

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Luke 2:40-52

Key Verse: 2:49

by Steve Stasinios

"Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?'"

Luke alone includes two stories about Jesus' childhood and life: Jesus' dedication at the temple at 40 days old, and 12 year old Jesus at the temple. While not comprehensive, these passages give us crucial insight into the early years of Jesus, and his development from a boy into a man. Jesus becomes the perfect man, the model we stand in awe of and long to emulate. As we look at him we see what God intended all of us to be. Jesus embraced his humanity and lived it to the full, as an example for us to follow (Jn 10:10). Let's think about three ways to follow Jesus: Jesus grew, Jesus learned, and Jesus obeyed.

First, the Boy Jesus Grew (39-40). Verse 39 reads, "When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth." Joseph and Mary provided the environment for baby Jesus to grow in. To protect Jesus' life from murderous King Herod, Joseph took Mary and the child to Egypt. After Herod died he brought them back to raise Jesus in Nazareth. Nathaniel tells us this place was like a hole in the ground, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there? (Jn 1:46)" But this was a good place for the Messiah to be raised. He would learn about agriculture, milling, animal handling, what it is like to have siblings, to see someone get old and die, and how to socialize and these came out in his teaching. Luke tells us later there was a synagogue in Nazareth (4:16). Jesus learned the law, how to worship corporately, and the reality of God. This was the environment Jesus was raised in.

Verse 40 reads: "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." This verse summarizes 12 years of Jesus' life, his childhood. Jesus' growth was not one dimensional. He grew strong. He ate and slept well.

He was healthy and active. He was also filled with wisdom. He grew in knowledge and understanding through education. He also grew spiritually, as the grace of God was upon him. Jesus, as the perfect man, grew in all areas, as a balanced man. Sometimes we view growing negatively. But we learn from boy Jesus that growing is natural and proper human behavior. We don't need to grow because there is something wrong with us, but that is what human beings are supposed to do.

Especially, Jesus grew in the grace of God. Growing is not just a physical matter, but a spiritual matter. Peter said, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation (1Pe 2:2)." We need the grace of God. We need the knowledge and the example of our Lord Jesus Christ so we too may grow continually (2Pe 3:18). Serving UIC ministry, we have people in every stage of life, from Dr. James Joung who has been in this ministry from before I was born, to babies like Paul Joseph Shin, only three weeks old. But I thank God that we are all interested in growing. So we pray for our environment. We think about our example. Most of all, we depend on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Are you growing like Jesus: physically, mentally and spiritually? Let's learn from the boy Jesus, and grow.

Second, the Boy Jesus Learned (41-49). Let's look at this section in two parts.

In the first place, Jesus learned from his parents (41-42). Jesus' early childhood education was largely done by his parents. Although poor, they taught their children to honor God and his word. The Bible emphasizes that parents must teach the word of God to their children (Dt 6:7). This would begin from the age of 3 by orally sharing God's word at meal times, or while doing chores. Children were to memorize sections of the Bible. At age five children would learn to read and write. In the local synagogue they would read the Scriptures and be taught by the local rabbi. This was Jesus' formal education. Luke also introduces the informal education his parents gave by their example. Verse 41 reads, "Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover." The Passover was the opening dinner of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which God commanded his people to celebrate every year. The journey was about 65 miles; from Lake Geneva, WI

to Chicago. It may take as much as three days at that time, traveling in large caravans. To attend the whole Feast would take as much as two weeks time. That is time off work. That is money spent in travel. That is possibly getting a babysitter to watch Jesus and his brothers and sisters while they were gone (Mt 13:55-56). Their devotion had a positive effect on their children's view of God. We can imagine that Jesus and his siblings looked forward to the time when they too would be able to go up to the Feast.

The time eventually came. Verse 42 reads, "When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom." According to Deuteronomy 16, every man is obligated to attend this Feast. This verse mentions that there was a custom that at the age of twelve a boy would be considered "a son of the law," and be put on a course of instruction and trained in fasting and attendance in public worship¹. Jesus was now able to go up to the house of the LORD. Psalm 26:8 may describe his feeling at that time, "I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells." This was the time of self-discovery, the coming of age, the entry into individual thought and personal reflection. Jesus, at this stage of life, was brought to the temple of God. His parents' education prepared him for this moment, and he learned from them not only the law of the LORD, but their devotion and desire for God. What legacy will we teach our children, and what desires are they learning from what we say, and what we do?

