

The Jesus Way / **BE PREPARED**
Grow Like Jesus
Luke 2:40-52

Benjamin Franklin once said, “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” As I look back over my life, I see each stage as a time of preparation for the next. Admittedly, I’m often thankful that I did not foresee all the challenges that I would face in the next phase of life. If I had, I may not have moved forward to face those challenges. At whatever phase of life you are in, God is preparing you for what lies ahead. But by “failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”

We could entitle the next four messages in this series on *The Jesus Way*, “Be prepared!” All of life is a preparation for what lies ahead. We see the same principle in Jesus’ life. In his childhood and youth, his baptism and initial temptation, the Father was at work preparing the Son for the challenges that lay ahead. God does the same in your life and in mine.

Over recent months I’ve stood amazed at the growth of my two grandchildren. I’m sure I noticed it too in my own children. But sometimes parents are so busy changing diapers, heating bottles, and cleaning up the mess that you hardly have time to appreciate the growth process. That’s one thing Mary Alice and I have enjoyed as grandparents. We get so much of the fun and so few of the hassles! And so to observe up close the growth process is an amazing thing. As I hold my little grandson, Jonathan, in my arms, I’m reminded that Jesus went through the same process of nurture and growth. And I’m sure there were many days when Mary would have given the world to have disposable diapers!

What do we know of Jesus’ boyhood days? The answer is very little. But the little we do know is found right here in Luke 2.ⁱ Notice again with me verse 52: “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” That one statement says it all. It’s packed full of insight, not only about Jesus’ childhood and growth, but with practical insight concerning our growth.

As we begin this New Year, a good question to ask ourselves is this: How can I grow like Jesus? Yes, grow to be *more like Jesus*. But also grow *as Jesus grew*.

We Must Grow Intentionally

Write down this word: *intentional*. To grow as Jesus grew, we must grow *intentionally*. The New American translation gets it right when it says that Jesus “kept *increasing*” in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and men. The word is very forceful, coming from a word meaning “to drive forward” as if by beating. Growth doesn’t just happen. There must be a personal determination to advance.

This idea of intentionality is seen in Jesus reply to his parents (verse 49): “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I *had* to be in my Father’s house?” This is one of Luke’s favorite expressions, the idea of “necessity.”ⁱⁱ Jesus was driven in his growth by this sense of intimacy with the Father and urgency to do the Father’s will. No complacency here. No

settling for the status-quo. Often Jesus says throughout this gospel, “I *must* preach,” “I *must* suffer,” or “I *must* be delivered over.” Here it is, “I *must* be in my Father’s house.” All of this says there was a sense of passion and determination in Jesus’ life. This tells me that Jesus’ life was driven by an all-consuming purpose. He had a mission. And he knew what that mission was. On the night of his betrayal he prays saying, “I have finished the work that you gave me to do” (John 17:4).

I mention this here because this is really the heart of the passage. Everything else we’ll say about Jesus’ growth begins with intimacy with the Father and urgency to do the Father’s will. As it was with Jesus, so it is also with you and me. This is where we must begin.

As we approach this New Year, is there something that you sense God is calling you towards. Is there this sense of “I must...” in your life? Is there a sense of mission and calling? Our Christian lives will be pretty much stuck in the ho-hum of the status-quo unless we deeply sense the “must” that Jesus felt when he says, “I must be about my Father’s business.”

We Must Grow Continuously

Not only did Jesus grow intentionally. But he also grew *continuously*. Again, I appreciate the more literal reading of the New American Standard translation: “Jesus *kept increasing*.” This was a progressive action – Jesus kept on growing.ⁱⁱⁱ He didn’t stop.

The Christian life is more of a marathon than a sprint. Sprints are good. They demand explosive strength and amazing speed. But they are finished in a matter of seconds. Not so with marathons. A marathon demands a good start, follow-through and perseverance to the end. Many start well in the Christian life. Far fewer finish well.

Growth takes time. And that’s why we need to “keep on keeping on.” Jesus here is a model of that patience necessary in order to grow. He is not impatient about starting his ministry. He is willing to wait on the Father’s timing. In fact, at this point, being only 12 years old, he had to wait another 17 years until John the Baptist came on the scene and prepared the way for Jesus’ initial ministry. This should be an encouragement to all of us. If you are young, don’t be impatient. Maybe you’re a student, preparing for your life work. Wait on God’s timing. Learn all you can. Don’t lag behind God; but don’t run ahead of God. Be patient. We need to, as Jesus did, seek only *what* God calls us to do and do it *when* he calls us to do it.^{iv}

But here’s the thing – *don’t get stuck*. As we saw in our study of the book of Hebrews, one of our greatest tendencies is to get stuck. We hit a rut. We run up against a difficulty, and our growth gets stunted. We allow our difficulties to destroy us rather than develop us. So as you look ahead to this New Year, is there an area in your growth where you are stuck? Is there an area where you need (by God’s grace) to break through?

