

# The Disciple's Tenderness

by John Henry Jowett

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*John Henry Jowett emphasizes the importance of tenderly wooing children into a loving relationship with Christ through admiration, hope, and love.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 27:4, Hosea 2:19, Matthew 19:14, Romans 12:9, 1 Corinthians 13:13, Ephesians 5:1, Colossians 3:12, 1 Peter 3:15, 1 John 4:19

**Topics:** "Christian Ministry", "Spiritual Devotion"

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## Description

John Henry Jowett preaches on the beautiful figure of being betrothed to God forever, emphasizing the ideal relationship between the soul and its Lord as a marriage covenant. He highlights the importance of Christian ministry aiming to bring souls into this covenant with God, focusing on winning children into a marriage-contract with the Lord. Jowett discusses the significance of revealing Jesus to children through His simplicity, sympathy, heroism, and the hope He offers, ultimately leading to a deep spiritual devotion. He stresses the need for consistency in the lives of those who are wooing others for God, as living out the Gospel message authentically is crucial in the process of winning hearts for the Lord.

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## Transcript

"And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever" Hosea 2:19

That is a tenderly beautiful figure; surely one of the sweetest and the most exquisite in God's Word! "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever!" The communion of ideal wedlock is used to express the ideal relationship between the soul and its Lord. We are to be married unto the Lord! Look into the heart of it, and see how much the gracious figure reveals.

"I will betroth thee unto Me for ever." There is to be a wedding of the soul and its Saviour, of the nation and its King. To bring that wedding about is the aim and purpose of every kind and type of Christian ministry. We are to labour to bring souls into a marriage-covenant with their Lord. I wish for the present to limit my outlook entirely to the winning of the children, and shall engage your thought to the pertinent problem as to how they can be wooed into a marriage-contract with the Lord of glory. What is the kind of wooing that will lead to a wedding?

Let me begin here. I do not think we greatly help the cause of the Lover by proclaiming the remoteness of the Lover's home. I have never been able to find out what we gain by teaching children the "far-offness" of the Saviour's dwelling.

There is a happy land

Far, far away!

How does that help the wooer?

For beyond the clouds and beyond the tomb

It is there, it is there, my child.

I say, how does that help in wooing? I am afraid that the remoteness of the home tends to create a conception of the remoteness of the Lover; and, if the Lover is away, the wooing will be very mechanical and cold.

There's a Friend for little children

Above the bright blue sky.

That is the only line I don't like in that greatly beloved and very beautiful hymn. In my childhood it helped to make my Saviour an absentee, and He was "above the bright blue sky," when I wanted Him on the near and common earth. I think that we shall perhaps best help the cause of the Wooer if we teach that His home is very near, and that no clouds interpose between us and the place of His abiding.

There is a happy land

Not far away.

Destroying all sense of remoteness, we must labour to bring the children into the immediate presence of the Lover Himself. How shall we do it? What is there in the child of which we must lay hold? To what shall we make our appeal? Ruskin was never weary of telling us that the two fundamental virtues in childhood are reverence and compassion, the sympathetic perception of another's weakness, and the veneration regard for another's crown. To perceive the sorrows of life, and to maintain a sense of the dignities of life, are two rare and choice endowments; and, when these are exercised upon "the Man of Sorrows," and "the King with many crowns," the issue will be a life of commanding spiritual devotion. But Ruskin's analysis does not altogether, and quite fittingly, serve my purpose here. It is more to my purpose to borrow the familiar line of Wordsworth, for his teaching includes the teaching of Ruskin, and also adds to it - "We live by admiration, hope, and, love." In those three attributes a man's personality abides. Gain them, and you win the man! All the three attributes must be regarded in indissoluble union. The quality of each depends upon the presence of all. Strike out one, and you maim and impoverish the rest. There is an imperfect love in which there is no admiration. There is an imperfect admiration in which there is no love. Perfect love admires; perfect admiration loves; and love and admiration are ever associated with the gracious spirit of hopeful aspiration. These three, I say, constitute the very marrow of life - the deep, secret springs of character and conduct. "We live by admiration, hope, and love." To win a child's love, and admiration, and hope, is to grip his entire being, and make conquest of all the powers of his soul. If the great Lover can win these, the wooing will be followed by the wedding. How can we so represent Him, that this triumph shall be won?

We have so to reveal Jesus to the children, that He captivates their love. What shall we reveal to them? Instinctively, I think, we feel that we must let them gaze long at His beautiful simplicity. We must reveal

Him handling the lilies; we must strive to make it so real, that the children, with the magnificently realistic imagination, shall feel that they are with Him among the flowers of the field. We must reveal Him watching the graceful flight of the birds of the air, and His peculiarly tender regard for the common sparrow. We must reveal Him pausing to give thought to the hen and her chickens, and His wistful interest in the sheep and the sheep-fold. We must reveal Him as the approachable Jesus, with groups of little children clustering about His knees; not bored by them, not too great for their companionship, but lovingly taking them into His arms to bless them; and, if there is some puny weakling among them, giving to that one some special caress and regard. Will these fascinating simplicities, if vividly revealed, be ineffective in awakening the impressionable responsiveness of a little child? Depend upon it, the heart will begin to thrill! But not only His simplicity must we reveal, but His sympathy too! We must whip up our own powers, and seek to clearly depict for the child the great Lover's love for the weak, the defenseless, the unloved, and the abandoned.