In the second place, Jesus learned from his Father in the temple (43-49). Verse 43 reads, "After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it." Joseph needed to get back to work. There were tables to make, farm instruments to repair, and money to be made. But what sticks out in this verse is the boy Jesus. Luke no longer calls him, "the child," but the "boy Jesus." Jesus makes his first independent decision recorded in the Bible. He decides to stay in Jerusalem after the Feast. Even at the age of twelve Jesus has a desire for God and to know God's word. We learn from Jesus, the perfect man, that seeking God is normal human desire. What were your desires at the age of 12? I started smoking around that age, and was growing my hair long, playing Nintendo and generally becoming a nuisance. Instead of building on the natural desire for God, I instead was building up my

sinful desires. Many of us didn't make an independent decision to study the Bible until our college years. In view of the boy Jesus, let's give our hearts to the word of God, instead of gratifying the desires of the sinful nature (Ro 13:14).

Luke goes back to the parents. Let's read verses 44-45. "Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. 45When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him." Although they were unaware of Jesus' location, they trusted their son would be with them in the company. But he was not. Nor was he with the relatives or friends; they had lost the Son of God! What a nightmare! Imagine the frantic journey for one day back to Jerusalem, searching the whole way. I was reminded of one time Amy and I were at the center for one of our UBF functions, perhaps Founder's Day or prayer meetings, and we had brought my oldest son Judah. After the meeting was over, we started looking for him, and could not find him. We would ask people, "Have you seen Judah?" "No, we didn't see him. Is he ok?" "Oh, I'm sure he is around." But inside I felt like dying! It took us 30 minutes to find him. I've never been so terrified.

Verse 46 reads, "After three days, they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." Thank God, they found him, and he was ok. But look at what boy Jesus is doing in the temple! Jesus stayed behind in order to study the Bible! During the feast, the members of the Sanhedrin would come out and teach the crowds of teachers and rabbis that gathered. Jesus was there among the teachers, listening to these great theologians and Bible scholars. He understood them, having faithfully studied the Bible since his childhood. We get no hint that he knew it all, and was patronizing these teachers. He was learning the Bible, actively participating by asking questions, and also giving insightful, on topic, related answers.

Sometimes we think it is because we are fallen or have some problem that we need to study the Bible. Recently a couple was having marriage troubles. A shepherd said, "They REALLY need Bible study." But sinless and perfect Jesus studied the Bible. Others don't want to learn from anyone. But boy Jesus, the Son of God, the perfect man and our

example, learned. He learned from parents, he learned from teachers of the law. Most importantly, Jesus learned from his Father through studying the Bible. Learning is normal and proper human behavior. How is your attitude toward Bible study? Jesus listened to the teachers. He asked questions to ensure his understanding. Jesus also shared what he learned, submitting to questions and giving relevant and insightful answers. This became foundational to Jesus' life. When Satan tempted him in the desert, Jesus quoted the Bible in Deuteronomy. Where did he learn that? In his first recorded sermon in the book of Luke Jesus quotes the book of Isaiah and applies it to himself. Where did Jesus learn that? As boy Jesus studied the Bible, we should study the Bible: listen intently, ask questions, and write our testimonial answers. This summer at UIC we are devoting ourselves to Bible study with the key verse from Psalm 1:2, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." My hope and prayer is that a delight for the word of God may be kindled in the hearts of every UIC member, just as Jesus delighted in the word of the Lord. As Jesus did, let's decide to study the word of God as our desire.

Jesus' Bible study made an impression on those listening to him. Verse 47 reads, "Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers." They didn't know who Jesus was, and it wasn't simply his age that amazed them. They were amazed at his understanding of the messages, and the weight of his insightful answers. But their response is also recorded here in contrast with that of Jesus' parents. Verse 48a reads, "When his parents saw him, they were astonished." It was clear that he wasn't lost. He hadn't been accidentally left behind. Instead, he had independently chosen and willfully decided to stay behind in Jerusalem, without telling them! What a shock! They had been searching all day for him, in the pools, the arcades, the police station, and here he was in the temple courts studying the Bible!

Read verse 48 again. "When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.'" Mary's question reveals the deep pain in her heart. "Why have you treated us like this?" Anyone ever heard that from your mom? On Easter Sunday, I was

delivering the message at 6PM and was not able to attend my customary Easter Family Dinner at Mom's. My mom was hurt because she expected me to be there, but instead I chose to remain behind. Likewise, Mary was hurt. She also said, "Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." She means, "You are answerable to us." What did Jesus say?

Let's read verse 49, our key verse. "'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?'" These are the first words of Jesus recorded in the Bible. Jesus says, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" Jesus did not intend to hurt his parents. He wasn't rebellious to Mary. His question implies that Jesus expected they should know where he was, and what he was doing. He thought they were on the same page with him. He was so engrossed in Bible study, he forgot all about leaving, and maybe even eating and sleeping too. His question also reveals how Mary and Joseph did not see him correctly. When they looked at him, they still saw him as the baby boy that Simeon held aloft. Shortly after my son Judah was born, my dad said to me, "You are still my little boy in my eyes." They should know their son and see him from God's eyes, and know what he should be doing.

