

Growing in Wisdom, Stature, and Favor with God and Man

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Date: 29 December 2024

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

I'm Denise Yon. I'm part of the San Francisco Community Group, as well as Women Reading Women. Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, verses 39 to 52, as printed in your liturgy.

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

And the child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him. Every year, Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.

[1 : 07] When he was 12 years old, he went up to the festival according to the custom. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.

Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

After three days, they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

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. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

[2 : 08] But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ. Thank you, Denise. Merry Christmas, everyone. Let's go to the Lord in prayer as we open up his word. Father, we want to hear from you.

We want to remember your son. We want to see him. We want to behold him high and lifted up.

Even as the 12-year-old boy that you have revealed himself to be to us in this passage, would we behold in him the son of God, slain for the sins of the world.

All glory be to Christ, we pray in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. All right. So I'm excited to open up this passage with you today because it's a super intriguing passage.

It's a super intriguing episode in Jesus' life. It's literally the only account, right, about him in the whole Bible where he's not either a helpless baby or a grown man.

[3 : 16] What you just heard Denise read is all we get in the whole Bible, just 12 verses, about Jesus between infancy and the beginning of his ministry at age 30. 12 verses about 12-year-old Jesus.

Think about that. 12-year-old Jesus. He's not a baby anymore. He's 12. He's able to converse. He's able to run around with his friends without parental supervision all the time. He's clearly able to make some decisions on his own independently from his parents, but he's also still not a grown

man either, right?

In Jewish society, you were seen as an adult at the age 13. So he had one more year to go. He hasn't begun his ministry. He's not a carpenter yet. He's still got almost 20 more years to grow up into the 30-year-old Jesus that we're all mostly familiar with.

So again, this is a super unique window into the life of Jesus compared to everything else we read about him in the rest of the Scriptures. And so the question we should be asking as we examine this super unique episode is, why is this story included here in Luke's Gospel?

This little one-off story about 12-year-old Jesus. And like, why aren't there other stories about Jesus from this, you know, this pretty long formative chapter in Jesus' life?

[4 : 28] Like, from infancy all the way to adulthood, that's a long time to not know what happened in this guy's life. And this is all we get. Why don't we have stories about, you know, potty training Jesus as a toddler?

Or adventurous adolescent Jesus? Or teenage boy Jesus going through puberty? Or maybe Jesus as a 20-year-old young apprentice, carpenter's apprentice?

Why just this tiny little snippet, this really kind of unremarkable story about a boy staying behind at the temple and worrying his parents? You know, in ancient Greco-Roman literature, man, if you were going to tell the story, the story of your greatest hero of all time, you'd most definitely tell the stories of their childhood and of their youth.

Think of Hercules, right? Who was supposed to be known for what? His strength. Greek mythology is full of stories about his strength, even from childhood. This is a guy who killed a lion with his bare hands, right?

Even as a baby, when two snakes were sent into his cradle to strangle him, he strangled those snakes, right? And then as a youth, when he was reprimanded by his music teacher, he didn't know his own strength and he whacked his music teacher with his lyre and killed him, all right?

[5 : 35] All stories about his strength. It was quite typical for ancient texts to tell such tales about their heroes in their youth, to highlight these heroes' unique abilities and to show how special they were even from a super young age.

But what we find here in Luke's gospel, it's quite different, right? Quite different from all these mythical, fanciful tales. Really, the only accounts you can find about Jesus that resemble such ancient Greco-Roman hero myths are outside of the scriptures.

We call these the apocryphal texts, these texts that are not inspired by God, these texts that have often very shaky historical reliability, and texts that often read way more like myth and legend than like history.

For example, there's this text called the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. I just read it this past week. It was written much later than our scriptures. All of our scriptures were written within the lifetime of the apostles, but the Infancy Gospel of Thomas was written 200 years later.

And it's almost like it was written to fill in the blanks that scripture left behind, blanks like, yeah, what was five-year-old Jesus like? Well, according to the Infancy Gospel, Jesus was this little magical boy who couldn't submit to anyone because he was way more powerful, way smarter, way wiser than everyone else, and he both dazzled his community, and he struck the fear of God into his community because of all his powers.

[6 : 57] Like, according to the Infancy Gospel, it says that one little boy, you know, Jesus was playing as a five-year-old with some water in a brook, and he was gathering some pools with the water, and it says that another little boy came and he messed up the pool.

