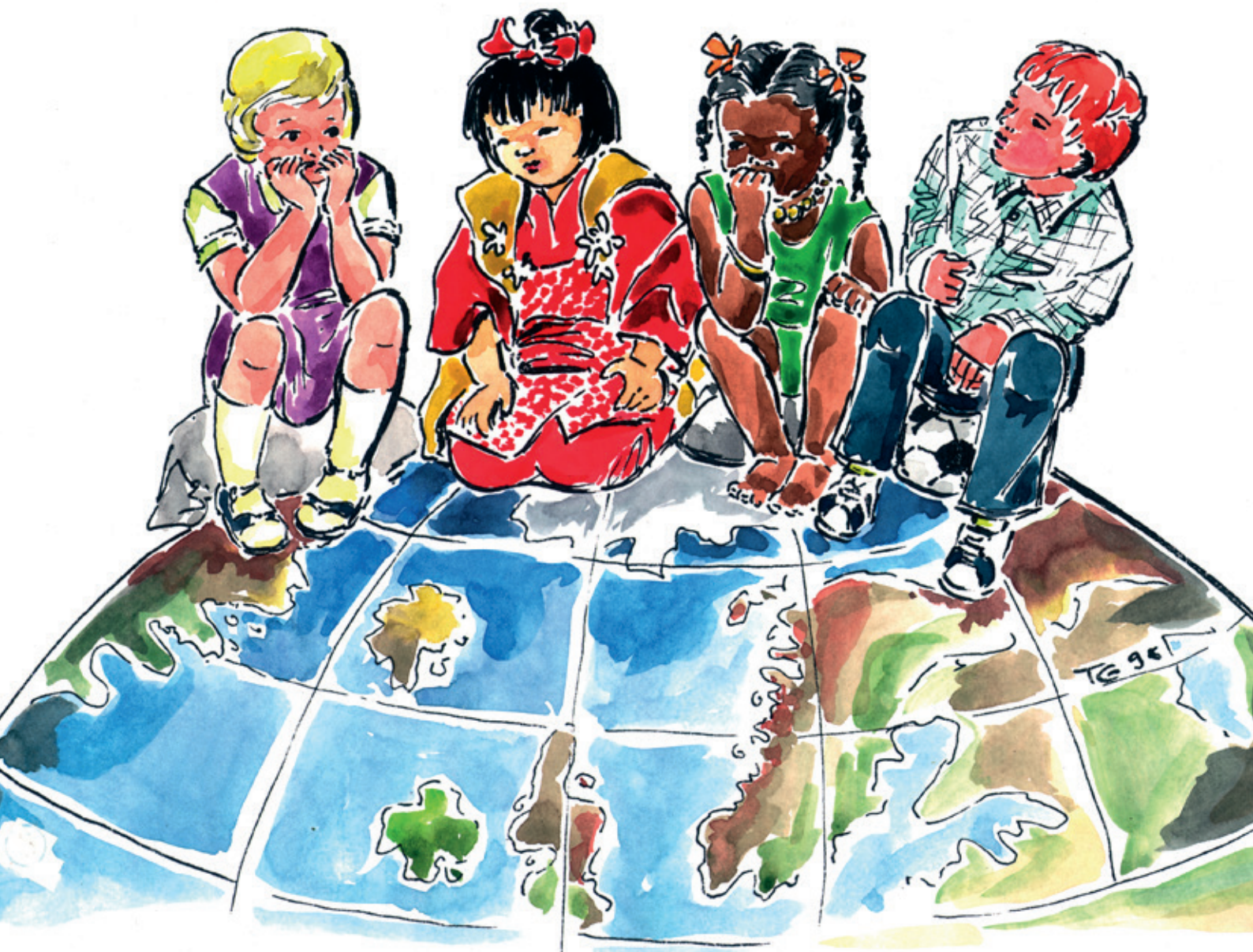




Text for the Story of Jesse I. Overholtzer

JESSE'S ADVENTURE

*LIFE AND MISSION OF
JESSE IRVIN OVERHOLTZER,
THE FOUNDER OF
CHILD EVANGELISM FELLOWSHIP*



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LIFE AND MISSION OF JESSE IRVIN OVERHOLTZER, THE FOUNDER OF CHILD EVANGELISM FELLOWSHIP

With one jump, Mr. Wilson (*real name unknown*) gets out of his bed, groping for the light switch. There it is again: the bellowing of his favourite cow tells him that something is wrong out there. After dressing as quick as he can, the farmer runs out of the house.

