

Growing Up Right

Luke 2:52

I. Introduction

A. Many of our children are returning to their school routine this week and it got me thinking about this popular saying, “Children are sponges.” Now, at times it might appear they are more like couch potatoes, but the reality is that children soak up information at an amazing rate. In fact, their ability to soak up information is essential to their life. Children are not born knowing everything...that doesn’t happen until they become teenagers, when, at least, they think they know everything. A child’s ability to soak up information is vital to developing the values and skills they need to live their lives.

1. Children are sponges. As parents our desire is to fill our little sponges up with all kinds of good things that will help them live a godly and useful life.
2. This is what Joseph and Mary did for the young child Jesus. One of the first places they took their baby was to the Temple (Luke 2:22). Then the Bible says His *“parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover”* (Luke 2:41). Joseph put his “closed for business” sign on the carpenter’s shop and they were gone for weeks...filling themselves and their Son with the values and skills to live a godly life.

B. Have you ever wondered what Jesus was like at eight years old, twelve, or as a teenager? Not a lot is recorded about this time in Jesus’ life. But there are a few summary statements that show us that Jesus was busy soaking up the kind of information and skills that would help Him serve God’s purposes in this world. That is every parent’s dream! —That their children could serve the purposes of God in their generation. Jesus is a perfect example of how to do that. Jesus is a model of how to grow up right. The elements of His growth are found in some key summary statements.

1. One statement is found in Luke 2:40 that describes what Jesus was doing from infancy to about 12 years of age. And it says,

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

Jesus was busying growing physically and filling His mind with knowledge and how to apply it wisely in life.

- a. By the time Jesus was twelve He had filled His mind with God’s word and God’s values so much that when they come to Jerusalem for the Passover He walks right past the “Game Stop” and the electronics store and makes a beeline to the Temple. He is there to talk about the Scriptures and listen to others talk about the Scriptures. Everyone who heard him talk was *“amazed at His understanding and his answers.”* This young man was filled with knowledge and wisdom.
- b. Later that week he told his worried parents, *“Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”* (Luke 2:49). At twelve, Jesus realized the most important relationship in His life was with God—His heavenly Father. And that the purpose of His life was to do the work of God...to be about the heavenly Father’s household work.

2. That leads us to a statement which summarizes what Jesus was doing from twelve years old until He bursts on the public scene at around 30 years of age. It is found in Luke 2:52. This is how Jesus grew up right.

Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:52)

There are four areas in which Jesus soaked up all He could. He didn't start pursuing these things at twelve. These were priorities for Him from infancy. But at twelve He kept making progress in these four areas.

- a. Jesus grew mentally (knowledge & morality) – “He increased in wisdom”
 - b. Jesus grew physically – “He increased in stature.”
 - c. Jesus grew spiritually – “He increased in favor with God.”
 - d. Jesus grew socially – “He increased in favor with man.”
3. What a joy it would be if all our little sponges could soak up these things like Jesus did. Imagine how useful they could be to God's purposes in their generation!

C. Let me point out that it wasn't only Jesus who grew up like this.

1. Back in the Old Testament there was a child named Samuel who God used to change Israel forever, and this is what the Bible says about how he grew up, 1 Samuel 2:21

The boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man. (1 Samuel 2:26, see also 2:21)

There is no wonder why Samuel was such a guiding force for Israel—he grew up right.

2. In the New Testament there was a child named John who God used to prepare a nation to listen to Jesus. And this is what the Bible says about how he grew up, Luke 1:80,

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. (Luke 1:80)

There is no wonder why John taught the truth to thousands and brought people to Jesus—he grew up right. There is a consistent message here about the values and skills children need to grow up right.

3. And in addition to that, these things are still essential to living a good and godly life no matter what your age is! If you didn't learn these things when you were young, it is never too late to grow in these essential areas.
4. So, let's think about how Jesus grew up right.

II. Jesus Grew

A. ***Jesus Grew Mentally.*** First, consider how Jesus grew mentally. The verse says, “*Jesus increased in wisdom*” (Luke 2:52). When you read the teachings of Jesus you discover He had a broad knowledge of the world. He understood how the world works... how seeds grow, how vineyards are kept healthy, how fish are caught and sorted, and how weather changes take place. How did Jesus know about all those things? One reason was because He grew in knowledge. He understood how people work... why people fight, why people commit adultery, why people lie, why people worry. How did Jesus know about all those things? One reason was because He grew in knowledge. Understanding how the world works and how people work gave Jesus the tools to teach people about God and help people live for Him.