And Jesus said, you shall wither like a tree. And that little boy died, all right? Another story goes, like, there's another little boy, he's running and he actually bumps into Jesus, and Jesus says, what does he say?

What does he say? You shall not finish your course, is what Jesus says. And that boy also dies, okay? On some other occasions, Jesus is, you know, he's constantly outsmarting his teachers, all these guys who are trying to disciple him.

He's constantly embarrassing his teachers, and one teacher gets so frustrated with Jesus, he hits Jesus on the head because he feels disrespected by this little smarty pants, all right? And then Jesus curses his teacher, and his teacher falls flat on his face, and he faints, all right?

And people are terrified at this little five-year-old Jesus in this narrative. And then one day, this is probably my favorite story in this account, Jesus and another boy, they're playing on a roof, all right?

[8 : 05] They're playing on a roof, and then the boy that Jesus is playing with, he falls off the roof and dies. And people are quick to blame Jesus. Of course, that Jesus, that troublemaker, throwing this kid off the roof, but Jesus is like, no, I didn't throw him off the roof.

And you know what Jesus does in this story? He leaps down from the roof, right? To the boy who just died from falling from that same height, he leaps down there, and this is how he brings the boy back to life.

He says, he yells out loud, Zeno, arise and tell me, did I throw you off the roof? Does that sound like Jesus to you?

Does that sound like a story inspired by the Holy Spirit? A few days later, there's a man who accidentally cuts his foot with an axe, and he starts to bleed out. He's about to die. And Jesus is depicted like this Marvel superhero.

He goes and he sees this panicked crowd. He rushes through. He forcefully pushes himself through the crowds. He puts his hand on the foot. He heals it. He saves this guy's life. And then like a gangster, five-year-old Jesus says to this man, arise now, cut the wood, and remember me.

[9 : 12] This is the infancy gospel of Thomas. Sounds more like it's written by Will Ferrell than the Holy Spirit. It's hilarious, right? Some pretty wild stuff in this infancy gospel.

And you can totally tell how artificial it is, right? And that there's a super clear agenda behind all these childhood Jesus stories. They're trying to establish his power, right? His authority and his uniqueness.

And you know, it's not untrue that Jesus, even as a baby, he did have all the power and all the authority. And he was the most unique, the most special child in all of history. But again, the gospel accounts, particularly our passage today, are nothing like these ancient Greco-Roman stories of heroes in their youth.

Why? Why? What is Luke trying to communicate to us in this account of Jesus' youth, if not the power and the authority that existed within this special boy from a young age?

Well, we've said this many times before, but you know, Matthew's gospel likes to emphasize Jesus as the promised Messiah. And Mark's gospel emphasizes Jesus as the servant king. John's gospel emphasizes Jesus as the divine son of God.

[10 : 17] But Luke's gospel, Luke, while agreeing with all the other accounts, Luke is keen to emphasize Jesus as a human. Jesus as someone who is like us in every way, yet without sin.

And that's what comes through here in our text, in this unique window into the life of 12-year-old Jesus between infancy and adulthood. Luke is showing us not primarily the divine power of Christ, but the humanity of Christ.

And this is important because if we only understand Christ as the divine son of God, then we'll never be able to relate to him. We'll never be able to believe that he gets us.

And we'll tend to see his way of life as unattainable, not really for us to humanly imitate or pursue. We'll only see him as the truth to believe in our heads, the eternal life to live and enjoy later, and the way to escape from the fires of hell.

But if we understand that Jesus is also fully human, then we will see him not just as a ticket to heaven or as some unrelatable, unapproachable, far-off, detached God-hero that we cannot and need not imitate.

[11 : 24] If we see him for who he really is, not just fully God, but also fully human, then we will see him as the way to always walk, the truth to trust today, and the life to live in every second of our existence.

When we understand the humanity of Jesus Christ, we will see him not only as God, our maker and redeemer, but also as, at the same time, Jesus has the best way to be human.

That is what Luke is trying to communicate to us in the story of 12-year-old Jesus, the picture of the best way to be human. So if I could put the whole point of this text into one sentence, it'd be this, and these are our three points.

It's, even Jesus grew, and not by accident, with God and men. Even Jesus grew, and not by accident, with God and men. Okay, those are our three points.

So first, even Jesus grew. So picking up where we left off last week, baby Jesus has just been to the temple to be presented to the Lord by his parents. And then verse 39 says, his parents then headed back home with him up north to their hometown of Nazareth in Galilee.

