

## Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, Your love for me is never ending, infinitely expressive, forever undeserved, supremely generous, overwhelmingly joyful, powerfully caring, utterly unselfish, completely satisfying and awesomely true. You have died for me and risen again to give me both new life and the gift of Your Holy Spirit, so I ask that I may never forget what You have done for me, Lord Jesus: AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Today, pray to bless. In the midst of all the situations in which you find yourself, offer prayers of blessing*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for Your home church** Pray today about the mission of your church, and the way in which it is viewed by the local community.
- Pray for Haiti and all those affected by the earthquake there
- Pray for Nigeria and for the health of President Umaru Yar'Adua

## Meditation

How can anyone praise God in the midst of suffering?  
Except by faith in Christ, who was slaughtered but not broken.

How can anyone have faith in God in a world of scepticism?  
Except by allowing that human reasoning is never perfect.

How can anyone trust that the Bible reveals the truth?  
Except by respecting the lives of those who have lived it.

How can anyone accept that God heals some but not others?  
Except by agreeing that eternal life is worth more than health.

How can anyone believe that God is love when so many suffer?  
Except by finding Him with us in the midst of our suffering.

*Or to put it another way;*

How can people ignore what Christians have been saying for years?  
Except by putting their heads in the sands of a materialistic world.

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## Bible passage - Luke 2:41-52

<sup>41</sup> Each year His parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> When Jesus was twelve years old, they went up for the festival as usual. <sup>43</sup> When the festival ended and they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed longer in Jerusalem, but His parents did not know this. <sup>44</sup> Assuming that He was in the group of travellers, they travelled on for a day, but then started to look for Him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup> When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for Him.

<sup>46</sup> After three days they found Him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> All who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. <sup>48</sup> When His parents saw Him they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you with great distress.' <sup>49</sup> He said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what He was saying to them.

<sup>51</sup> Then He went down with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature, in favour with God and with other people.

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## Bible Study

### Review

Our passage today is the only Gospel story about the childhood of Jesus. At its heart is a remarkable tale of Jesus as a young boy taking advantage of a unique opportunity to talk about the things of God with the learned rabbis and Pharisees of the Temple in Jerusalem. Moreover, this happened at the feast of the Passover, when roughly twenty years later, Jesus would lose his life at the hands of the religious authorities. In retrospect, it is a bitter-sweet story; the first and last recorded words of the Son of God are uttered at the Feast of Passover, Israel's great celebration of the saving acts of God.

It was expected that all male Jews would journey to Jerusalem for the three great festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Ex 23:14-17). In Jesus' day, Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire and many could not come, so it was understood that they would come only once a year, at Passover, probably the greatest of the festivals. It was also common for families to travel in convoy to the festivals together, with the women and children together in front, and the men and older boys behind. A Jewish boy was considered an adult from thirteen, and in the year before, at twelve years old, his father would educate him in the religious and practical duties of a man. So this was Jesus' own special year of education and growth, and doubtless with great anticipation and excitement, the highlight was His first experience of worship in the Temple courtyard.

The heart of this story is well known. In the midst of these circumstances, Jesus failed to leave Jerusalem with the rest of his family and remained in the Temple, debating with the learned scholars in residence (2:46). On festive occasions, it was customary for the senior figures of the Sanhedrin, the governing council of Judaism, to make themselves available for consultation and teaching within the outer courtyards of the Temple. What better opportunity could a young boy have for exploring the meaning of his family's traditions and ancient Jewish heritage? When asked, however, Jesus was at home in the Temple not because of his prowess at debating with the scholars (2:46f.), but because He was *'in my Father's house'* (2:49). His parents did not understand this, but we are expected to understand that it was natural for Jesus, as God's Son, to feel at home in the place where His Father dwelt. True, his family home was back in Nazareth (2:51) with his parents, but his spiritual home and His life's destiny would be in Jerusalem, though never again at peace with the religious authorities.

From the point of view of Mary and Joseph, however, this was a traumatic event, and we can understand why. Mary rebuked Jesus when she found Him (2:48); surely, He had acted like a child and not appreciated the perspective of others. His parents were struggling, as no doubt they struggled on other occasions, to comprehend their 'son' and keep Him close; He had been given to them by God, and He had *'strength, wisdom and grace'* (2:4) above others. Mary's rebuke is softened by Luke's later comment that she *'treasured all these things in her heart'* (2:2:51) expressing Mary's devotion to the godly task she had been given. We have already read this before, for Luke said the same of Mary after the shepherds came to see Jesus (2:19).

Our passage concludes with the famous sentence, *'and Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature, in favour with God and with other people'* (2:51) This verse is a virtual copy of verse 40, identifying again the key themes of Jesus' growth, in physique, in wisdom, and in spiritual grace (or, 'favour'). Those who structured the New Testament by providing the chapters and verses (a process completed in the sixteenth century) included this story in Luke 2, within the collection of stories about Jesus before He began His ministry. It should perhaps have a chapter of its own, standing between the stories of the infant Jesus and the adult Jesus.

### Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- Jesus at the festival of the Passover (2:41-45)
- The conflict between Jesus and His parents (2:46-50)
- Jesus' obedience and favour with God (2:51,52)

### Notes on the text and translation

## **Important words**

### **V43 'stayed longer'**

The boy Jesus 'stayed longer' in Jerusalem; most Bible versions have 'stayed behind'. I have chosen this translation because the Greek word 'hypomeno' has the meaning of enduring or staying overtime. This gives the story a slightly different feel, as if Jesus stayed behind purposefully not because he wanted to for his own benefit, but because He felt it right to do so (see study below).

## **Significant phrases**

### **V42 'they went up for the festival as usual'**

#### Other translations:

*'they went up to the Feast, according to the custom' (NIV)*

*'they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast' (Authorised Version)*

The phrase I have translated 'as usual' is the Greek 'to ethos' meaning 'custom or practice'. The journey to Jerusalem, presumably for Passover (see study) was indeed customary, but from the point of view of the people and the style of the story, this was just what people did as a matter of course. It therefore seems simplest and most correct to translate 'as usual'. At least one other major translation (the NRSV) agrees with me on this.

## Going Deeper

### ***Jesus at the festival of the Passover (2:41-45)***

The festival of the Passover was held annually and together with the feast of Unleavened Bread with which it was associated (Exodus 12, Leviticus 23:8, 2 Chron. 35:17), this made the feast a total of eight days. There was plenty of time, surely, for Jesus to spend with the scholars in the Temple. However, we have already seen that the point of the incident was not so much Jesus' show of prowess, but His growth in grace, and His wisdom in handling the circumstances of life.

In the notes above, you will discover that the word used to describe Jesus' action in staying in Jerusalem does not suggest He remained out of forgetfulness, or with any intent to show off His ability at answering the questions of the scholars. While Jesus' parents were searching for Him, Jesus appears to have assumed two things; firstly that they would know where to find him (see 2:49), and secondly that he felt it necessary to remain in order to challenge the scholars.

Verse 46 says that Jesus was '*listening to them (the scholars) and asking them questions*'. On the one hand, these could be the deeds of one who was learning and who wanting to know more about the things of God. On the other hand, these could be the actions of someone who knew what he was talking about better than the scholars, and by continuing to ask them questions, He challenged the perceived wisdom of the times. One who continues to ask the difficult questions is nearly always the one with the greater grasp of a subject, as any good teacher knows! In our passage, this is confirmed by the next verse, which says '*all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers*' (2:47); so Jesus was not only asking questions that stretched the scholars, He was giving these scholars answers to the questions He asked them, to their amazement!

People frequently ask how Jesus might have gained wisdom sufficient to challenge the scholars of His day at the age of twelve. This should not be surprising to us, because in Jesus' day, Scriptures were read in Synagogues throughout the Jewish communities in Israel, so all people had a chance to get to know God's Word from hearing it spoken. This, together with the family traditions of the two parents chosen by God for His Son, Mary and Joseph, seem to have given the young Jesus a start in understanding the things of God; though we should not be surprised that One born of the holy Spirit was alive to spiritual things from the earliest of days. Perhaps Jesus' recollection of His own childhood was responsible for His adamant teaching that people must become like 'little children' in order to enter the Kingdom (Matt 18:3, 19:14).

### ***The conflict between Jesus and His parents (2:46-50)***

The next issue with which people have struggled is the notion that Jesus had an argument with His parents over His behaviour. Surely, He had stayed out of their reach and beyond their discipline for longer than was acceptable. We will naturally feel this after reading Luke account of the way in which Mary and Joseph lost track of Jesus over a period of more than a day. A group of people from a village or neighbourhood would usually travel together, with the men some way behind the women and children. A young lad of twelve was exactly of an age to create uncertainty about whether he should be with the one group or the other, and

Luke's story about confusion and assumption is understandable. We cannot tell, of course, but as we read the story, we will naturally wonder exactly what levels of guilt or anger were felt by Mary and Joseph at what had happened.

When Mary eventually put the question to Jesus '*why have you treated us like this*' (2:48), however, we should be careful not to presume what tenor of voice was used, for we cannot tell. This could be severe chastisement, or it could be mild rebuke, we do not know. Jesus' level headed reply, which was perplexing to Mary (and presumably Joseph), indicates that however Mary spoke to Him, Jesus would not be swayed from the truth. At an age where He was supposed to be learning to behave as an adult, we should surely expect Him to respond with a reasoned argument. He was a child no more and did not need to answer to Mary and Joseph's concern for Him as if for a little child. His excuse was rational, if perplexing.