1. ***Knowledge Helps You Appreciate God.*** One question math students often ask is, “How do all these “x”s and “y”s; “sins” and “cosines” help me in the real world?” The teacher then tries to make an impassioned explanation of how the Pythagorean Theorem is going to be their closest companion in life. Well, I may not use higher level math on a daily basis anymore, but I wouldn’t take anything for my experience with it, because it taught me that God created an amazingly complex yet ordered world; which causes me to reverence Him, respect Him, and submit to Him even more. Growing mentally helps you know God more clearly.
2. ***Knowledge Helps You Understand God’s Word.*** Growing mentally is essential to knowing God’s Word. Knowing language and literature provides us with the tools needed to dig out the treasures of God’s word.
3. ***Knowledge Helps You Provide For Your Needs.*** Growing in knowledge is essential to provide for yourself and help those who are in need (Eph. 4:28).
4. ***Knowledge Is Corrupted When It Becomes An End In Itself.*** As important as all that is, growing mentally can easily go wrong, and it does just that for most people.
 - a. For many, what you know is more important than who you are. Their GPA, SAT, MA, BA, and PhD, is an indication of their self-worth, and the source of their arrogant pride.
 - b. Some parents give their children the clear idea that doing their homework and making the grade is more important than knowing God and serving His purposes. At that point the pursuit of knowledge has just steered into dangerous territory where God is not king!
 - c. You see, growing in knowledge is not an end, it is a means. It is a means to know and serve God. Jesus used His knowledge about the world and people to help them walk with God. We need to ask ourselves, “How does knowing this help me know God and serve His purposes?” If there is not a good answer to that, we’re just wasting our time.
5. ***Knowledge Is Corrupted By False Teaching.*** Knowledge can also be corrupted by false teaching.
 - a. Learning about how the world works is great, but people will also tell you that there is no God, the world was not created, and if it was, it was certainly not created like Genesis 1 teaches.
 - b. Learning about how the body works is important, but people will tell you it’s perfectly natural for the body to be used in sexual immorality.

- c. It's wonderful to learn about *how people work together* (psychology and sociology), but people will tell you that all beliefs and lifestyles are equally acceptable.
 - 6. Growing in knowledge is such a wonderful thing when it helps us know God better and serve Him more effectively. But when serving the Lord is not the purpose of our learning, it can go wrong.
- B. **Jesus Grew Physically.** Next, we find that Jesus also grew physically. Verse 52, "*Jesus increased in ... stature.*" This has to do with His physical condition. I don't know if Jesus lifted weights or ran marathons, but Holy Spirit felt it was important to include a note about Jesus' physical condition, and why not? The body is the vessel through which we serve God, why would we not want it to be in the best condition possible.
- 1. Jesus was physically capable of walking great distances, teaching for long periods of time, and being without food, and suffering. All those things would be impossible without being in good health.
 - 2. I am concerned that some of our ability to serve the Lord is diminished because we abuse our bodies. We say, "I can't come or do that because...I'm too tired," when in reality we are not eating right, sleeping right, and exercising, so we miss out on serving the Lord.
 - 3. We want our children to be physically healthy so we make sure they eat right, get enough sleep, and get involved in programs that will strengthen their bodies.
 - 4. However, like knowledge, there is a danger here. We live in a world that has made health an obsession and the body an idol. There is a reason our sporting arenas look like temples. The health and fitness is a multi-billion dollar industry in this county. Recently an athlete was offered over 260 million dollars to be a spokesman for a fitness company, while nurses get paid 40,000 dollars a year.
 - a. And our children are swept right up into this preoccupation with looks, strength and fitness—and they take our pocketbook right along with them.
 - b. Some parents give their children the clear idea that their sporting event and physical welfare is more important than knowing God and serving His purposes. At that point the pursuit of health has just steered into dangerous territory where God is not king!
 - 5. You might just do a Bible study sometime on what the Bible teaches about physical fitness. You just won't find many verses. The ones many people use, they abuse by ripping them out of context. That's not to say being healthy is wrong. It shows that being healthy is not the goal, it is the means to the goal—and that is serving and glorifying God! This is how Paul put it,

"Train yourself for godliness; ⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." (1 Tim. 4:7-8)

Few things give us more joy than to see these little ones grow up and become strong, but we need to ask ourselves, "Why? What will they use that strength for? What will they use that body for?" Will they use it to feed their selfish pride? Will they use it for sinful pleasures? Will they use it to dominate and control others? Why do we want them strong? Let it be so they can "have a long life in God's service!"