[12:27] And verse 40 says, verse 40 pretty much covers the next 12 years of his life, and it says, and the child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Now think about that for a second. This eternal Son of God taking on flesh and humanity, and it says, the eternal Son of God grew.

The I am became. He subjected himself to a state of becoming. Again, Jesus was fully human. He was born in weakness, and he became strong.

He was born with the wisdom and the knowledge of an infant, and then he became filled with wisdom as he grew. This means there's a real point in his life in which he could not speak, he could not understand, he could not feed himself.

He had to learn those things, how to speak, how to read, how to eat, how to bathe himself, how to wipe himself, how to help out around the house, how to follow his parents' way of life, how to observe the Torah, right? How to follow the law of Moses, how to even get to Jerusalem once a year with his family.

[13:28] He had to learn all this and so much more. All the things that we take for granted about him, he had to grow up and learn and develop just like the rest of us do as humans. Like, you know that feeling that many of us who are parents, especially first-time parents have had, I remember it well, just gazing at my firstborn, newborn, Cammie, right?

And thinking to myself, I can't imagine how this little girl is going to somehow start crawling and then walking and then running and then she's going to be potty trained somehow. She's going to get a job maybe one day, have children.

This is wild to me, right? It's wild. But this is probably what Mary and Joseph had. These are probably the same feelings that Mary and Joseph had as well about their firstborn, Jesus, who like the rest of us, had to grow up.

And probably not rapidly like some magical prodigy, but probably in a very human amount of time, at a very human pace. And this is not to say there wasn't anything special about Jesus.

He clearly had a knack for the Word of God, depth of insight, hunger for God and for the things of God. But even as a religious student, even as a faithful Jewish follower of Yahweh, He was still subject to the process of inquiry and growth and understanding and learning.

[14:41] And that's why in verse 46 it says, He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Twelve-year-old Jesus here is showing us that He, like all the rest of us, was subject to diligent study and to discovery and to all the practices of spiritual formation that would shape Him into the person He would only eventually become.

As a 12-year-old, yes, He was the Son of God. Yes, He was without sin. And yes, He did have wisdom and understanding about the Scriptures beyond His years. But He also still hadn't arrived. He was being formed.

He was being shaped. He had to grow. As a human, He wasn't born just, you know, having the Torah memorized, understanding all the depths of the Word of God, apart from decades of teaching and dialogue and reflection and meditation and prayer in His community of faith, the Son of God was subjected to the long process of growing as a human being and as a worshiper of Yahweh.

As it says in verse 52, He grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man for the next 18 years of His life after this text. See, just like all the rest of us, Jesus knew Psalm 1.

He knew that blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord and on that law He meditates day and night. Jesus, like all of us, He had to grow as a tree in order to bear fruit.

[16:02] In season, He had to grow in His understanding of God and God's heart and God's mind and in His understanding of the human heart and the human mind in order to bear fruit and flourish. And at this point in Luke chapter 2, you know, the season for the juiciest fruit in His life, it hadn't even yet arrived.

So in the meantime, He waited. And He committed Himself to growth. And very importantly, He committed Himself to dependence upon God for that growth, like a tree planted by streams of water.

Verse 40 says, The grace of God was on Him, indicating that all of Jesus' growth, He owed not to Himself or to some kind of automatic process because, hey, I'm the Son of God. No, again, like every other human being, Jesus owed all of His growth in strength and in wisdom to the gracious favor of God.

But as a human, He was and had to be absolutely dependent upon God for His growth and development. And I point this out to us that even Jesus grew because I want to encourage you wherever you are in your spiritual journey.

The fact that even Jesus grew teaches us that wherever you are, no, you haven't arrived. And yes, you do have room to grow. But hey, so it is 12-year-old Jesus right here, the Son of God.

[17:17] So don't beat yourself up about it. We like to say it's more about direction than perfection here. Here at Christ Church, we exist to lead you simply into a deeper relationship with Christ. Wherever you are on the spectrum, and trust me, we have people here all over the spectrum.

Some are negative 10s, super skeptical about Jesus. Others are plus ones. They've just taken their first steps as baby Christians. There are others who are sevens. There are others who are eights. Then you have Jonathan, who's over 9,000. So if you're feeling discouraged or like you're behind or you're frustrated by your need to grow at all, why can't we just arrive immediately?

