

JESUS GREW IN WISDOM AND STATURE AND IN FAVOR WITH GOD AND MAN

Luke 2:41-52

Key Verse: 52

“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.”

It's the New Year 2017. I'm sure all of us struggled this week to consider our key verse for this year. We want to know what is God's direction for me this year? How does he want me to grow? Also, many of us searched this week for our children's key verse as well, we've sought out and prayed about how God is working in their lives and how he wants them to grow. Growth is good, and choosing a key verse is good because we must always be looking for the way to know God better, to struggle and develop in his character. Jesus also grew and he is the example in all things for how we are to live our life. As we're praying for this year we can learn from Jesus to crave for God and say, **“We must be about our Father's things”** his business, and in his house. May God inspire us and challenge us through this passage.

First, The role of godly parents (41-42)

Last week, we thought about how serious Jesus' parents were about keeping the rituals and sacrifices of their faith even though many Jews did not keep them so precisely.¹ Even before this we saw their personal decisions of faith to obey God even though it meant giving up their human dreams (Lk 1:38, Mt 1:24). And now, verse 41 says, **“Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover.”** In Deuteronomy 16:16, every male was commanded in scripture to appear for the 3 major festivals: the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles. Women were not commanded to come but we see that every year Mary came as well. As we thought about at Christmas, it was an 80 mile journey to Jerusalem from Galilee, maybe a 4 or 5 day trip, one-way walking. What is more, they always took place around the time of harvest and planting, when they needed to be busy working; therefore, many Galileans didn't attend faithfully. Mary and Joseph could have also made excuses why they couldn't attend all the meetings and conferences but they made their spiritual life a priority and their children saw this. We see in John 7, Jesus' brothers encouraging him to come with them to the Festival of Tabernacles (Jn 7:2-3,10). We see in Mark 13 that Jesus was very familiar with the temple by the time he started his

¹ Tosefta Keritot 2:21 and Mishnah Keritot 1:7, 2:4

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ministry in sharp contrast his awestruck disciples. You know, our children are always watching. They see when we come home exhausted from work and then go Bible study or prayer meetings—they also see if we do it grumbling or out of sincere devotion. They see when we pray instead of complaining, or when we trust God in a difficult situation. What could Mary and Joseph do to raise the Son of God? They simply lived sincere, devout lives to God, together with their children. Of, course it's given that Jesus would grow up with faith, but his brothers James and Jude were also very devout Jews and later great Christian leaders. This is the power of the influence of godly parents.

Verse 42 says, **“When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.”** Here **“according to the custom”** refers to the custom of training twelve year old boys to enter Jewish religious life the following year. Jews today mark this with a Bar-Mitzvah ceremony, which means “son of the commandment.” This ceremony didn't exist in Jesus' time, but from the age of 13, the time of education was now finished and children are expected to keep all the law as adults. Before this time, Jesus participated in family worship service and education but from this year he was being disciplined to become a man. It is likely this was his first time coming with his parents. Before this he could at most enter into the court of women, but now he could ascend the steps and go through the Nicanor Gate into the inner court of men. Imagine what it must have been like for Jesus the first time. He could stand before the altar, in front of the magnificent temple, the model of the throne room of God in heaven, he must have been filled with awe. He could watch his father say his prayers asking forgiveness for his sins and the sin of his family, see the priests accept the sacrifice and pray over it and then see the lamb's blood spilt out in their place. He could see the sincerity with which his father prayed for their family and feel for the first time how he was part of something much bigger than himself. As he stood among so many men praying before God for their nation and saw how the priests ministered before the Lord, it surely gave him a deep sense of belonging and identity before God.

It is beautiful to include children in our worship because then they can see our relationship with God. They may not understand everything but they can see us. They see how we pray, how we sing, how we listen and repent, how we truly worship the Lord. Many churches have rejected the idea of age-segregated worship because it seems to not be working, with 60-80% of young people leaving the church after High School². Many are encouraging churches to return to a

² Rob Rienow, “When They Turn Away,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011)

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traditional model of worshipping together as families and finding it gives children a sense of belonging in their church.³ I wish that at least all our 12 year old and above children could be here. I thank God for Judah Stasinov, Joshua and Theresa Jung, Andrew and Hannah Albright, Joshua Ward and Evangeline Gruett who attend each week together with their parents and for little Boaz and Jakin Misurac who sing with their parents each week—and there are more in the basement being trained to be able to come up and join us soon. So often, all our children see of our life of faith is when we come home exhausted at the end of the day, but think of the profound impact of their being welcomed into our body and included in our worship and ministry as we see through Jesus here.

Second, Jesus' growing spiritual desire (43-48)

Verse 43 says, **“After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.”** So, seven day Bible conference, not enough for Jesus! He wanted more! At this time something must have awoken in Jesus. Verse 44 shows that Jesus was an exceptionally reliable boy. His parents traveled for some 20 miles before they began to look for him just believing he was in their company as he always was—where he should be, doing what he should be doing. I mean would you have left our last international conference just assuming your preteen child got home ok because he's so responsible and reliable? It is clear that this event was very out of the ordinary for Jesus, verse 48 reveals his parents' astonishment. This festival had to have had a profound effect on Jesus. When his parents realized he was not among any of their relatives, they traveled back for another day and on the third day returned to Jerusalem and looked for him. Where did they find him, in one of the pools? Checking out the view from the wall? Playing in the market or some popular hangout, with people his own age? Perhaps, at their lodging, he just overslept? It seems that they searched every inch of Jerusalem except the temple, because Mary says they had gotten anxious searching for him. The temple was the last place they expected to find him.

