

Jeremy and His Five Fingers

by Narka K. Ryan and William S. Ryan

"Why do you weep, Elizabeth? Do you not like the new home we have here near the river? Is it not all we hoped for when we left England?"

Hastily wiping her eyes, Elizabeth smiled through her tears. "Forgive me, Jonathan. Of course, it's more than what we both wanted. It's the church, though; it's the only church in the area, but it is not like ours. This morning when we could not receive communion because we did not say all the words everyone else did, I felt so left out, so rejected. And I wondered, when will we ever be able to be a full part of the church again?"

Jeremy overheard the conversation of his parents and he thought about it on the way to Mr. Barton's store with the daily supply of eggs from their chicken coop. *It's not fair*, he thought. *Is that the way all churches are?*

With the eggs delivered, Jeremy came home the long way. That meant walking along the beautiful Ohio River, climbing around rocks, and watching the fish jump out a distance in the water.

Today he came upon something different. Right at the river's edge, a young man was standing on the back of a wagon, talking to a group of Jeremy's parents' friends and neighbors. Frequently some traveling salespersons would try to sell medicine or herbs, and Jeremy might listen for a moment before running on home.

But today, Jeremy caught the words "church," "one," and "simple." He stopped at the edge of the group. It seemed as if the man was speaking directly to Jeremy. If only Mother and Father were here. But he couldn't pull himself away for fear he'd miss the exciting words of the young man.

Walter Scott—for that was his name—was traveling all along that part of the Ohio frontier sharing his simple plan of salvation. "You don't have to have a token to be a church member," he said. "You don't need to recite creeds to join a church. There is no creed but Christ." Jeremy swallowed hard. It was exactly what his parents had been talking about. This was the subject that had brought those seldom-seen tears to his mother's eyes.

"The church of Jesus Christ on earth is one. We are meant to be one people. God means for it to be that way. And it's as simple as this. Hold up your hand. I can show you on the fingers of one hand."

Touching his little finger he said, "First, you've got to believe that Jesus is the Christ and confess that faith." Putting his thumb to his ring finger, he said, "Next, you must repent of your sins. Thirdly, you must be baptized. These are the three things we must do. The next two fingers are God's actions."

Holding up his index finger, Scott said, "God will forgive your sins, and then fifth," with his thumb outstretched, he raised his voice and shouted victoriously, "God will give you the gifts of the Holy Spirit and eternal life."

"It's as simple as that," Scott said softly. "Let me repeat it for you." Again he spoke the words of faith, repentance, baptism, forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jeremy was glad because he knew he'd heard something important.

Having run all the rest of the way home, he came into the house, laughing and talking all at the same time. With hand held high, he said, "Listen, I've found us a church that's made for people like us!" He started with the first finger.

He was so excited that his parents made him repeat it three times.

"It makes sense, Elizabeth," smiled Jonathan. "Come on, Son. You and your mother and I are going back to town to talk to your Mr. Scott!"

Adapted from a story by the same name in *Community of the Called: Older Children/Younger Youth*, © Christian Board of Publication, 1981. Used by permission.

Let's Think About It

1. Why did Elizabeth feel so bad about the church?
2. What did Walter Scott say that caught Jeremy's attention?
3. In what way did the five-finger exercise help the new movement spread across the frontier?
4. What do you think happened when Jeremy and Elizabeth and Jonathan met Mr. Scott that night?