What this little window into the life of 12-year-old Jesus shows us is that even Jesus grew. We're all growing. And it's not so much about where am I on the scale compared to everyone else, but what's my next step to grow as Jesus grew?

And that brings me to my next point. Jesus' growth was not by accident. It was deliberate. There was a plan and a direction set out for him that he and his community had committed to. And I think for a lot of us, it can be easy for us to think of Jesus' growth as just automatic and accidental.

[18:28] Like it just happened because that was the plan, and how could it not happen for the messianic Son of God? And we have a very mechanical, deterministic understanding of Jesus' growth without recognizing that there was a lot of intentionality.

There was a lot of structure and a process and a method that were placed around Jesus to help him grow. Read verse 39. Did you hear that?

It didn't just say Jesus grew because that's what was supposed to happen. It says Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the law of the Lord. Excuse me. Jesus' growth had a lot to do with his faithful, pious, Torah-observing parents and the way of life that they committed themselves and their whole family to.

They were just at the temple, right, dedicating him to the Lord according to what was required by the law, and that was their intention for the rest of their lives and for the rest of Jesus' life, to build a purposeful environment of spiritual formation, to set up a principled context in which Jesus would grow.

That's how Jesus grew. The same way we do. The same way our children will grow. Jesus' family was practicing a way prescribed by God himself. A way, a law, predictable patterns, a holy habit, a rule of life with intentionality.

[19:53] Verse 41 says, Every year, every year, Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. Verse 42. When he was 12 years old, they went up to the festival according to the custom.

Did you hear that? Every year and according to the custom. They never missed, rain or shine, whether business was good or bad, no matter how many children they had, no matter how old their children were, no matter how many extracurriculars their family had or how many opportunities were presented to them.

Every year, Jesus' parents made it a point to observe the Passover. Every year. For those first 12 years straight in Jesus' life and probably for years to come, they committed to celebrating with their people God's greatest act of redemption, delivering them out of slavery in Egypt, sparing their firstborns by the blood of a lamb and judging their Egyptian oppressors.

Jesus grew up hearing this redemptive story again and again and again. His parents looked for every kind of opportunity to present to him this redemptive story, the story of what God had done for their people.

He saw it at the table that they would eat at, the roasted lamb, the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, the wine. This was a predictable pattern, a holy habit in the life of Jesus and in the life of his family that formed him into the Passover lamb that he would one day become.

[21:12] And it was a holy habit that he practiced not just individually, but communally. With his family, with the whole company of people, with the whole nation that was gathering in Jerusalem and all the people they traveled with, every year, this was a tight-knit community that looked out for each other, that did life together, a community where relatives and friends watched each other's kids and traveled together and shared the same values and worshipped the same God.

Verse 44 says, Mary and Joseph just assumed he was in their company and they traveled a whole day assuming he was with their relatives and friends. And through these predictable patterns, through these holy habits, and in this whole community that was practicing this way of life that God had commended to them in his law, this way of worshiping and walking with Yahweh together, this is the context in which Jesus grew.

See, it takes more than a desire in our hearts to grow. Jesus didn't just grow because he wanted to grow. It takes a plan. It takes a community. It takes a rule of life.

And it takes accountability. Sure, it starts with desire in our hearts. And we definitely need to be checking our hearts as we engage in these practices so we aren't just performing religious rituals or practicing religious techniques that will help us level up spiritually or make us feel more holy and self-righteous.

But desire by itself, it's not going to get us there. Jesus himself was committed to a concrete list of practices. Practices that God had ordained for him and for his community in the Scriptures.

[22 : 42] And that's what we need as well. That's why we've been focusing on this all fall and winter. And we do this not to force growth into our lives, but there's a posture that our lives can take that makes us more conducive to growth.

Think of it like a boat with a sail. We can either be tossed by the waves here and there, there and here, with no rhyme or reason, ending up wherever the waves may take us, or we can put up our sails.

And the sails won't get us anywhere by themselves, but if we put up our sails, that's how we'll be ready to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit, to be moved in the way God wants us to go.

And maybe this is a word for some of us going into 2025 as we're thinking about our resolutions, our goals, the themes of the new year. And I want to point you to this holy habits list.

You've seen this before. It's in your liturgies. Turn to this page. Practices daily, weekly, monthly, seasonally. I want to point you to these holy habits.

[23 : 47] Let's challenge ourselves. Let's be that garden of trees, right, that are planted by the stream of water. I want to challenge you to take up something on this list that you aren't already currently practicing.