This cannot be true! In the livid light of the moon his eyes make out the whole mess.

Picture 1: Cow on top of the barn

The best milk provider of his farm – standing on top of the barn roof.

The farmer rubs his eyes. But it is not just a nightmare. He can see it clearly. And now, something needs to be done about it.

It is not easy to bring the poor animal down to the ground. It takes all night and the help of the neighbouring farmers (*end of picture 1*).

After the shock is over, a question arises: How in all the world did the cow get up there? Who might be behind that?"

The answer is living in the neighbourhood, and it has got a name: Jesse Irvin Overholtzer!

Once more, he has dared to play an enormous trick. Together with friends, around midnight he put planks up to the side of the barn roof and after that decoyed the good-natured cow to walk on them. The culprits still roar with laughter when they think of how the heavy tight-rope dancer went up to lofty heights in the moonlight.

It is not the first time that Jesse badly embarrasses his parents. The list of the tricks he played is long. And he can get his friends excited about everything he has in mind.

Yes, Jesse is strong among his peers. But all by himself, he feels totally different. No one knows him like that. Sometimes, he is full of fear. What if he dies? Oh, that dreadful fear!

He stops eating. He just can not manage to gulp something down.

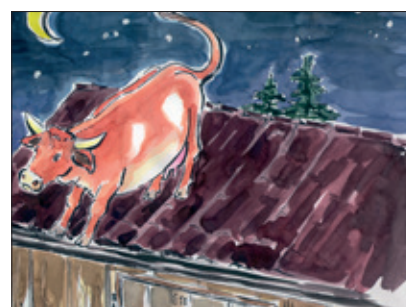
During the night, he lies wide awake. He turns over again and again. A bad conscience is bothering him. "What if I'll have to die soon?" he asks himself. "Is there really a God? Who made God? Does he see me and the things I do? Will I get to heaven?" Questions over questions.

Are there questions in your heart, too? Can you understand how Jesse was feeling, because within you there is the same kind of fear?

Jesse is looking for an answer. But who would give him an answer? He does not dare to ask his father. The father is a strict man. Jesse fears him.

Picture 2: The Overholtzer Family sitting in church

On Sunday, he must go to church with his family. They take up a whole bench with their seven children. Jesse's seat is besides the father's. He does not like the services at all. They are all about commands - commands he is not able to keep. He is a sinner, and he has known it for a long time. He would like to make a new beginning. But



how? No one tells him that Jesus is the Saviour and that He forgives.

The father nudges him when he turns pages in his hymnbook.

Why is this all so boring?

Jesse is ready to do everything to please God and to be able to go to heaven. But what does he need to do? Once, he has an idea. "Mom, can I become a member of our church?"

His mother is shaking her head. "It's not possible. You are still too young."

Jesse's last hope has gone.

"My father and my mother want me to be good, and I'd like to be good. But I just can't." He is overwhelmed by despair. "Too young!" With contempt he repeats these words of his mother. "If I am lost anyway ... some more sins won't matter!"

Soon his sister Carrie sees the mother sitting in the kitchen, weeping. "Jesse is gone!", she sobbed. "He has... run ...away!"

Like the Prodigal Son in the Bible, Jesse has disappeared. On his trip, he reaches the sea.

"I'll go swimming!" he calls out excitedly towards his new friends. The lad throws himself into the big Pacific Ocean, pushing forward against the waves. Suddenly, he feels a current drawing him.

Picture 3: Jesse I. Overholtzer drowning

How strong it is! Jesse notices he is helpless against it. The current is dragging him into the open sea. "Help! Help!" he cries at the top of his voice. But the sound of the sea drowns out his voice. He is floating with the waves, sometimes on top, sometimes under the water.

And there it is again, his old fear, his panic. "Do I have to die?"

Within seconds, Jesse sees all of his life passing before his eyes.

"If I will have to die now, God's wrath is waiting for me."

He fights for his life.

All at once, the current is gone. As unexpectedly as it got hold of him, it gives way. With his last ounce of strength, Jesse swims towards the shore. "This must be my mother's prayers", he pants. "They have spared me from drowning." (end of picture 3)

For a long time, he now has been away from home. One day, he is fed up with this kind of life. It is not like he imagined at first. His employer expects very hard work for very little money. Jesse has got enough of that. He feels homesick, and he is overwhelmed by this feeling. Will they welcome him, if he turns up again? After eight years? Yet, Jesse starts off.

