



Through the struggles of finding his place in the Kingdom, even while he finds his place in the world about him, the youth is learning enough about Jesus to know that there is far more that he doesn't know. Every small step of knowledge he takes is confounded by the steps he has yet to travel. Primal forces quake within him. Doubt nags. He struggles to separate that which cannot be separated. How is he to bond with a God who shows Himself in three persons? Is he to have three different relationships with the three aspects of God—or is he to love Them as one, all-powerful yet enigmatic deity?

Within Reach

With the Heart

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

Ephesians 1:18-19a

WHAT HAD, EARLY ON, SEEMED SO CLEAN AND SIMPLE, was becoming confused by details. As the youth listens to his pastor speak on the members of the Godhead, he is left with more questions than answers. Still, one constant remains: God's love for him—and his love for God.



He is learning, slowly, painfully, that there is no earthly template for this kind of love. For the objects of earthly desire are all within reach. They can be gazed upon. They can be touched. They can be embraced.

He is learning that he must see the object of *this* desire—all of God—with the heart. He must touch Him with the heart. He must learn to embrace Him with the heart.

Even so, the youth understands that the heart responds uniquely to each member of the triune God. He imagines that one reason the Father sent the Son to earth was that the Father, in His native glory and holiness, could not bear that intimate proximity to sinful earth. Thus the Son—not created, but as eternal as the Father—made the journey in the Father's stead. And

who better? After all, He was the Creator.

Holiness

Perhaps, then, it is not just young faith that blinds the eye to the Father. Perhaps he is not meant, at any age, to gaze upon that glorious, painful sight.

But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" Then the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

Exodus 33:20-23

He cannot imagine the appearance of the Father, for, to look upon Him would profane His majesty, His purity. Still flesh, even the youth's gaze itself—as if it were of physical substance—would be an offense upon such holiness. Thus the Father's appearance is beyond the vision of impure flesh. And to *touch* the Father is beyond comprehension.



Because the Spirit touches him, lives within him, the youth knows that He is more touchable than the Father. But the Spirit is elusive, mysterious, the most invisible part of an invisible God. The Spirit is a counselor without an audible voice, a comforter without hands. Though His presence can be felt, He has never assumed a form that can be touched. His form is as ethereal as the wind.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

John 3:6-8

Flesh and Bone

The intricate relationships weaving together the members of the triune God remain a mystery to the youth. But there is one member of heaven's Trinity who is within reach. He is as holy as the Father, yet familiar. As invisible, to earthly eyes, as the Spirit, yet touchable.

Jesus is God with skin.

There were no flannel-graph characters of the Father in his Sunday School classes. *Egermeier's Bible Story Book* contained no pic-

tures of the Spirit. But Jesus walked the soil of this earth, and the youth's childhood was filled with images of Him. Even he knew that the pictures were only the product of artists' imaginings, and surely the Semitic son of a Jewish woman looked far different than most Western representations of Him.

But no matter how He is painted, Jesus the Son was flesh and blood and bone. Those who knew Him in the first century could *see* Him, could touch Him, could hear the warm timbre of His voice. They heard Him laugh, heard Him weep, and heard Him shout with anger at hypocrisy and injustice.

And though the body of the resurrected Jesus was now different from before, He was still the touchable, personal Savior.

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them.

Luke 24:36-43

Reaching Out

The problem is, I do not live in the first century. I live in the here and now, the *twenty*-first century, the "church era." I live at a time when Jesus does not walk the earth. Or does He?

"...touch Me and see..."

If I belong to Him, if I am a believer, then I have been given a sixth sense—a new sensory organ with which to feel the presence of my Savior and Lord. I have been given the Spirit.

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."

John 14:16-20

It is through the Spirit that Jesus becomes real in my life. It is through the Spirit that He touches me—and it is through the Spirit that I can touch Him.

When I reach out to Jesus, He is there. He responds. He touches me back. Jesus is not just history, not just theology. Jesus is not just philosophy, not just an idea.

Jesus is *real*.

As flesh, we are raised to think that touching flesh-to-flesh is best. It is all we know. But as spiritual beings we come to learn—over time, as we mature—that touching by way of the Spirit is far superior to flesh.

True, the disciples could touch the arm of Jesus, His hand, His side. But when He departed this earth He promised a *better* way to touch Him: through the Spirit. Now they could touch His *mind*.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

Acts 2:1-4

The disciples never really understood Jesus until they received the indwelling Spirit. They did not understand His actions, His words, His reason for being with them. They never really touched Jesus intimately until He was gone.

Only through the Spirit can I touch Jesus with my heart. Only by nurturing my new, but very ancient spiritual sense—indeed, by accepting that I am no longer a being of flesh, but a "new creature" in Him—am I able to reach out and touch the very Son of God.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

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