, pique, or affection. Indeed, it need not be spoken; through their eyes and body language alone, most of these emotions can be discerned. Because I am their “dad,” I understand them. I speak their language.

It is possible that my nephew understands the language of cats as poorly as I understand the language of small children. But then, I am not the father of his kids, and he is not the “dad” of mine.

The Tongue of the Human Heart

Every believer has a heavenly Dad—that affectionate, familiar term used in its highest sense—who has invested His life in them. There

never has been or will be a Christian who is alone or unloved; every one has an attentive, loving, even doting heavenly Father.

His word is filled with declarations and examples of God's love. He is patient and longsuffering; He is gracious, bestowing that which is unearned and undeserved; He is gentle, understanding that we are made fragile.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.
He will not always strive with us,
Nor will He keep His anger forever.
He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.
As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
Just as a father has compassion on his children,
So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.
For He Himself knows our frame;
He is mindful that we are but dust.

Psalm 103:8-14

Beyond all of that, however, through Christ, the Lord God speaks our language. The tongue of the human heart is a second language for Him; His native tongue—the voice of heaven—is comprised of words and sounds no human ear can bear to hear.

Like the sight of His awesome native form, man is not constructed to withstand the diamond-shattering clarity and succinct purity of the native language of God's heart. It is too awful, too terrible for his fragile ears.

So through the earthly sojourn of the Son, God learned the dialect and stumbling intentions of man's guttural voicings. He already knew the language, of course, since He invented it. But through the experience of the Son, He came to know what man had done with it—how he corrupted it; spliced, expanded, and altered it; and, at times, had made it something beautiful when turned upwards.

The Pristine Language of Heaven

Look down from heaven and see from
Your holy and glorious habitation;
Where are Your zeal and Your mighty deeds?
The stirrings of Your heart and Your compassion are restrained

toward me.

For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us
And Israel does not recognize us.

You, O Lord, are our Father,
Our Redeemer from of old is Your name.

Isaiah 63:15-16

To demonstrate the depth of His love for us, God not only learned the stilted language of man's heart, but He became—again, through Christ—our Father. Not in the aristocratic Victorian model, a distant and chilly patriarch who finds it uncomfortable sharing even

the same airspace with his

offspring, but in the warm and familiar model of the modern common-man who embraces time spent with his children, coming to

know them, intimately, as individuals.

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because

He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:26-27

Through the intimate ministry of the Spirit, God effortlessly understands our most pain-filled, guttural moanings. In a language no other human can interpret, our most inner self groans its pain, its ignorance and misgiving, its anger. Then the Spirit lifts to the throne those sounds and words of the human heart, translating them en route into the pristine language of heaven. Only in that eternal, otherworldly tongue do our groanings reach full flower, for the believer's heart—connected by the Spirit to the Father—is already yearning to acquire knowledge of that tongue.

So even now, with our steps still stumbling across the leaden soil of this temporal plane, with our mind clouded by the noxious ether of this unholy land—even now we may climb up upon His lap, cradle ourselves within the crook of His embracing arm, and speak our childish babblings.

And our Abba Father lovingly understands every word. (d)