His family receives him with great warmth and love.

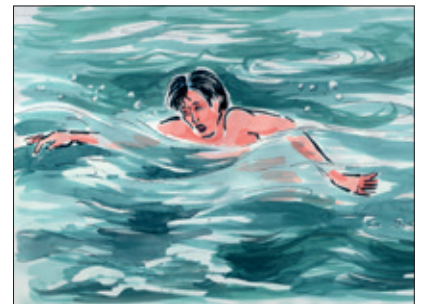
Carrying logs and coal is over now. Jesse begins to go to college.

"Hello, Jesse!" an old friend is greeting. "I haven't seen you for a long time. Have you anything on tonight? Will you join me and go to the evangelistic meetings in college?"

"No. This is not for me. I am not interested."

But his friend does not give up. Finally, he has got him that far. Jesse comes along.

"God loves you", Jesse hears the preacher say, after they have sung several songs. "He invites you to come to him, no matter how much you have sinned. He wants to forgive. The Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for you, too. He took the punishment for your sin. Trust in him. He will give you new, eternal life."



This is the answer Jesse has been searching for, for such a long time!

He feels that God is talking to him.

During the night, he thinks about all that he has been hearing. Then he starts to pray. He confesses the whole load of guilt that is upon him to the Son of God. He asks for forgiveness and receives Jesus Christ into his life.

From then on, his whole life is changed. He is full of joy now. Fear has gone. Peace enters his heart. He knows that he is saved and that he is now able to go to heaven.

It was easy for Jesse, and it is as easy for you to get saved. Jesus loves you. He invites you to come to him. Confess to him the guilt that is making you sad, and ask for forgiveness. Ask him to come into your life. He will listen to your prayer. Jesus Christ forgives, and he will give you eternal life.

Jesse Overholtzer thanks God and plans to become a pastor of a church. From Monday till Saturday, he is now a farmer, and on Sunday he preaches.

It is raining. Jesse Overholtzer has finished his work on the farm for today and enters his home. In there, it is warm and cosy, as the fire is burning in the tiled stove. The armchair invites him to spend the evening reading.

Jesse takes a volume of Charles Spurgeon from the shelf. He is excited about this British preacher. This man is famous for having preached sometimes in front of 10 000 people. His sermons are spread throughout the whole world. The Californian preacher wants to learn from this man. He keeps on reading, but all of a sudden, he is startled.

“That is not true! I do not believe that!” Determined, he closes the book and places it on the chest of drawers.

“How can he say such a thing. No, no. This time, Spurgeon errs. This is wrong, totally wrong!” Mr. Overholtzer jumps up from his armchair. Very thoughtfully he walks through the room.

“Spurgeon, this is impossible!”, he repeats. “Or ... might it be possible, though?”

In front of the chest, he stops. He takes up that book again, turns the pages and is looking for the passage that has just irritated him so much. And then he reads it aloud, the sentence that sounds so impossible to him: “A child of five years, if thoroughly instructed in the Word of God, can as savingly believe as a grown up person.”

Overholtzer thinks. A child of only five years can not possibly believe and be saved. He is much too young! At this thought, he is alarmed.

Can you imagine, why?

Too young! This is what his mother told him. And he knows exactly that he would have believed at that time. Although he even was still a child, then.

To Mr. Overholtzer, it seems as if God was saying: “Think about that. What would happen, if you told children they should believe in Jesus and come to him with their guilt?”

“Well then! I will try this out. I will make an experiment.”

For his experiment, he chooses two children whose parents are not going to church.

Picture 4: Mr. O. talking with the two girls

“Do you know who God is?” he asks them when starting to talk to the girls. They shake their heads. “He lives in heaven. God is strong and mighty. He has created everything: the animals, the plants, the sun, the moon and the stars. And He made you. Do you know why? He wants to have fellowship with you. He wants you to live with Him and get to heaven one day. But – there is a problem: The bad, wrong things that there are in every heart. As there are bad things within us, we think wrong,



speak bad words and do things that do not please God. The Bible says this is sin. Sin separates from God."

When hearing this, the children shyly turn their eyes to the ground.