- C. **Jesus Grew Socially.** We also find that Jesus grew socially. The text says, *“Jesus increased in favor with man”* (Luke 2:52). Jesus was a refreshing change from this self-centered world. He cared about others...all kinds of others. He cared about men and the women; the religious leaders and the tax collectors and prostitutes; he cared about the healthy and the sick; the wealthy and the poor. Jesus cared about having healthy social relationships with all kinds of people.
1. We live in a time where children are the focus of attention. Children run the home rather than mom or dad. The children are lavished with gifts, and the jobs children used to do around the house we hire out to someone else to do, so the kids can go have more fun. I am not alone in thinking this has created a very self-centered generation who believe everyone else is there for their benefit!
 2. But then Jesus came along and said, *“I have not come to be served, but to serve and give myself as a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45). And he loved the people who couldn't give him a dime, or make him the most popular person in town. Instead of forming groups and excluding others and making fun of them, Jesus taught, *“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”* (Rom. 12:18). We need to grow in our love and respect and service to all kinds of people.
 3. However, just like the other two, this aspect of growth can go wrong also. Our love for others can quickly become a desire to please others; where our social relationships become more important than our relationship with God.
 - a. Some parents give their children the clear idea that having friends is more important than knowing God and serving His purposes. At that point the pursuit of social relationships has steered into dangerous territory where God is not king!
 - b. That is why our children, and all of us, need to be careful about the friendships we make. Paul said it very clearly, *“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’”* (1 Corinthians 15:33).
 4. Remember that while Jesus did grow in favor with people, it didn't stay that way. For a while they loved the way He cared for them. They loved His good character. But after a while the truth He taught and the holy way He lived made them mad, and they threw Him out and crucified Him.
 5. Having good friends and loving and serving others is great, but again we must ask, “Why?” Why do we want to have friends? Is it so we will feel good about ourselves? Is it so we will be popular? Or, is it so we can show them God's love and teach them God's truth, so we can all honor God together?
- D. **Jesus Grew In Favor With God.** Growing in knowledge is great, but there is also the danger of making it an idol. Growing in our physical health is great, but there is also the danger of making our body an idol. Growing in our relationships with others is great, but there is always the danger of putting them before God. However, there is one thing we can grow in, and we can grow in without ever running into a problem. We can grow in our relationship with God. That's what Jesus did. He *“Increased in favor with God”* (Luke 2:52). Does that mean that God didn't care much for Jesus, but after a while he began to grow on Him? No! From Jesus' birth God sent angels to sing praises. So, what does it mean that Jesus increased in favor with God?

1. I can understand this in the other relationships I have in life. For example, when my children were born I could not have loved them any more than I did in that moment. But, as they began to grow and learn what was good and they began to do it I have this little recording in my mind that says, “That’s my boy. That’s my girl.” And now I have many more reasons to love them. At first I loved them for who they were, now I increasingly love them for what they’ve become.
2. Now, God loved Jesus at His birth, because He was willing to humble Himself and come in the flesh to save sinful man. But then, Jesus begins to make other obedient choices that make God so proud. Jesus goes out to be baptized by John and the Bible says, *“The heavens were opened ... and a voice came from heaven saying, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased”* (Luke 3:21-22). Jesus went out and began to heal the sick, preach the gospel and go to the cross for sinful people who didn’t deserved to be saved, and God raised Him from the dead saying, *“You are my Son!”* (Psalm 2:7), and raised Him to His right hand.
3. One thing you children need to always remember is that God loves you. He deeply loves you, even when you do what’s wrong; God deeply loves you (Rom. 5:6-8). But the greatest thing you can do in life is to increase in His favor.
 - a. Do those things that are good. Be kind to everyone, even those who hurt you. Help those who are weak. Show your friends what it means to live for God. Tell them about Jesus and salvation.
 - b. Do those things that are right. Have the courage to stand by the truth of the Bible. Show your friends that Jesus is first in your life, even when it causes you to do something different. Resist the temptations to act wrong and talk wrong.
 - c. Every time you avoid those wrong thoughts and actions, God is in heaven saying, “That’s my Child!” And every time you do something good and say something right and have the courage to stand for truth, God is up in heaven saying, “That’s my Child!”
4. Now, growing in knowledge, strength, and friendships are all great things to do, but growing in your ability to give God a reason to say, “That’s my Child!” is something that never has a down side. It’s always right and good.
 - a. So, this year when you grow in knowledge ask yourself “Why?” and let the answer be, “I want to make God smile.”
 - b. When you grow physically this year ask yourself “Why?” and let the answer be, “I want to make God smile.”
 - c. When you make new friends and deepen the friendships you have ask yourself, “Why?” and let the answer be, “I want to make God smile.”
 - d. Growing in favor with God is the main goal that makes all the other aspects of growing up, right.

I. Get Started

- A. Abraham Lincoln once said, “*If I had six hours to chop down a tree, I’d spend the first hour sharpening the ax.*” A lot of our children don’t get to where they need to go in life because they don’t make the right preparations. Oh, they may get a good job and have a bit of fun along the way, but the road will eventually run out.
- B. But, Jesus modeled a different way of preparing for life. It was a life where the *knowledge* learned was to honor His Father. It was a life where the *strength* of His body was to honor His Father. It was a life where His *friendships* were for the purpose of honoring His Father. It was a life whose purpose was to make His Father smile. And it was a life that lead to the Father’s side for eternity! That’s growing up right.
- C. The good news is no matter how old you are you can start living that kind of life. You can be born again to live a new life. Today you can start that new life by confessing your faith in Jesus, repenting of your sins and being baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. You can arise out of the waters of baptism sinless and free to live a new life. Come.