



Knowing Him

The boy does not yet comprehend what has happened. Too young to grasp the process, the subtle progression, he knows only that something has happened to him. He is now different. It feels as if part of his body has been removed, and replaced by part of someone else's.

In a moment his life—no, he has changed.

First Love

A Hopeful Future

THE BOY IS TOO YOUNG TO REALIZE that the moment just passed began years earlier. It began shortly after his birth—just moments after, really, when his mother would murmur her gentle lullabies in his ear. Old songs. Songs sung to his mother when she was but a girl.

*Jesus wants me for a sunbeam,
To shine for Him each day...*

*Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee.*

*Jesus loves me! this I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong...*

Before the baby heard much of anything else, he was hearing about Jesus. As yet the words meant nothing to him. But like classical music being played for a pre-born infant, the seed for a hopeful future was being planted.

Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Matthew 19:13-14

Stories

The baby became a child, and in Sunday School he heard the old stories—the warm, organic stories of a babe in a manger, a precocious youth at the temple, of a young man healing the infirm, rebuking deceit, teaching new ideas with the words of God.

The young man in the stories was named Jesus, and to the child there was already something very familiar about Him.

But as yet they were only stories. The stories were about someone who might as well have been a distant uncle—dear, and fully known to his parents, but only a faded photograph to the boy. He *could* be known, but there was as yet no basis for a relationship: The boy had never met him, and he lived too far away for a visit. So there were only the stories.

Jesus was dear to the boy in the same way that the characters in his picture books were dear to him. As his mother read to him, he imagined what they were like in "real life." What would it be like to actually *play* with Pooh Bear and Piglet and the rambunctious Tigger. Oh, how wonderful it would be to be with them *in person*, to touch them, to give them a hug and get a hug in return. They would all sit together in the Hundred Acre Wood and share stories of themselves, their past adventures, their yearnings and dreams. And then they would head off together in search of *new* adventures. Oh, how wonderful it would be!



Then there came the day when, as if by surprise, as if by the whims of unseen fate, the story became real. Suddenly Jesus became something more than just a character in a story.

The boy could not explain it better than the slightly disorienting, grandly exhilarating sensation that part of his body had been removed, and replaced by part of someone else's. But in a heartbeat he realized that it was not just "someone else."

And in that same heartbeat he understood that it was not at all the whims of unseen fate. It was not by chance.

It was Jesus.

The Jesus of his earliest memories, the Jesus of his childhood stories was now—inexplicably, yet undeniably—real.

Now part of him.

Folded In

This is where it begins. This is where fallen humanity unites with unshadowed deity. This is the moment of First Love, when the Jesus of Sunday School stories and simple songs becomes personal Savior and, perhaps, Lord.

First Love.

It is an infantile moment—no matter one's age. Jesus in that early moment is more a feeling than a well-reasoned conclusion. For this feeling did not result from calculation or cold logic, but by the miraculous indwelling of the Spirit. It is the moment in which Father God says, "Now!" and we become His.

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

I struggle to remember how it was—that beginning moment shrouded in my antiquity. Like the young boy, I, too, was still of single-digit age—still too young to understand even a small part of this supernatural event. I knew only that I was changed. *That* I knew for sure. I could feel the strong and pervasive warmth of Jesus coursing through me, filling me, possessing me.

In the telling, the experience sounds unnerving, even spooky. But there is nothing spooky about a life being folded into the life of Christ.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

John 11:25-26

I believed it.

But I was not saved *by* my believing, for that would mean that the act of my believ-

ing played a part in my salvation. Jesus saved me at the cross. His blood alone canceled my debt of sin. No, I believed *because* I was saved. Because He selected me out, because He chose me for His own, because Jesus *chose* to be my Savior. My part, in believing, was to acknowledge that which He had already accomplished.

It was that selfless love that consumed me in that primal moment. It was all of grace, and nothing could be more gracious than Jesus putting His arm around me and forgiving my sins.

Sweet Intimacy

This was where it all began. This was the point at which Jesus became "real" in my life. The relationship was new and exciting. The wonder of it was like the electric expectation one experiences in the early days of dating and courtship.

*What wondrous love is this
That caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse
For my soul.*

But over the years since then the ecstasies of first love have been smothered under the slippery sugar coating of urbanity, the callus of cynicism, the weariness of age. What was once begun with expectant promise has withered into banal monotony.

'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.'

Revelation 2:4

Can it be regained? Can I fall in love again? Can I reawaken the sweet intimacy that has for so long languished in the doldrums? Or am I too old, too worldly to rediscover Him?

Will Jesus once again be "real" to me?

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