We Must Grow Proportionately

Those questions lead me to the next thought. We are to grow, not only intentionally and continually, but also *proportionately*. What do I mean by that? It’s one thing to grow. It’s quite another to grow in all areas of our lives; to grow *proportionately*, or *symmetrically*. To grow as Jesus did involves balanced growth. Why? Because God is concerned about *all* areas of our

lives. We are whole people. The physical aspect of our lives affects the spiritual. And the social aspect of our lives affects the mental. This is not my idea; this is what the Bible teaches, in both the Old and New Testaments. And so true growth is balanced growth, *proportional* growth.

Jesus himself modeled this for us in four areas that are mentioned in verse 52 and illustrated in the story of his visit to the Temple in Jerusalem. Notice again what the verse says, “And Jesus grew [kept on increasing] in *wisdom* and in *stature*, and in favor with *God* and *men*.”^v There you have it, four areas in which Jesus kept on growing.

Jesus grew *mentally*; he grew in “wisdom.” Jesus is twelve years old at the time of the account in Luke 2. According to Jewish custom, Jewish boys reached the age of accountability at 13. But at the age of twelve, their instruction became much more intense in preparation for adulthood.^{vi} At this age they became a “son of the law.” It was mandatory to attend the Passover feast by the age of 13. We can assume that Jesus attended the synagogue school in Nazareth, his home town. There he would have spent many hours reading and studying the Hebrew Scriptures.^{vii} But beyond the normal level of education, Jesus never attended the Academy of Jerusalem or the higher schools of education. He was a carpenter. In the eyes of the religious elite, Jesus was considered uneducated.^{viii}

Here in Jerusalem, Jesus is found among the teachers of the law in the Temple. This was not unusual. Students would often gather at the feet of the rabbis to discuss theology. This was often done in a question and answer format.^{ix} Maybe Jesus was already sharpening his apologetic skills as he became familiar with the Pharisaical traditions that he would one day attack. In any case, he amazed these rabbinical pundits.

I see here in Jesus’ example an attitude of a learner. Imagine – he’s the Son of God, and yet desirous of learning all he can from the rabbis. The account says that he was both “listening to them and asking them questions” (verse 46). But there is more here than mere intellectual advancement. He grew in *wisdom*, the text says. Wisdom is the application of knowledge to all of life. Wisdom is understanding life and life’s relationships and the ability to navigate both. It’s so much more than mere intellectual information.

This is our problem today. In recent years we have experienced an explosion of knowledge. With the click of a key, we have access to information on any topic we can think of. A child of ten today probably knows more than a boy of twenty a generation ago. Even our toddlers are using cell phones! While I was at a conference in Florida back in September, I got a call on my phone during one of our sessions. I was from the caller ID that it was my daughter Rebecca. But when I answered the phone, I heard the non-comprehensible expressions of my granddaughter, Rachel. Think of it – she can’t yet talk, but she already knows how to use the speed dial feature on her mother’s cell phone!

And yet it would seem that with all the added “bells and whistles” of life, our lives would be more meaningful and satisfying. But that is far from the case. As Paul says of people in his day, they were “ever learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:1). While we have increased in knowledge, we have not increased in wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge in such a way that we live life with discernment.

What are you going to do this year to grow like Jesus did in this area? How can you grow *mentally* – but not just in knowledge, but in wisdom, the use of that knowledge for living life as God would have you to live it?

Jesus grew mentally, in wisdom; but he also grew *physically*, he grew in “stature.” We all go from pimples to wrinkles. We all grow in height and sometimes in width! Justin passed me up this past year. Actually, it was a little of him growing and me shrinking. He gained an inch-and-a-half, but I lost nearly half-an-inch!

In the Bible, you will never find a devaluing of the human body. In fact, just the opposite is true. In both the Old and New Testaments, the body has great value in the eyes of God. Man (i.e. man and woman) is viewed as a whole. Man is the image of God, and that includes both our body and our soul (spirit). In the New Testament, our bodies will someday be resurrected. All this goes to show that God values our body, just as he does our spirit. And if God values your body, so should you.

That means that we should take care of our bodies. We should not neglect our bodies or abuse our bodies. Paul says that “bodily exercise profits little;” but it *does* profit. Christians, of all people, should be those who take time to properly exercise, who develop good eating habits, and who do the necessary to maintain the physical body God has entrusted to them.

In this New Year, how will you be a steward of the body God has entrusted to you? Will you begin to get the necessary exercise if you’re not? Will you evaluate your eating habits and weight control? Will you deal with any destructive habits that abuse the body you have been entrusted with?

