

## A Bible Lesson on Luke 2:40-52 (ESV<sup>1</sup>)

This is a lesson on what Luke tells us about the boyhood of Jesus.

**Luke 2:40** And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Here is what we know about the very early life on earth of the child Jesus. This short verse tells us about the humanity of Christ. He didn't come from the womb fully developed, but went through the same kind of processes that all humans do. His body and brain developed. He learned to crawl and walk like we all did. He, was, of course, singularly wise and (from before birth) in unbroken fellowship with His Father. He was at all stages of development absolutely perfect. But He laid aside His infinite power and complete knowledge about all things to go through normal life as a human being. To understand how the eternal One could possibly retain His Godhood and go through infancy, childhood, adolescence, etc. is simply beyond us. But that is what is true. Mechanisms and particulars are not for our finite understanding.

Luke proceeds to give us one example of the wisdom of Christ in His growing up days ...

**Luk 2:41** Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

Mary and Joseph are ordinary people, but they are devout, careful people. So when the Feast of Passover came, they made the trip to Jerusalem. It might have been easier and cheaper to stay home, but that wasn't who they were. They were people that loved God and honored Him in all their doing. Expense and trouble were not the issue. This was the ordinance of God, and together this little family took part. Technically, women were not absolutely required to appear, and it seems that Jesus might not yet have quite been of an age that he was really required to be there either. But again, technicalities are not the point.

**Luk 2:42** And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.

**Luk 2:43** And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it,

The main verb in verses 42 and 43a is "stayed." To best catch the sense of what is being said, the verses might be rendered "When he was twelve and they had gone up, and when the feast was ended, when they were returning, Jesus stayed behind." The fundamental thing Luke wants to emphasize is that Jesus stayed behind.

His parents did not know it. The best guess seems to be that folks traveled to these feasts in caravans made up of people from neighboring towns and villages, the women and kids going first and the men and older boys bringing up the back. Quite possibly Jesus' appropriate place here is ambiguous, Mary reasonably expecting him to be back with the men, and Joseph reasonably expecting him to be ahead with Mary.

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**Luk 2:44 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances,**

**Luk 2:45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.**

**Luk 2:46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.**

A day out, a day back, and the better part of a day in Jerusalem looking for Him, three days by this way of reckoning. And where did they find Him? In the temple, drinking in the Scriptures.

We think about this story in terms of our own kids, and accordingly think about it wrongly. This is a twelve year old boy, but not just any twelve year old boy. This is one whom by now Mary and Joseph have every reason to understand is the wholly perfect Son of God. This kid is NOT going to be left in Jerusalem because He gets distracted by somebody's dog or can't get enough of the cotton candy. In all reality, they should have been able to walk straight to where He was sitting. Where else would He have been? Hanging out playing video games? On the soccer field or basketball court? Your kid or mine might have been doing his or her own thing, but we are not talking about an inattentive ordinary kid here. This is Messiah\Christ, Son of God. Mary and Joseph have had adequate testimony about Him and experience with Him to think "If He's not here, He's in the temple." It's not even beyond reason that they should have thought to go by the temple on the way out of town and announce that it was time to leave.

Anyway, in the temple, those without adequate background to know are stunned.

**Luk 2:47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.**

This does *not* say that twelve-year-old Jesus was lecturing or instructing anyone. Instruction in this time included dialogue. This says that everyone listening as He soaked up the Word of God realized that this was not anything close to an ordinary kid here. This was a twelve year old with an absolutely pure heart and love for the Father, incredible intelligence, and a deep understanding of what is central, what the Scriptures reveal about God, His will, and the situation of humanity. These people haven't heard from the angels, Simeon, or Anna, and haven't lived with Jesus for twelve years. And they are, accordingly, blown away.

**Luk 2:48 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."**

Mary speaks as an ordinary parent would speak to an ordinary child who had been irresponsible and self-centered. Her words carry rebuke. She would have done well to go a bit slower and think things through before speaking here. She's tired and upset and has it wrong. She proves that wonderful woman that she was, she was nevertheless imperfect and weak like the rest us.

**Luk 2:49 And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"**

Indeed, where else would He have been? These are the first recorded words of Jesus, and these first recorded words are significant in their declaration of His essential oneness with the Father.

What's He doing? His own thing? Something intended to provoke His earthly parents? Hardly. He is, with completely pure and clear conscience, about His Father's business. What is rendered in the ESV "in my Father's house" is more literally "in my Father's things." Commentators vary on whether they think we should hear mild rebuke of Mary here, or simply wonder in Jesus's questions. I'm inclined to think it is the latter. It's a matter of surprise to young Jesus that Mary and Joseph didn't already understand that His single purpose was to be about God the Father's business. This purpose was not some option that He made an arbitrary choice to take up instead of some other one. It was imperative. "I *must* be" There was no adolescent rebellion nor unthoughtfulness in Jesus being in the temple. There was only a pure abandonment of self to the will of the Father.

Notice too that at age twelve Jesus already says "my" Father in a way that implicitly already indicates more than a relationship with God that you or I might have. It is not "our" Father but rather "my" Father.

**Luk 2:50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.**

What Jesus has just said is about as profound as it gets. As a twelve-year-old, He's made a clear claim to an absolutely special relationship with the Father. This special relationship makes His location in the temple completely obvious. Not having the advantage that we have of knowing "the rest of the story," Mary and Joseph are not able to immediately process what Jesus has said.

**Luk 2:51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.**

This is not indicative of a change of circumstance or attitude. He was, as the perfect Son of God, perfectly keeping the Law of God, always in submission to Joseph and Mary. The tense is one indicating the continual habit of Jesus. This describes the first 30 years of His earthly life.

Mary stores these things up in her heart and sorts them out over the years. Looking back from after the resurrection, they make good sense. The best she could do at the time they were happening was to put them into memory. Leon Morris said: "She might not understand, but she remembered." Many people think that Luke talked to Mary as he prepared to write his gospel.

**Luk 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.**

As a human, having voluntarily laid aside comprehensive knowledge that was His as the second person of the Trinity, there was room for growth in wisdom. And the indication from the last part of the verse is that Jesus, the carpenter's son, was well-liked around Nazareth.