



Luke 2:41-42
Jesus 101: Discovering the Depth of Jesus
Wisdom, Stature, and Favor

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A couple years ago I went to a Christmas party at a friend's house a few minutes south of downtown Bellevue in the Enatai neighborhood. There were five or six couples there who all know each other to varying degrees, and most of them brought their kids along, too. Because of our family schedule I was there with two of my kids, Blake was in downtown Bellevue at an event he had, and Gwen was with Brooke in Seattle. My schedule for the evening was to drop Blake off, go to this Christmas party in Bellevue with the Elliott and Hailey, and at about 7:45 go get Blake in Bellevue when he was ready, then head on home, where Gwen and Brooke would meet us a bit later.

I arrived with the kids at, I don't know...maybe 6:00 or so. It was a great evening: the home of the family who hosted was a large two-story home that the husband had significantly remodeled over the previous year or more, there were like 10 kids there, with lots of toys and game and video games to play. Some of the kids knew each other, others didn't, and they all hit it off really well, playing downstairs and having a great time while the rest of us adults hung out upstairs. At about 7:40 Hailey came upstairs and I told her to get her shoes on because we'd be leaving in a few minutes. About 5 minutes later she and I said our goodbyes to everyone and we headed out the door for the 10-minute drive to get Blake from his event, at which point we would then head home. About three minutes into the drive, my cell phone rang. It was one of my friends who was there at the Christmas Party.

"Hey!" I said as I answered the phone. "You missed me so much you had to call already?" "Not really" he said. "I'm just calling to let you know that you left Elliott here at the house."

I nearly had a heart attack right then.

I think he had me on speakerphone because after I said, "Oh, crud!" all I could hear was everyone laughing. I tried to recover and said I had actually left him there on purpose because he was having so much fun...I figured I'd come back and get him after I got Blake...but they knew I was lying – my

initial response tipped my hand.

I had forgotten my second grade son. After getting Blake, we drove back and I sheepishly went inside the house and got Elliott. I got pretty razzed by the folks, and deservedly so.

Hopefully you've never done anything like that, but if you have, you're in good company. Not because I've done it, but because Jesus' parents did it. Jesus got left behind by Mary and Joseph. And not at a friend's house with people who knew him, but they left him behind in Jerusalem, the largest city in Israel, after the Passover Festival, the biggest of the year every year for the previous 1300 years or so.

[Luke 2:41-52.](#)

So people from all over Israel would come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, commemorating when their ancestors had fled Egypt and were graciously saved by God in their journey to the Promised Land. The population of Jerusalem would swell for this week-long event from *around* 80,000 to several hundred thousand. And at the end of the week, they walked out of town in a stream of people, believing Jesus was with them amongst all the friends and relatives. Now, you have to understand that: **There was a strong sense of “it takes a village to raise a child.”** It's a theology of the “covenant community” – that they covenant with one another in community as God's people and look out for each other. We still have this theology in our churches today. For instance, when we baptize a child today, or have a baby dedication, the congregation vows to help raise up the child and nurture him or her in their faith. There's this sense of us all covenanting together to help raise up these children; and it's in our denominational name, also...and we can trace the roots of that right back to Jesus' day and beyond.

So they're walking along with what was likely a large group of people, maybe almost a non-stop stream of people, even...and after a day of walking – probably literally when they stopped to set up camp for the night – they realized Jesus was left behind.

When they realized they had forgotten Jesus, they did what any parent would do: they went back to look for him. **Looking for Jesus is always a good thing to do when we realize we've left Jesus.** We can always go back to him, and he welcomes us back, whether we've been journeying through life without him for a day or a decade or longer.

Luke tells us that after they walked for a day back to Jerusalem and then searched for him for 3 more days in the city, they finally found him in the Temple, having a theological discussion with some of the religious teachers. Isn't this where you'd expect to find a 12 year old boy, and what you'd expect to find him doing? Ok...Maybe not. We'd probably expect them in front of a tv or a computer or whatever the equivalent time-killing thing to do was in their day.

So: Jesus was engaged with some of the Jewish teachers in a theological discussion. Actually, Luke doesn't *explicitly* tell us what they were talking about. We know they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers. It could be they were discussing philosophical differences about football. Should you have a run-first offense, or pass-first offense? Which defense is better: 3-4 or 4-3? Zone or man-to-man? Packers or Seahawks? Not that there's a debate on the last one, of course.

We do get some clues that they probably were *not* talking sports or politics or any of the day's news. For instance, Jesus was sitting amongst "the teachers," Luke says in verse 46. These teachers are not local school teachers, or teachers of a sport. These are religious teachers, and they're gathered in a courtyard of the Jewish temple, the center of the Jewish faith. They were talking matters of the Jewish faith, and particularly about Scripture.

And many people today, when they think of this passage, think of a scene similar to what was famously painted in 1881 by the German artist, Heinrich Hoffman¹: Whether you're familiar with this painting or not, this is kind of what we



envision, though hopefully we can picture them looking more Israelite and less German. 😊 But in this painting, you get the idea that Jesus is doing the talking and the teaching as he points to the Scriptures, and everyone seems to be hanging on his every word, considering what he's saying, focused completely on him. And it is true that in verse 47, Luke writes, "Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers." This painting captures that verse, and I think it's how many of us, if we're at least a little familiar with this passage, tend to think of it.