Proportional growth includes growing mentally, physically, but also *socially*. Jesus grew “in favor...with men.”^x What does this mean? Does it mean that he had favor with everyone he met? It sure doesn’t. In fact, Jesus lived a very controversial life. He had far more enemies than friends. But if he had enemies, it was not because of *his* inability to relate and communicate with others. In fact, we consistently find Jesus moving into the lives of those who were so different than he was. And in doing so, he was also misunderstood. Even in this account, he is misunderstood by his parents. Look again at verse 48:

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.” “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” But *they did not understand* what he was saying to them.

By the time they found Jesus, he had been missing for three days. They were already one day out with the caravan when they discovered he was missing.^{xi} Now some have thought it strange that Jesus’ parents didn’t recognize their son’s absence until a full day’s journey away from Jerusalem. But we need to understand that people traveled as extended families in those days. Often the men would travel together and then the women and children would travel together. Joseph probably thought Jesus was with the women, while Mary probably thought that Jesus was with the men, since he had now “come of age.” In any case, once they realized that Jesus was missing, it took them another day to get back to Jerusalem. And then they spent another day looking for him in the city. No wonder that, when they found Jesus, Mary said that they had been

“anxiously” looking for him. The word is very strong.^{xii} In other words, they had a major anxiety attack!

This wasn't the last time Jesus was misunderstood by his own family members.^{xiii} Later on, Mary misunderstood Jesus' mission at the wedding feast in Cana. Peter misunderstood Jesus when he spoke of him impending death. And over the past two thousand years people around the world have misunderstood Jesus, his person and his claims. And the same will be true of you and me. If we are to follow in the Jesus way, we too will be misunderstood. But we have to run that risk.

The other day Justin decided to put his PSP (for those of you who aren't up on the latest electronic gadgets, that's a game/movie device that's pretty cool!) up for sale on Craig's list. Within a couple of days, he had a taker! But then the question came, “Dad, when we go to sell my device to this fellow, do you think I should give him something to read about Jesus?” “Well, yes, that would be a good idea,” I told him. But you know, that wasn't an easy decision for a 15 year old. To step out and share you faith with a total stranger, that's not too “cool.” You risk being misunderstood.^{xiv}

On the other hand, notice how Jesus submitted here to the authority of his parents. Verse 51 says, “Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.” Couldn't he have said, “Look, Mom and Dad, don't you get it? I am the Messiah. I've got to get this show on the road! Don't distract me from my Father's business! I'm not going home with you. I have a higher calling!” But no, this wasn't Jesus' response. He was submissive and obedient.^{xv}

Finally, Jesus grew *spiritually*. Verse 52 tells us that Jesus grew “in favor with God.” Jesus is here in the Temple in Jerusalem. He's attending, with his family, the annual Passover feast. This may have been Jesus' first trip to Jerusalem since his dedication in the temple as an infant. He was most likely looking forward to this journey with a sense of excited anticipation. It was a great privilege to attend the Passover and he had heard so many stories about this annual pilgrimage since he was a very young child. As the caravan topped the Mount Olivet and he looked across the valley towards Jerusalem, his heart must have been racing. There he would see the dome of the temple rising above the other structures. This was a dream come true.^{xvi}

By the way, it would have taken this family three days to travel from Nazareth to Jerusalem. But for Joseph, Mary, Jesus and the other family members, this trip was a priority.^{xvii} Some of us have a hard time coming to church when it's only 10 minutes away! I also see an important point for us who are parents in these verses. Jesus' parents led the family spiritually. They took the initiative to go to Jerusalem. And it's our responsibility as parents to see that our children are receiving the spiritual nurture that they need. If our priorities in this area aren't straight, how can we ever expect our children to grow with the right spiritual priorities?

After the feast, however, the family began the long trek back to Nazareth. The only problem was, Jesus wasn't among them. Jesus was so consumed by being in his Father's house that he stayed right where he was, in the temple courts, dialoging with the teachers. “Why were you searching for me?” he asks his parents. “Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?”^{xviii} As for Jesus, we all as believers have two families. We have our biological family. But we also have our spiritual family. Sometimes we are tempted to place our biological family as a priority over our spiritual family.

And here we end with the point with which we began. Jesus' growth in every aspect – whether it be physical, mental, social or spiritual – finds its source and meaning in intimacy with the Father and urgency in doing the Father's will. And so it is with you and me. Intimacy with the Father and urgency in doing the Father's will is that which lends coherence and perspective to all other aspects of growth in our lives. Why should I grow intentionally, continuously, and proportionately? Why should I grow physically, mentally, socially and spiritually? It's because I desire intimacy with the Father and sense an urgency in doing the Father's will. As you look ahead at 2009, are you committed to this kind of growth? Where do you need to begin? Is there an area where you're stuck, where you need to "break through?"