Sometimes we're also not expecting to find spiritual desire in teenage boys. Teenage boys can sometimes look on the outside like all they care about is games but just a little under the surface is a deep thirst for God, a pure desire to know the truth. 12 is a very significant age. In child psychology it is the age when children move into adolescence. Their mind moves away from purely concrete thought to

³ Rob Reinow, “Limited Church, Unlimited Kingdom”

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beginning to understand and think abstract thought. They begin to question their understanding of everything. So, they say that whatever a child has been convinced of by the age of 12 will shape their worldview for the rest of their life. If we can awaken spiritual desire in children at this age it can shape the way they think, relate to others and challenge the worldly ideas thrown at them every day.

Verses 46-48a say, **“After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished.”** To us with the benefit of the whole story, we can think, “Of course, Jesus is the Word, he already knew the whole Bible, he’s omniscient.” But Philippians 2:6-7 say, **“Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men”** (ESV). He emptied himself when he became human. Hebrews 2:17a says, **“For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way.”** CS Lewis I think correctly said, “Christ, in the flesh was not omniscient—if only because a human brain could not, presumably be the vehicle of omniscient consciousness”⁴. This is all to say that Jesus wasn’t born knowing the whole Bible and all things—he had to learn just as we do.

And Jesus was filled with desire to learn. For 3 days he stayed in the temple having Bible study, asking questions, probing deeper, sharing his insights. Can you imagine a 12 year old sitting in Bible study for 3 days? Of his own choice? Without being forced? This is after a 7 day religious festival! His wisdom and understanding reveal that as a child Jesus had not just learned the scriptures but understood them, considered and meditated on them day and night (Psalm 1:3). He didn’t just learn God’s word but he delighted in it and hid it away in his heart (Psalm 119). Where did he learn so much and develop such thirst? It was in family worship learning primarily from his parents—we see Mary’s own thorough understanding of the Bible in her song (1:46-56).

We can imagine what it was like for Jesus, only learning at his Mother’s knee in the backwater little town of Nazareth and now finally being among the most knowledgeable Bible teachers of his time. He was finally able to ask all the questions that had been burning in his mind and have deep Bible study. His soul was fed with the living word of God. He thirsted for God as the deer pants for

⁴ Lewis, “The Problem of Pain”, p110

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water (Psalm 42:1-2). And it seems that this spiritual desire in him blossomed and he realized that this is what he was supposed to be doing, this is where he belonged and who he was, **“I must be in my Father’s house”** (49).

We don’t have Bar-Mitzvah’s or coming of age ceremonies but from 6th grade we especially encourage children and parents to begin praying about Baptism. I thank God that over the years I have been able to hear so many moving testimonies of how children came to know Christ. One young man had a vision at a conference during a time of worship where he saw Jesus reach down and embrace him and he knew he would always be with him. He was on fire after that but later he was disappointed that the feeling of the experience was not enough to sustain him. But such was his spiritual desire that he realized he needed to study the Bible deeply so that he could meet God on a deeper level. How did this come about? His parents always talked to him about his faith, taking every opportunity—especially in the car. He always got involved, or his parents got him involved and he had a great attitude always ready to serve until spiritual desire awakened very personally. Another young man had a bad experience at camp and his mind was filled with dark, dirty images tormenting him. No matter what he did, he couldn’t clean it out. So, he began to attend early morning Daily Bread every day—can you imagine getting your 12 year old up at 5 am every day? Soon, he came and put his game system and a stack of video games on a table in the basement for whoever wanted to take it and devoted himself. He started leading Bible studies in his parent’s ministry in Portland and even gives the message from time to time. There was a young man who was in my very first choir at the church, whose father died at a young age. He fell into pornography to find comfort but soon found himself hopelessly addicted. Yet, when he turned to Christ he broke the chains of his addiction and even in High School, I was amazed at the respect he commanded among other young men who looked up to him for spiritual guidance and friendship—he now leads the ministry in Austin Texas. I remember another young man, surprisingly who was also in my first choir. He was a happy-go-lucky young man who could make friends with anyone, and as I remember loved to listen to rap and worldly hip-hop on B96 when he gave me rides—I was shocked, because his parents were fellowship leaders and respected Bible teachers at UIC. But later he said his parents always brought their Bible students into the house and he got to know them and see how they grew and changed and who left and why and he saw the beauty of the life of serving God and impacting lives for Christ. Spiritual desire awoke in him and he now leads our HBF ministry. One young woman began studying the Bible from Kindergarten and writing page-long testimonies in 1st

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Grade. Through Bible study she overcame so many difficulties in her childhood by the grace of God and spiritual desire awoke in her. She was always filled with a passion to get involved and serve. She asked for permission to lead the Boone Bible club, she came and thoroughly studied the passage each week to prepare for Bible study, came up with fun games, assigned people to bring snacks and invited all her friends, always bringing new people every week. I've rarely seen anyone so committed and sincere. To this day she has always looked for anywhere she can put her many gifts to use and I'm continually impressed by her faith and service. I could keep going on all day, please forgive me if I didn't include your child.