Jesus said, "I had to be in my Father's house." This time in the temple led Jesus to some very important convictions. 1) Jesus became Father-centered. Jesus answered Mary's comment, "Your father and I." Jesus is clearly identifying himself now as the Son of God. These days my father has a life-threatening illness. I need to pray for him and begin to take responsibility for my family as the eldest son. But above our earthly father is our Heavenly Father. Jesus taught us to pray, "Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This was Jesus' attitude and motivation, and all other things were second to that. As Jesus showed the example, so we should follow.

2) Jesus loved God his Father. This was the main point Jesus learned in Bible study. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Jesus loved God with all his heart: his desire is described

by his words, "I had to be in my Father's house." Jesus loved God with all his soul: he gave his mind and heart to study the Bible, allowing the Bible to mold his thought world and attitude. Jesus loved God with all his strength: His decisions became God-centered. As this book was written for Theophilus, or "lover of God," (Lk 1:3) we too should love God like this.

3) Jesus found his identity and purpose in God his Father. Jesus had conviction of what he should do as the Son of God. As Jesus' disciples, we have an identity too. Jesus tells us in John 15:15, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." Our Heavenly Father has a position for you in the family business. There are many who don't know what to do with their life. One girl in early college cried, having no direction for her life. Through Bible study, she learned about God. She learned about herself. These days she is preparing to move near UIC to establish a house church for UIC campus mission. Where did she find this identity? In her Father God. Many among us are graduating with a degree. But a career alone is not identity. We need the loving involvement and caring direction of our Heavenly Father. He is the one who created us, and has a purpose for us in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10).

This is the question: Do you know your Father in Heaven? Do you know that he sees you? Do you know what he wants you to do? When we do, we become normal human beings, on the path to become like Jesus some day. As a prerequisite to growing like Jesus, we need to be born spiritually. This happens when we repent our sins and accept Jesus as Savior in our hearts. God unites us with himself, and gives us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit assures us we are God's children, and we cry out, "Abba, Father!" We experience his love and care. He gives wisdom, guidance, direction, meaning of life and a clear identity everyday. If you don't experience this in your relationship with God, please ask Jesus to come and help you be born again. Repent of your sins, and believe in Jesus for salvation.

Third, the Boy Jesus Obeyed (50-52). Look at verse 50. "But they did not understand what he was saying to them." Joseph and Mary didn't understand their son. What did Jesus do? Verse 51a reads: "Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them." Jesus was not hurt by his parents' misunderstanding, and become discouraged and crooked. Nor did he despise them, as if he was now past them. Rather, Jesus humbled himself, coming down from the temple to lowly Nazareth. Jesus willfully chose to be obedient to his earthly parents. Some think rebellion is the true expression of individuality. To obey seems unnatural and wrong. But we learn from the boy Jesus that humility and obedience are normal and proper human behavior. Jesus humbly obeyed.

In the end of verse 50, Jesus mother treasured these things in her heart. She did the same after hearing the testimony of shepherds in verse 19. Although she didn't understand, she didn't ignore these events. She treasured them in her heart, thought about them, and later she would come to understand. This is likely how the stories of Jesus' childhood were passed on to us. We can learn from her that treasuring Jesus is important, even when we don't fully understand.

What was the result of Jesus' obedience? Let's read verse 52. "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." Here, Luke for the first time addresses him as "Jesus." Through this submission for 18 years, Jesus developed as a human being. He learned carpentry from Joseph, and was known as "son of the carpenter" (Mt 13), which means "apprentice carpenter." He likely supported his family after Joseph's death. He also grew in wisdom, applying the knowledge of God. According to the Passion of the Christ, he invented table and chairs. He was not a social outcast either. He grew socially and spiritually as well, in favor with God and with men. Jesus' growing life, in preparation for his ministry is so important. We all want to do something great for God. But seldom do we want to practice submission and humble obedience in God's time of preparation. Soon there will be a student workshop on characters in 1 Samuel. Among them, God trained and disciplined David for 13 years, and David grew to be a man after God's own heart and learned how to be the shepherd king of God's people.

We all need to grow as people of character and content, with identity in God. When I was approaching graduation from UIC in 2000, I wrote God's servant Dr. Samuel Lee an eight page letter asking him about what I should do with my future. My options were all centered around going as a missionary to Russia within a few years. He laughed and laughed. His direction was, "Get a good job and make a lot of money." For eight years I did just that. But it was not a waste. This was the best direction, as I learned how to work hard, how to provide for my family, how to manage my time and money, and how to interact with people outside UBF. These have been crucial to my life and practice as a man of God.

In this passage we studied about the boy Jesus. I learned from the boy Jesus that growing in humanity, learning about our Father God and his will for us, and practicing humble obedience are the way to live life to the full as a human being. May God help us to come into this relationship with our Heavenly Father. May our delight be the same as that of Jesus: "I had to be in my Father's house."