Maybe you're here today and you're saying, "I can't pursue intimacy with the Father; I don't even know if God *is* my Father!" Well, He can be. It all begins with simple trust in what Jesus Christ has done for you. The same one who said, "I must be about my Father's business," also said, "The Son of Man (Jesus) *must* be lifted up." "Lifted up" how? Lifted up on the cross... *for you*, and for me. And if you will look to that cross, if you will but look to the man Jesus who died for you, you can be saved. And *his* father will be *your* father. I can think of no better way to begin the year 2009 than to come to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin. Will you turn to him today?

ⁱ There are all kinds of apocryphal stories about Jesus' childhood. Many are found in the Apocryphal Gospel of Thomas. For example, Jesus is described as a boy wonder worker. And at times, it doesn't matter whether he does harm or good. On one occasion, he molds clay pigeons on the Sabbath. But when some object, he claps his hands and the pigeons fly away. On another occasion, a boy about his age is running through the village and bumps Jesus on the shoulder. Jesus cries out "You will not finish your course!" and with those words the boy drops dead! Another time, Jesus is being taught by a man. But Jesus turns the tables on his teacher. He asks the teacher to explain the Greek letter Alpha. When he's unable to do so, Jesus explains the meaning and makes fun of his teacher. See Everett Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 118.

ⁱⁱ Luke 4:4; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 19:5; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44.

ⁱⁱⁱ All of this raises a question: But didn't Jesus already have all wisdom, all knowledge? He didn't acquire this wisdom and knowledge simply by osmosis or by the fact that he was God's Son. He had to be intentional. "His humanity was as perfect as his deity was complete." J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 78.

^{iv} To grow continuously demands setting priorities for our lives. And sometimes these priorities will seem strange to the world around us. Ex. Jesus in the Temple

^v There may be a subtle comparison with verse 40 where physical growth seems to take priority, being mentioned *before* Jesus' growth in wisdom. However, in verse 52, wisdom is mentioned first.

^{vi} Darrel L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 99, n. 1.

^{vii} Jesus grew up learning three languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic.

^{viii} Cf. John 7:15; R.T. France, *I Came To Set the Earth on Fire: A Portrait of Jesus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 34-36.

^{ix} *Ibid.*, 100.

^x Also, Jesus was known as "Mary's son" (Mk 6:3). Under this aspect of physical growth we could also include his growth in a professional way. Since his legal father, Joseph, is not mentioned after the birth narratives, it can be assumed that he died during Jesus' youth. In this case, the weight of providing for the family would have fallen on Jesus' shoulders.

^{xi} Jesus had obviously proved himself to be reliable. I don't think that his parents were negligent, not knowing where Jesus was. I believe that they had so come to trust him that they really didn't question his whereabouts. He had been consistently obedient and reliable in every area of life. When you have a child like that, you aren't constantly wondering of there up to something behind your back!

^{xii} The same word is used to describe the rich man who asks Father Abraham to send Lazarus to relieve him of the "agony" of hell (Luke 16:24).

^{xiii} We do know that Jesus had at least four brothers – James, Joses, Judas (Jude), and Simon – as well as several sisters who are not named. After the birth narratives, we have no further mention of Joseph, Jesus' legal father. So it may be that he died while Jesus was still relatively young. At this point, Jesus didn't really have the favor of his parents. They were beside themselves! And so it is in every parent-child relationship. There is great joy in seeing our children grow. But there are also moments of anxiety, frustration, and concern. Jesus' parents were not exempt from this. And that is encouraging to me and to all of us who are

parents. If the parents of God's Son experience such moments of anxiety, then who am I to think that I will be exempt from the same?

^{xiv} We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ... 1 Corinthians 4:9-10

^{xv} Cf. "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." John 15:10.

^{xvi} C.E. Elton, *Expository Studies on the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), 63. This took place in the Jewish month of Nisan, the equivalent of our March/April.

^{xvii} Here Jesus had a good example in his parents. Women were not required to attend the feasts in Jerusalem. But Mary went. This shows the devotedness of this family.

^{xviii} Jesus was so obviously conscience of his intimate relation to his Father in heaven. I personally believe, however, that this spiritual perception was progressive. Just as Jesus grew in other aspects of his life, so he grew in his spiritual perception of who he was in relation to the Father. Maybe Mary had told Jesus of what had taken place in his first visit to Jerusalem. Maybe she told him that Simeon had taken Jesus into his arms, and praised God, speaking of Jesus as a "light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for his people Israel" (31-32). The same is true for you and me, though in somewhat of a different sense. Do you have a growing awareness of your sonship, of God's calling on your life? Or are our minds so taken with the next family event, the next vacation, the next major purchase, the next repair on the house, the next electronic gadget that we have no space for growing in spiritual perception?