But cannot we go further? Must we confine the visions of the children to the simplicities and sympathies of the Lover? Must we just keep to the fireside Jesus, the Jesus of the lilies, the farmyard, and the sheepfold, the good-Samaritan Jesus, binding up the wounds of the bruised and broken? Shall we keep the children in the "green pastures" and by "the still waters," or shall we take them into the "valley of the shadow"? Shall they abide upon the sunny slopes of Galilee, and watch the Lover there, or shall we guide their feet into Gethsemane, and let them gaze on Calvary? Brethren, I will give you my own experience; at any rate, it is one man's witness, and represents, I avow, the findings of one who seeks to woo young life into covenant-communion with the Lord. I sometimes take my young people into the garden of Gethsemane and up the hill of Calvary; I do not do it frequently, lest the via dolorosa should become a common way, and should be trod with flippant step; but now and again, when I think I dare, I lead them into the shadow of the Passion, and whisper to them hints of the awful mystery! And what do I find? By brethren, I find there is no wooing like that! It is not only for the reprobate, but also for the little child, that in the passion of the Lord there is unbarred the infinite love of the Lover. There is no need to be sensational. The sensational is never the parent of fruitful love. Gethsemane was very quiet, and all we need to do is walk very softly, taking the children with us, and let them gaze upon the Sufferer as He bows amid the olive groves on that most eventful night. The spiritual appreciativeness of the child will supply the rest. "I thank Thee, O Father . . . that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto the babes." "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings has Thou ordained praise." I say there is no wooing like this! The spiritual marriage contract is most frequently made in Gethsemane and at the Cross. "The love of Christ constraineth me."

"We live by love." By "admiration" too! Our children must not only find in the Lover their Saviour; they must find in Him their Hero too. Say to yourself, "I will so present my Master as a Hero as to woo the adoring homage of my boys." Would you suffer from any lack of matter? Your eyes are closed and sealed if you do not see the heroic glowing upon every page of the sacred story! His splendid chivalry; His tremendous hatred of all meanness and sin; His magnificent "aloneness" in the night; His strenuous refusal of a popular crown, when the sovereignty would mean compromise with the powers of darkness! Let these be unfolded with the same tremendous effort and vivid realization which we make when we seek to unveil the heroisms of a Cromwell, a Howard, or a Gordon, and our boys and girls will go on their knees before the unveiling with reverent admiration and homage. "Thou are worth, O Christ, to receive all honor and glory."

Loving! Admiring! These fair dispositions will be assuredly associated with the beautiful genius of hope. The glorious Lord will become the children's bread. Their worship will become their hunger. Their loving

will become their longing. Their admiration will become aspiration. Their faith will become their hope. They will be laid hold of in all the fetters of feelings and personality, and the great Wooer will have won.

What more shall we say about ourselves? Let this be said: while we are employed in wooing do not let us be heedless as to the manner of our living. I know that is a great commonplace, but I know also that is the preservation of the commonplace that we maintain the wholeness and sanity of our lives. Those who woo for the Master must be careful how they live. The detection of inconsistency is fatal to the reception of our message. "A child is the most rigid exactor of consistency." "I say" may count for little or nothing. "I know" may count for very little more. "I am" is the incarnation which gives the defense and confirmation to the Gospel, and reveals the deputy-wooer in something of a reflected beauty of the glorious Lover Himself. The wooers must themselves be won; and our own conquest must be proved by the brightness and purity of our wedding apparel and the radiant buoyancy of our dispositions. I say the wooers must be in wedding attire, and must be "children of light," children of the morning. "I wonder if there is so much laughter in any other home in England as in ours." So wrote Charles Kingsley in one of his incomparable letters to his wife! That sounds fascinating, captivating, there is the ring of wedding-bells in the quaint and only partially hidden boast. I do not wonder that this child of the morning was such a mighty wooer for his Lord! Let us beware of a forced seriousness. Let us discriminate between sobriety and melancholy. It was a saying of David Brainard's that "there is nothing that the devil seems to make so great a handle of as a melancholy humor." Let us distinguish between a wedding and a funeral, and in our wooing let it be the wedding-bells which lend their music to our speech. I confess that in the school-teaching of my early days I think the wooers gave too much prominence to the minor key, and the dirge of melancholy resignation too often replaced the wedding-march of a triumphant walk with God.

When shall we begin the wooing? When I had written that sentence I chanced to lift my eyes from the paper, and I saw a tender fruit-sapling just laden with blossom. At what age may a young life begin to blossom for the King? To revert to my figure - when shall we begin the wooing? Plato said, "The most important part of education is right training in the nursery." And Ruskin said: "When do you suppose the education of a child begins? At six months old it can answer smile with smile, and impatience with impatience." Perhaps we have to begin the wooing even in the speechless years. In the life of the Spirit I believe early wooings because I believe in early weddings! The wooing and the wedding become increasingly difficult when we pass the age of twelve. As for the wedding itself, the betrothal to the Lord, I would have it a very decisive act. It must be a conscious, intelligent consecration. The vow must not be made in thoughtlessness; not in any bewildering and sensational transports. In the rapture there must be the moderating presence of a serious and illumined thought. But mind you, the act of a decision must be a wedding and not a funeral. It must be serious and yet glad.

I give my heart to Thee

Saviour Divine

For Thou art all to me

And I am Thine

Is there on earth a closer bond than this? That my beloved's mine and I am His?

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