Mr. Overholtzer can guess what they are thinking and encourages them: "Do not be afraid. God loves you. He sent His son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to the earth. The Lord Jesus died for your sins on a cross. Three days later, God woke him up from death. He is now in heaven. He sees and hears you. He wants you to come to Him. You can pray. You can tell Him all about your sin and ask forgiveness. He then cleanses your heart, He has promised to do so. You need not wait to talk to Him until you will have grown up. You can do it today."

The girls listen very carefully (*end of Picture 4*).

Mr. Overholtzer is surprised that both of them want to pray. They want to pray **now**, and they do it together. The nine year old girl starts and the eleven year old continues: "Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you love me, although you know all about me. Please, forgive my sin and come into my life, I want to belong to you. Amen." So each of them becomes God's child.

I want to encourage you to do the same, if you are not yet a child of God – because it is really true: Jesus wants children to believe in Him and be saved. No one is too young. Not even you.

The girls both like to go to children's church. Every Sunday! Three months later, their mother, too, comes to the service. One day she says: "Mr. Overholtzer, I want to believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved."

"Why do you want that?" he inquires.

"The lives of my two girls have been changed, and that is why."

After this experience, Mr. Overholtzer is convinced. He is now very sure that even children can trust in Jesus and be saved. "I need to tell many children that God loves them. Indeed, all the children of the World."

His thoughts are fitting well into God's plan. God's plan is written in Matthew 18, verse 14: "Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." (*NKJV*)

In earlier times, Jesse was getting others excited about his tricks. Now he wins many to do God's will and bring the Gospel to the children.

Together with them, he starts Good-News-Clubs. This is a great idea.

Every week, children are meeting in a flat or a house in order to listen to the stories from the Bible. Most of them never go to church. Through the Good News Clubs, they get to know God. Many of the children believe in the Lord Jesus and are saved.

Mr. Overholtzer works a lot. Actually, he is working too much. So tired, he faints. His strength is gone, and he needs to stop. Is this forever? No. God does not let this happen. But it takes a long time until he is healthy again. Now he has lots of time to read the Bible. While he is ill, he realises some very important thing: He is not able to tell all of the children that God loves them.

God shows him what to do in the future. Feeling better, he starts right away.

He holds training classes for people who want to teach a Good News Club.

For it is better to teach ten people to do it than to try doing it all by oneself.

He has pictures printed, so that children can hear **and** see the stories.

He prays. This is the most important thing.

Therefore many more children hear the Good News about the Lord Jesus Christ.

This work is pleasing to God. He blesses it, and He makes it grow.

Some people think, Mr. Overholtzer is a special man. He is not. But he is a man who loves God and who therefore does what God is telling him to do. Can he, perhaps, guess what God still has in mind for him?

Jesse Overholtzer prays. He does this often, but today, it is different. He feels that God is present – very near to him.

Picture 5: Globe with children

He starts to pray for each country of the world and for the children who live there. For Germany, too. (*Fill in your country*).

Some weeks later he does this again. And while he is praying, God tells him to pray, too, for the country he left out last time – for the Sovjet Union (*this is Russia plus a number of other countries*). He cannot imagine that the communist government will allow at any time to tell children about Jesus. But he wants to trust in God. For nothing is impossible with Him. He prays from the depth of his heart (*end of picture 5*).

Today, we see that God has answered his prayer. A miracle has happened. Communism has broken down. In the former Sovjet Union, there are now many missionaries showing the children the way to Jesus. Many children possess their own Bibles and read them regularly. And thousands of them are involved in Bible Correspondence Courses in order to get to know God.

Los Angeles. This is the next place Mr. Overholtzer wants to visit. In this city, together with other Christians, Mr. Overholtzer founds a mission society – especially for the children.

Dr. Orr is there, too, and he has something to say. "Let's call this mission 'Child Evangelism Fellowship'. Its task shall be to win Children for Christ." Everyone agrees.

Mr. Overholtzer says to his friend: "You will see this movement spread around the whole world."

(*Show again picture 5*) He was right. Today, Child Evangelism Fellowship exists in an always growing number of countries in the world. Over 3,000 men and women ... who love the Lord Jesus are fulfilling the task he has given. All over the world, they are showing boys and girls how to come to him.

Mr. Overholtzer has already died. For a long time, he now has been with God in heaven.

But the story of CEF is going on. For God loves children. He loves those who bait a cow to the top of a barn roof. He loves you!

Since God loves all the children, he wants them all to be saved. He does not want to leave even one behind. This is really true!