But Luke is clear in verse 46 that Jesus wasn't the only one with the answers. He writes that when Jesus' parents found him he was in the temple courts, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions." Jesus was clearly *not* doing all the talking and teaching here. He was asking questions and listening to them as well. Really, the picture that Luke paints is a back and forth dialog. It's a respectful conversation between these Jewish religious teachers, and Jesus, a 12 year old boy who is clearly a little more theologically adept than most 5th graders are. In fact, it occurs to me that what we have here is the first episode of "Are You Smarter Than A 5th Grader?" Except, of course, Jesus is no ordinary 12-year-old boy. So there's this dialog here that seems to be full of reciprocity, and is respectful and mutually engaging, because they're all asking and answering questions. Jesus asked questions and listened, and he had his own answers and demonstrated his own understanding.

And so it's not hard to draw a connection between this mutually-enriching conversation and verse 52 which says, "**And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and people**" (Luke 2:52). For instance, it's clear that Jesus' stature grew right here in these verses – Luke tells us that all who heard him were amazed. If cell phones and social media were around then, someone would have videoed this conversation and it would have gone viral. Comments under the video would be things like: "Look at the depth of this kid's Scriptural understanding!" "Listen to his insight!" "He's asking questions I've never even considered." #12yearoldboywonder. His stature definitely grew by leaps and bounds here.

And as he interacted with the teachers of the law, as he listened to them,

undoubtedly he grew in wisdom as well. How could he not, as they gave him space to ask questions and they shared what they knew about the Scriptures. I've always been fascinated by this passage and wondered what was going on inside of Jesus, because He's God come to us in the flesh, and he inspired the authors of Scripture...he created all things seen and unseen along with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. In His divinity, He knows everything. So was Jesus just sort of playing along with these guys? Was he asking questions that he actually knew the answers to? Well, while the Bible tells us that while Jesus is divine, he's also fully human. In fact, Paul writes in Philippians 2:5-7:

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; [like in the temple with the teachers]

7 rather, he made himself nothing ["keno-o" literally: "emptied himself"]

by taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness (Philippians 2:5-7).

So Jesus was interacting with these teachers genuinely. He listened to them openly...and undoubtedly he did likewise with other people throughout his growing up years, and he grew in wisdom.

Lastly, **Jesus grew in favor with God and with people.** Jesus strikes the balance perfectly, which it is such a tough thing for us to do. In an effort to grow in favor with God, it's easy to fall out of favor with people. God's ways are not our ways, and society is not receptive to the ways of God. And we Christians have not always helped our cause. We have not collectively been very Christ-like an awful lot of the time.

And if we go the other route and seek to gain the favor of people, it's tough to maintain the favor of God. This doesn't mean God doesn't love us and doesn't welcome us back into relationship with Him, but too often we fall short of God's glory and righteousness if our aim is to gain the favor of humankind.

Jesus struck the right balance: He loved God and loved people (Matthew 22:37-38, the Greatest Commandments). The result is he had favor with both God and people. Perhaps this is proof of his Divinity – because he accomplished what we never can do. He loved people where they were, he engaged with them like he did there in the temple, he cared for them, he attended parties, changed water into wine, spoke to huge crowds that would feed the ego of any normal human being...he had huge favor with people and he did all of this in a God-honoring way that brought him favor with God. He lived the perfectly righteous life, completely in step with His Heavenly Father, as we looked at a few weeks ago. When the Bible says that we are to be Christ-like, this is really at the heart of it. We're called to live in a way that cultivates our relationship with God – that reflects Biblical values and gains his favor – and we're called to live in a way that cultivates our relationships with people – that gains their favor.

Verse 52 is describing Jesus, but as we mature in faith and become more like Jesus, it means it describes us as well. **So we need the favor of God and the favor of people, if we're going to live as vibrant and flourishing Christians, and as a vibrant and flourishing Church.** Without God's favor, we have nothing to offer. Without favor of people we have no influence in the community. And Jesus models this for us throughout his life, including right here as he engages the religious teachers in a mutually respectful manner, and then continued to grow in the wisdom and stature and favor.

So, a question for us all to consider (and I ask this of myself as well): **How are you doing in becoming more Christ-like: growing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people?** Are we treating people with dignity and respect and giving space for who they are, with their questions, their answers, their talents and gifts and more? Jesus models for us, at the age of 12, how to grow in wisdom, stature, and favor. I hope and pray that we are becoming more like Jesus in these things. And if we aren't...if we have dropped the ball...if we've even completely left Jesus behind and tried to navigate the path of life on our own – like Joseph and Mary forgetting to bring Jesus with them – his grace and love are sufficient. He welcomes us back so that we might keep growing in Him, and as He created us to be. So, may we each be growing in wisdom, stature and favor, and give space for

others to do the same. As we do this, we will become more Christ-like in who we are, loving God and loving our neighbor. And the result will be, just like in this passage, that all those around will be amazed – not at us, but amazed at Jesus.

ⁱ <http://www.heinrichhofmann.net/jesus-in-the-temple-1881.html>