You can circle it right now. Or maybe something that you do practice, but you want to practice with more intentionality and consistency. Maybe for you, it's just showing up consistently on Sundays rather than once a month.

Maybe it's just making sure you hear the good news preached to you once a week and that you taste and see that Jesus is good at this table once a week. Or for others, maybe it's joining a community group, joining a men's covenant group, sharing life and prayer and accountability with others to help each other keep your commitments to Christ.

Maybe it's praying for people in your life who you'd love for them to meet Jesus. Or maybe it's inviting someone to Alpha to have spiritual conversations with us here in this church.

Maybe it's just showing up to Alpha yourself to grow in your ability to have such conversations yourself. The bottom line is, what's your next step? Even Jesus grew.

[24 : 51] Even Jesus grew. And not accidentally. Not without steps. Not without a concrete list of practices. And now finally, what was the fruit and result of Jesus' growth?

Well, it says in verse 52 that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. See, the point of growth isn't growth for growth's sake, for more spiritual badges, to satisfy our self-righteous inclinations.

No, the point of growth is communion with God and our neighbors. So let's go back into the story. Verse 43 says, the festival ends and Mary and Joseph head back home, but Jesus stays behind in Jerusalem without them knowing.

And verse 44 says, they don't go looking for Him until a day into their trip, which some scholars say could have been a 20-mile walk that they just walked a day through. So when verse 45 says they don't find Him, they now have to leave their traveling companions, go back maybe 20 miles to Jerusalem to look for this guy.

And at this point, of course, they're anxious. Jesus is close to, you know, Walter and Jack and Luke's age, and He's a whole journey, a whole day's journey away. It's not just that He's a 12-year-old boy either, but maybe Mary and Joseph were also thinking, oh shoot, have we lost the Messiah?

[26 : 03] Have we lost the Son of God? This isn't just any child. What have we done? Have we failed in parenting the miracle child who all the people and all the angels have spoken great prophetic things about?

How's He going to save the world now if we can't even find Him? Verse 46 says, they eventually find Him after three days. And He was in the temple court sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers, and even His parents. Verse 48, when His parents saw Him, they were astonished. But that's not the only thing they felt. Mary's got something to say to her preteen, right?

Verse 48, His mother said to Him, Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.

And this all sounds like a pretty typical relationship between a 12-year-old and his mother until Jesus replies with a very interesting response in verse 49, why are you searching for me?

[27 : 05] Didn't you know I had to be in my father's house? See, up to this point, while Yahweh worshipers did speak of Yahweh as a father, they never, like, personally addressed Him as my father.

So as verse 50 says, they did not understand what He was saying to them. In Mary's mind, this was her 12-year-old son. In just one year, he'd be 13, he'd be considered as an adult, he'd be responsible to God for himself.

He'd probably also take up the family trade and increase his family responsibilities. So in this 12th year, more than ever, in Mary's mind, Jesus was supposed to shadow and stick to Joseph as closely as possible to prepare for becoming a man, to prepare for becoming a Yahweh worshiper and a carpenter.

This past Passover festival, Joseph probably more meticulously than any other year was probably explaining to Jesus all the elements of the Passover, what the lamb represented, what the bitter herbs represented, the bread and the wine.

And in her mind, she's probably thinking, and here you are, Jesus, just one year away from being responsible for your own faith, and we've been trying hard to teach you how to be a faithful Jewish man, and here you are, disobeying the fifth commandment and not honoring your father and your mother, and you've made us so anxious.

[28 : 21] But see, little does Mary understand that Jesus has been paying attention to everything she and Joseph have been teaching him. And Jesus does know the importance of this year, and he is gearing up for when he turns 13 and when he turns 30.

And he actually has been sticking closely to his father. For while Joseph may indeed have been anxious, Jesus' true father, his ultimate father, his father in heaven, was not one bit anxious.

Actually, God his father was delighting that his son lingered to stay in his house, even if it led to Mary and Joseph's anxiety. This is what Jesus is trying to communicate to his mother.

Mom, I have been with my father. At this early age in Jesus' life, it's become clear to him that there is a relationship in his life that is more important than even the most important relationships in his life.

And it's a relationship with God, his personal father. And nothing will take precedence over this relationship, even if this means disappointing and confusing and scaring and breaking the hearts of the people he most loves and of the people who most love him.

