



*Fresh from the visceral exhilaration of the altar, the boy immediately experiences the confusing dichotomy of his new situation. He has been told—and he believes—that Jesus loves him. In return, he loves his new Savior. But, rooted in the soil, the boy is not a mystical being. His mind is both unformed and practical. He is not yet capable of experiencing Jesus on an intellectual, even spiritual level.*

# The Embrace

## By the Senses

THE JESUS IN HIS SUNDAY SCHOOL STORIES has always been very real to him. He was as much a flesh-and-blood person as anyone else. The boy knew Him by the senses. He could smell the fresh sawdust of His childhood workplace. He could taste the bread and fish Jesus ate beside the sea. He could feel the dust and grit of the road that collected on His clothing. He could hear the anger in Jesus' voice as He drove the moneychangers from the temple. He could see the blood upon His brow.

Jesus lived on earth and paid the price of the boy's salvation in a very real, sensual way. But He was no longer here. He no longer walked those dusty paths. He no longer ate the peasant bread, nor the catch of the day. Now He was in heaven. Jesus was now the Lord of heaven—how could the boy now experience by the senses this new Lord of his heart?

Human love was the boy's only standard for the love Jesus had for him. Everything he knew of love he knew from his parents. There was his mom's generous, uncompromising love. Her affection was tactile—warm, unquestioning, profoundly sincere. There was his dad's equally sincere, yet less tactile love—a more “manly” affection, expressed less by warmth than by the assurance of protection.

The boy wondered—with which of these did Jesus love him? Or did Jesus love him with a blending of both? And how could he *feel* the love of someone who lived in heaven? Still just a child, how could he *know* Jesus loved him?

# Releasing the Spirit of Christ

Hear my cry, O God;  
Give heed to my prayer.  
From the end of the earth I call to You  
when my heart is faint;  
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

*Psalms 61:1-2*

The boy became a youth, and joined a missions trip to Mexico. But his young faith was tested, and he became dispirited by the behavior of the group's leaders. Instead of a love for the locals, and a tireless zeal to share with them the good news of Christ, the leaders were more occupied with the group's survival than the salvation of souls.

He wrestled with what he should do about the situation. Too young to affect any change, his options were reduced to two: stay or leave. He brought his troubled misgivings to those in charge, but rather than helping him through his spiritual and emotional turmoil, they focused instead on what would become of the money he had paid them if he left.

One night, while everyone else was busy in a preaching service, he retired to his room and spent the rest of the evening on his knees.

In my distress I called upon the Lord,  
And cried to my God for help;  
He heard my voice out of His temple,  
And my cry for help before Him came into His ears.

*Psalms 18:6*

For more than an hour the troubled youth poured out his heart to God, seeking His will in the matter. After only a few weeks into the summer, should he pack up and return home? Or should he stay, and learn to live with the hypocrisy around him? Perhaps he was wrong, imagining hypocrisy where none existed. What did his Lord ask of him?

His anguish and confusion filled the room like a thick, heavy cloud. His tears drenched the seat cushion over which his head was bowed. The room became a powerful prayer closet as he sought God's face.

And then it happened.

Through the haze of his uncertainty the face of God came to the youth in the person of Jesus Christ. It was no apparition, no ghost conjured by religious ecstasy. Neither was it the Savior in bodily form. It was, instead, the spirit of Christ come to comfort in such tangible power as to seem that His presence filled the room. Even then, in the throes of passionate prayer, he knew that what he was seeing through closed eyelids was really emanating from the confines of his own heart—not that his bruised heart was manufacturing this comforting image, but that it was somehow releasing, in more tactile form, the spirit of Christ dwelling there.

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!  
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!  
Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love  
Leading onward, leading homeward to Thy glorious rest above!*

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus, spread His praise from shore to shore!  
How He loveth, ever loveth, changeth never, nevermore!  
How He watches o'er His loved ones, died to call them all His own;  
How for them He intercedeth, watcheth o'er them from the throne!*

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus, love of every love the best!  
'Tis an ocean full of blessing, 'tis a haven giving rest!  
O the deep, deep love of Jesus, 'tis a heaven of heavens to me;  
And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee!*

S. Trevor Francis

In the youth's moment of pain and lonely indecision, his personal Savior came to him, and in Christ's compassionate embrace he found peace—and the answer to his youthful uncertainty.

## A Sixth Sense

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of

Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

*Ephesians 3:14-19*

Explaining the tactile love of Jesus to an unbeliever is like trying to get a one-year-old to understand Einstein's general theory of relativity.

It can't be done.

For the gateway to that intimate experience is the Spirit—the Holy Spirit that indwells every believer. God the Spirit is the sensory organ necessary to *feel*—to recognize, respond to, and be affected by—the love of Jesus. Without the Spirit the soul is tone-deaf to the Savior's voice, and sequestered from His touch. With the Spirit, the believer is

given a new sense with which to experience the nearness, the *reality* of Christ in his life.



I knew that I was still in possession of that sixth sense, for the Spirit could not and would not leave me. But I had allowed that sense to atrophy from disuse. Over time the love of Jesus had become intellectualized—still true, but sapped of its effective life-force. I had, over time, consigned Christ's love for me to the dusty library shelf, rather than to my heart.

It has not always been so. There have been times when His warm, compassionate love has been demonstrated to me in a most profound, tangible way. His love for me did not begin nor end at the cross, but

spans the universe of time since before my forebears were born, to the unimaginable beyond of infinite eternity. And though I cannot yet touch *His* flesh, He has, many times over, touched mine.

*continued...*