

H O W I M E T J E S U S

When I was fourteen years old, I was invited by a friend from my Sunday school class to spend a week at a ranch in Colorado. I didn't know anything about the camp except that it was a really good deal. My friend Kevin's aunt and uncle had offered to pay for him to attend, and he could bring along a friend. I was the friend. (By the way, Kevin and I were the two mischievous kids in our Sunday school—partners in crime.)

His aunt and uncle wanted their nephew to hear the gospel, so in the summer of 1968 I boarded a Greyhound bus and began a three-day journey to the Rocky Mountains. I'd never been west of the Mississippi River. I didn't know anyone on the bus

except Kevin. As I began to meet the other kids on the bus, I noticed a different spirit about them. I also learned that this was a Christian camp. No one asked me if I was a Christian, and if they had, I would have said yes, isn't everyone? And they didn't ask if I was a believer. I had spent years attending Sunday school and I would have answered in the affirmative to that query. At some point I was asked if I had met Jesus. That question went to my heart, because I couldn't say that I had. I knew about Jesus, but I had never had a personal encounter with Him.

A significant factor in this life-changing week was the setting for the camp. A few hours south of Denver, the ranch was nestled in the Rocky Mountains. I never tired of gazing at the panorama of the mountains and surrounding area. They had a profound effect on me and made me aware of God in a way I had never experienced. When I laid eyes on the Rocky

Mountains, something expanded inside me. They are so majestic and awesome that they made me aware of how big God is.

We read in Romans 1:20, “The invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity.” I can see God, and catch glimpses of God, by looking at the things He has created. I learn about the Creator by observing His creation.

During the meetings I attended and in the small get-togethers in my cabin, I began learning about the different components of the Good News. I could have my sins forgiven. This was so appealing since I knew I was not a good kid. Later I learned more about sin and disobedience to God’s law, but at this point I wanted a fresh start. I had been suspended from school at age twelve, and it seemed like I was always apologizing to someone for breaking

something or throwing something at some neighbor's kid. I learned that I could have a clean slate and a new beginning.

I also heard that I would be able to know Jesus personally and talk to Him as if He were sitting next to me. Even though I had many friends, I had never had a really close friend or a bosom buddy. And even though I was kind of a loner I didn't like being alone. I wanted a friend like Jesus. The Bible said that He would never leave me or forsake me, so I would never be alone again.

And if I invited Him into my heart I would have eternal life and go to heaven. This was not very real to me at such a young age, but it still sounded good. What I liked better was that having Jesus with me and my sins taken away would mean I'd also have a joy and a peace that were different and deeper than anything the world had to offer.

When I put all the pieces together I thought, "Wow!

Which part of this message isn't good?" Now I knew why the gospel means the good news. There was still a conflict in my soul, but after some internal wrestling I knew I wanted to respond to the gift that Jesus was offering. The speakers had said that Jesus was standing at the door of my heart gently knocking and desiring to come in. But it was up to me to open the door and invite Him in. After a few days I made my way to a secluded part of the camp behind a little Swiss chalet on the side of a rocky mountain. I asked Jesus to forgive my sins and come into my heart. And He did. And I knew it. I don't think I can explain how I knew, but at that moment I knew that He was real and that He had indeed come into my innermost being. That's when I came to Christ.

While I was at the camp, I learned a song that was newly penned. It wasn't in any of the song books, but was on mimeographed purple paper, the kind that used to smell so good when it was wet. It was

entitled “He’s Everything to Me” and went like this:

In the stars His handiwork I see,
 On the wind He speaks with majesty.
Though He ruleth over land and sea,
 What is that to me?

I will celebrate Nativity,
 For it has a place in history,
Sure, He came to set His people free,
 What is that to me?

Till by faith I met Him face to face,
 and I felt the wonder of His grace,
Then I knew that He was more
 than just a God who didn’t care,
 who lived away up there.

Now He walks beside me day by day,
Ever watching o'er me lest I stray,
Helping me to find that narrow way,
He's everything to me.

That song summed up my encounter with Jesus. I knew there was a God away up there. I knew about Easter and Christmas, but in 1968 on a mountain in Colorado, I met Him face to face and felt the wonder of His grace, and my life has never been the same.

That fall I entered high school and after three years moved on to college. During those years I had some special times of sensing God's presence at Christian retreats and Young Life gatherings in people's homes. But I was not a committed follower of Jesus. I remember one meeting where the speaker talked about all the things we run after to find fulfillment and happiness: money, the perfect spouse, recognition, sports, cars, etc.

During my junior year in college I felt like I had all the world had to offer. I was very involved in the life of the school, president of the fraternity, vice president of student government, and other offices. I had a beautiful girlfriend, ran my own business in the summers, and had my own car. Life looked rosy on the outside. God was not very real to me, but it was because I kept Him at arm's length. But in my innermost being I knew that all that this world had to offer did not satisfy my deepest longings. Behind that chalet in Colorado I had tasted the reality of God. I had met Jesus. As good as my life looked on the surface, I was not satisfied and knew there was something, or someone, more.

After my junior year I applied to be a counselor at a camp in the Pocono Mountains working with troubled teens. In preparation for this job I read "The Cross and the Switchblade" by David Wilkerson. Partway through the book, I stopped reading and said to God, "Here we go." It was not a long prayer, but God knew what I

meant. I wanted to follow Jesus fully and seek first the kingdom of God, not my own kingdom or the kingdom of this world. I believe this was the time when Jesus became not just my part-time savior and friend, but my full-time Lord and master.

During that summer I had a small pocket-size gospel of John that I kept with me. This is still one of my favorite books in the Bible. It is also a great book to read to discover for yourself the facts about Jesus. I have reprinted it here in a larger font size, which is easier for older people like me to read!

I hope as you read this portion of scripture with an open mind that God will reveal Himself to your heart of hearts. It is my prayer that you, too, will encounter the living God.