[29 : 26] This is how Jesus was growing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God. He was learning to put God first above all else, even above his most precious family members. And maybe that's another word for us in 2025.

How will you put your relationship with God, your father first over everything, over everyone else in this coming year? Has your relationship with God as your father informed your plans moving forward into 2025?

How will you commit to growing with him in the new year? Now maybe for some of us it sounds so spiritual and unhelpful and irrelevant for day-to-day living. Like, come on! Of course the pastor is going to tell me I need to work on my relationship with God.

But what good is that going to do for me or for the rest of the world? Look here in verse 52. Notice it doesn't just say Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God, but also with men.

Just as soon as Jesus tells his parents that his relationship with his father in heaven is his highest priority, verse 51 also says, Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. [30 : 33] But his mother treasured all these things in her heart and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. See, growth in favor with God does not automatically preclude our growth in favor with human beings.

But actually, the two go together more than many of us might think. Like, sometimes I think some of us think that growing in favor with God means, you know, growing in animosity with our neighbors or growing in awkwardness toward others.

We're just like these spiritual weirdos, these outcasts who are always misunderstood all the time and that that's proof that we are close to God. And we can get so preoccupied with God and spirituality that we just don't really care to understand the world around us.

We don't care to understand the culture around us. We can't relate to others. We have a hard time having empathy or compassion or being sensitive to others. Friends, this is not the way of Jesus. If we are growing in the way of Jesus, we will draw nearer to the heart of God and also nearer to the hearts of our neighbors. We will become more human and not less.

[31 : 38] We will grow in empathy and understanding and compassion and sensitivity and humility and service toward others when we grow in our relationships with God. And sure, people do have sinful hearts and sure, we may be misunderstood by those who are far from God, but know this, when we are right with God, whether our enemies can see it or not, we have everything we need to be right with and to bless all kinds of people, any kind of person.

In a real sense, we never need to choose between pleasing God and pleasing our neighbors because to please God is the best possible thing for our neighbors. So to bring it all back, whether baby Jesus or 12-year-old Jesus or 30-year-old Jesus, Jesus shows us the best way to be human and the way to intentionally grow in favor with God and with man.

And this is good news for the world, that our growth in Christ, that our growth like Christ is for the glory of God and for the good of our neighbors. The good news of the gospel is that even though God had every reason not to pursue the good of sinful humanity, God didn't make us choose between Him and humanity.

No, God doesn't call us to honor Him at our own expense or at the expense of our neighbors. The good news of the gospel is that God has made a way for us to honor Him and humanity. And it's through the selfless, sacrificial way of Jesus.

The beauty of the gospel is that the very way that Jesus won favor with God is by winning favor with man. And the very way that Jesus wins favor with man is by winning favor with God all at His own expense, not by flaunting or asserting His power and dominance like Hercules or a five-year-old Jesus from the infancy gospel.

[33 : 18] Jesus doesn't come as a petulant kindergartner wielding His power to terrorize those who cross Him, but as a 12-year-old boy simply eager to learn and grow in His Father's house and happy to simply obey His godly parents.

It's as simple as that in humility. And from this point on, from this story on, He prepares for 20 more years being formed in this pattern, in this holy habit, in this community.

He's formed and He's on His way to becoming the real Passover Lamb who will one day pour out His own blood on a cross to finally satisfy God's demand for justice, God's desire for mercy, and to save us from ourselves.

This is what 12-year-old Jesus is here to show us today. Even Jesus grew, not by accident, and He grew in favor with God and man. So let's grow in Him this year.

Let's grow like Him, not by accident, and let's grow in favor with God and man. Amen? Let's pray. Lord, would You astound us with the reality that Your Son, the eternal Word, took on flesh and humbled Himself and subjected Himself to the long and often grueling process of growth?

[34 : 36] Oh God, we are an impatient people. We hate to wait. But that's how You've made us. You've made us to grow and to develop as human beings.

You alone are the I Am. And You, in Your humility, have graciously come down to us and You've entered into our state of becoming. And You learned and You grew and You developed and You subjected Yourself to practices in the person of Christ.

Would we do the same? And would we do the same not just to merit more spiritual badges, but would we do the same because we believe that Jesus is the best way to be human? Would we do

the same because we want to grow in favor with God and with man for Your glory, O Lord, and for the good of those around us?

We thank You that this is possible. Jesus has shown us the way. Help us to love Him, trust Him, obey Him, and enjoy Him. In His name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[35 : 54] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.