We must cut through the tendency to over-analyse the family dynamics of the situation, and accept that as far as this passage is concerned, the time had come for Jesus to begin to break away from the dominant influence of His earthly parents and begin to pay attention to the will of His heavenly Father. He had heard His voice in the Temple, urging Him to stay and engage with the scholars, and His parents would have to deal with the consequences. Jesus was not acting in rebellion; for just as any young person finds himself or herself by moving away from parents, Jesus was beginning to explore Himself and the truth of His own calling. In reading Luke's Gospel, we will find that in His ministry, Jesus was rarely able to hold together His family and His work. His work had to come first, and this story is the first evidence of this.

### ***Jesus' obedience and favour with God (2:51,52)***

In all this, Jesus had followed the call of His heavenly Father. There are many theories about what happened to Joseph from this point in the story of Jesus onwards, for we do not hear of him again. Unfortunately, we have no more to guide us than church tradition from early times, which says that Joseph died while Jesus was young, perhaps in his late teens. We can say, however, that from this point onwards, Jesus needed His heavenly Father more than His earthly Father, and this is part of the point of this story.

Luke records the phrase 'His mother treasured all these things in her heart' (2:51) not merely to repeat what she said in 2:19, but to confirm that even these events, though humanly difficult, were not enough to put a stop to Mary's inner faith in the destiny of her child, Jesus. She continued to believe. The last verse of our passage confirms the major theme that Jesus found favour not just with people, but now with His heavenly Father; He found '*favour with God*' (2:52).

## Application

This story of Jesus has caused many people to stop and think. Was Jesus unfaithful to His parents? Why did Jesus create havoc, and did He deceive Mary and Joseph? On the one hand, we can see in this story something of the same issues dealt with by parents and children for centuries. There comes a point in time when the child sees things differently and acts upon this, as Jesus did here (whether or not we agree that He had a good reason to stay). One thing we can take from this story is that human parenting will involve dealing with this, and Mary's example is telling. She was clearly hurt, but she refused to succumb to the paranoia of acting like one rejected; she maintained her faith in her son. This may well have been hard for Mary, but she held firm in faith.

Secondly, if we look at Jesus, we should see the natural development of God's Son, growing in this world and limited by it, yet still the Son of the Father. It is wonderful to see that Jesus was able to dispute with the scholars, but Luke does not tell us that He did this with supernatural knowledge, and we should be careful not to assume this. Jesus was yet to be anointed to ministry. Is there here a hint of a suggestion that the things of God can be learned from hearing the Word of God and observing the world? This, of course, is a radical proposition, but it tallies with Christian faith and its growth over the centuries. Just as Jesus rose above the intellect of the scholars of His day with little more (in a worldly sense) than the Word and the world, so have countless men and women of faith been used mightily by God with no more than this and the working of God's Spirit. The knowledge of scholars is essential to the church, and Jesus respected this, at least at this point in His life. However, scholars are the servants of the church, not its masters.

At this early point in His life, Jesus gave an example for all young people who seek to be godly, to '*grow in wisdom and in stature, in favour with God and with other people*' (2:52)

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## Discipleship

### **Questions** *(for use in groups)*

1. What can we learn about the character of Jesus from this passage, and how much does the life of a teenager tell us about the adult (think of yourself)?
2. Discuss how and why Jesus amazed the people with whom He spoke in the Temple? What could a child teach an experienced scholar?
3. Compare this story about Jesus and 'His Father's House' and the story of the cleansing of the Temple in Luke 19:41-48.

### **Topics covered by this text**

- *The feast of the Passover*
- *The growth of Jesus*
- *Conflict between Jesus and His parents*

### **Personal comments by author**

*Jesus had a unique relationship with the Father, and this is a major feature of the passage we have read today. However, what Jesus enjoyed is now a privilege we may enjoy. As Jesus' disciples, we can look to Him for an example of how we can grow in faith, and the first foundation is consciousness of the Father's presence and touch in every area of our lives. There is something about this touch of God that is rarely found by searching; it is something which is given, and it is part of our lives whether we like it or not, and whatever happens to us.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Think back on your own feelings about spiritual things when you were a young teenager. Did anyone help you or enable you to deal with your thoughts and feelings apart from your 'peers'? If you recall difficult things, then pray that they will be redeemed. If you recall good and happy events, pray that God will continue to use them for good in your life.*
- *Make a resolve to try and understand and 'keep with' some of the young people growing up in your midst at church.*

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## Final Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, open up our lives to the possibilities of Your grace. May we value the disciplines of our faith and also the freedom of Your Spirit; both of which are essential to the life of faith we seek to live. We ask You to lead us kindly, and show us how to live graciously. Praise You Lord Jesus Christ: AMEN

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