This week, I will give 3 truth seeker buttons to those children who finished reading the Bible in one year. They are ages 11, 12 and 14. How many of you finished reading the Bible this year? You don't have to answer but consider this: how many opportunities are missed because we believe that children are too young to have spiritual desire, or because we put them off to the side until they're old enough to participate? How can we awaken the spiritual desire in our children like Jesus? In the book "Raising a Modern-Day Joseph," Larry Fowler shared an experience talking to a man who helped Internet startups form a strategy to become successful. He asked him, "What do you want to be able to say about your children when they're thirty?" The man answered "College-educated, I guess—and in a good career. Happily married." Then he asked him another question "What would cause you to grieve if you *have* to say it about your children when they're thirty?" "Oh...that they're lost," the man said. The man helped companies find strategies for success but realized he had no strategy for helping his own children know the Lord. As he interviewed many other Christian parents, the answers were the same: parents had clear practical goals for their kids but almost no spiritual vision for them or clear plan. It's sad because before 12 is the time we have the most impact but often we only start worrying about their spiritual life when they rebel as teenagers.⁵

I believe we see 3 important keys to awakening spiritual desire in this passage. The first is a return to family worship or family devotion in the home. The second is to develop an atmosphere where kids can ask questions. The best part of CBF Bible study is when something clicks and they begin to ask all sorts of questions. Feed that and they grow in hunger to know the truth, shut it down and they stop thinking and go through the motions. The third is inclusion. The key to unlocking Jesus' desire, was that he was able to participate in the ministry for the

⁵ Larry Fowler, "Raising a Modern-Day Joseph", p54.

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first time together with his parents. The fourth element is perhaps the most important, it is a sense of mission or their purpose before God.

Third, Jesus' growing sense of mission (49-52)

In verse 48 Mary asked him **“Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you”**. **“Why were you searching for me? [Jesus] asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’”** The word house doesn’t appear in the Greek, it literally says, “not knew you that in *the* of the father of me it behooves to be me?” (Behooves is an old word that means “what is absolutely necessary”). So there is just the article “the” which could be **“I had to be in my Father’s *house*”** (NIV) or **“about my Father’s *business*”** (KJV) or **“in the *things* of my Father”** (YLT). Essentially, he’s saying “didn’t you know that it was absolutely necessary for me to be wherever God is at and working?” We have to ask ourselves why did Luke include this story? Luke clearly shows us that Jesus grew as a normal boy not doing miracles and teaching masses and yet here there was a just a preview of his divinity. There, in the temple about his Father’s business, in his Father’s house giving the words of life, we see a glimpse of the Word became flesh, of the mission he would accomplish as the Messiah, the Teacher. It proved that he was, even as he grew, a man but more than a man. Yet, the time was not yet come. Jesus’ parents did not understand (50). I believe just like the disciples, that it was hidden from them, because no one can accept who Jesus is except by the help of the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:22; 9:45; 18:34). Jesus knew that he still had to grow. And so Jesus went with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them and this is the last thing we hear of it.

The next 18 years of Jesus life are summarized by the words **“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”** This was the necessary time to mature the container of his spirit until his mind and body were ready to do his mission. It was a time of study, discussion and practical work probably learning to be a carpenter. Mysteriously, Jesus lived his life in such a way that God grew more and more in favor with him day by day. And amazingly he also grew in favor with man—these don’t usually go together. Sometimes, as we can grow to have more and more Bible knowledge and pure lifestyle, it leads us to treat people worse or become distant. Dr. Ben used to always tell us Dr. Lee’s words that one of the most useful things you can do is study people. He was trying to tell us that being a shepherd is less about knowledge and more about love. As the popular truism goes, “People won’t care how much you know until they know

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how much you care.” Jesus childhood culminated in his baptism when God said, **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased”** (Lk 3:22). Then Luke lists Jesus’ genealogy concluding that he is the Son of God—thus ends the story of Jesus’ youth, the prologue of Luke’s gospel and begins his ministry.

How about us, how are we growing? We think of growing as a negative sometimes “Hey you need to grow, buddy!” But Jesus grew. He devoted himself to grow for 18 years. As Christians our goal is to be made perfect in the image of Christ. This means we will have to continue growing from now and into eternity. This is why I learned from M. Isaac Choi that Luke 2:52 is the best key verse for our children and I pray it over Nathan every night. As we start the New Year, let’s learn the example of Jesus who thirsted for God, his word, his business, his house and wholeheartedly grew to serve God’s mission. May God grant each of us a proper direction for this year for ourselves, our families and our children. May all of us, but especially the young people of our church, take the example of Jesus and grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man in their young age. Amen.