

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Jessica wiped at her tears again and blinked. She held up the note written in markers, from the six-year-old, Courtlyn. She read it one more time:

"Dear Ante Jessica you are the best ever I love you so much and your body I love your house so much that is not why I love you I love you to the moon and back of course love you back again Don't be blue Your fav Courtlyn"

Jessica had no children, but she had taken to her good friend's child. Jessica had been there when Courtlyn was born. She was at Courtlyn's birthday parties, family functions and church activities.

Jessica routinely took Courtlyn for ice cream, lunch, park dates—just to spend time with her. Yesterday, Courtlyn had spent the night at her "auntie's" house. Jessica now realized she had been feeling a little depressed. She also engaged in a bit of negative self-talk about herself, which was commonplace for her.

When the two went for ice cream, Jessica quipped about her weight as she dove headlong into the brownie-nugget mounds. She had no idea that her six-year-old play niece was taking it all in.

Wow. From the heart of this young girl, the Lord had touched and blessed Jessica's heart. She was so thankful for Courtlyn in her life.

1. Ponder a time when a child's perspective challenged your assumptions about God. What did you learn?

2. What would it require of you to become more child-like in your view of the world?

3. What sorts of fears or anxieties keep us from asking the same questions as a child?

The Search for the Missing Jesus

Luke 2:41–47 KJV

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. 43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. 44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. 45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. 46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. 47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

Luke 2:41–47 NIV

⁴¹ Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover.

⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Regular attendance of the temple for major Jewish festivals is mandated by the Law (Ex. 23:17; Deut. 16:16). But it is commendable that Mary and Joseph make the long trip "every year" (Luke 2:41). They must journey from Nazareth all the way down to Jerusalem—a distance of about seventy miles—to celebrate the Passover. This particular festival came on an important year: "[Jesus] was

twelve years old" (v. 42). That makes Jesus near an age of accountability, when a child is becoming responsible for his or her actions. Thus it is surprising that, when time to return home, "the boy Jesus [stays] behind in Jerusalem" without His parents' knowledge (v. 43).

It is *not* surprising that Mary and Joseph are unaware. They are traveling with a large group of "relatives and friends" (v. 44). In this context, a large family can share the responsibility of looking after one another. At twelve years old, Jesus is capable of taking care of Himself among relatives.

Only after a long day of travel do Mary and Joseph "[begin] looking for him" (v. 44); and subsequently, they have to turn around and go back to Jerusalem. The short description skips over the day of travel back to the city. As with any parent, the anxiety at losing a child might mean a sleepless night. What they knew about Jesus, they did not fully understand (Luke 1:32–33, 35).

Mary and Joseph spend three days searching for Jesus (v. 46). That probably counts one day going away from Jerusalem, one day traveling back, and another whole day looking for Him, in and around the city. Their anxiety no doubt increases with every hour, before they finally find him in the courts of the temple, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (v. 46).

In those days, the temple area contained three courts where the rabbis would come to teach. They would ask questions and debate the meaning of Scripture. It is possible that some of the most famous rabbis were in Jerusalem for Passover and speaking with the young Jesus. Even these learned and respected men are "amazed at his understanding and his answers" (v. 47). As a boy raised in the rural territory of Galilee, Jesus is not expected to have any formal education. But Jesus is no ordinary boy, and this is not the only occasion when he will astonish teachers and crowds (Matt. 7:28; 22:22; Luke 4:22–32).

From Jesus' perspective, He isn't lost at all. He is in discussion and study. Who better to interpret the written

Word of God than the living "Word of God," the Son of God in the flesh (John 1:1-3)?

4. *What happens after Mary and Joseph leave Jerusalem? How could this have happened?*

5. *Why isn't Jesus looking for His parents? What is He doing instead?*

Jesus Responds to His Parents

Luke 2:48-52 KJV

48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

49 And he said unto them, how is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?
50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Luke 2:48-52 NIV

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."

⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

When they see Jesus' ease in talking among the teachers of Israel, Mary and Joseph feel "astonished" (v. 48). They are understandably upset that Jesus has stayed behind. Mary is the first to ask the obvious question, "Why?"

Jesus responds to his parents in a way that is both

compassionate and confident: "Why were you searching for me? . . . Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (v. 49). Although Jesus would later predict the destruction of the temple (Luke 21:5–6), the temple remains the "house" of God (2 Chron. 7:1–5).

Readers of the Gospel should stop and wonder what the word "Father" means when Jesus says it. Scripture speaks of God as a father figure to Israel and as a father to Israel's kings (Ex. 4:22–23; Deut. 1:31; 2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13). But Jesus appears to mean something more. His way of describing God is more personal. And even Mary and Joseph do not understand what He might mean (v. 50).

Nonetheless, Jesus is submissive to His parents and "obedient to them" (Luke 2:51). As the text says, Mary would remember this incident vividly—not only the anxiety of losing her son, but also His curious words to them in the temple. She would remember the faces of the Jewish teachers who were gathered and listening intently to the boy. By treasuring this memory in her heart, Mary's witness would shape the way that Jesus' story is told (Luke 2:51). Later, His mother would come to understand His words in a new way, especially after Jesus ascends to the Father in heaven (Acts 1:14).

The next years of Jesus' life are summarized with a single sentence: "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 3:52). Although Jesus would be known to the world as the son of Joseph (Luke 3:23), one day the whole world would be astonished by Him and the unexpected fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.

6. How do Mary and Joseph react after finding Jesus?

7. How does Jesus react to his parents? What might be the meaning of His words in verse 49?

8. What is your own reaction to Jesus' words and actions in this story? Do you find yourself sympathizing with Mary and Joseph?

A God of Surprises

Consider all the things that Mary and Joseph had experienced! They were visited by angels announcing Jesus' miraculous birth (Luke 1:26–38). They were met by strangers sent to worship a newborn child (Luke 2:15–18). A strange man took the infant in his arms and called the child "[God's] salvation" (Luke 2:30). And then a prophet began telling everyone in the temple courts about their son (Luke 2:36–38). You might think they had all the information they needed to expect the unexpected. But God has a way of surprising His people.

Even as a young man, Jesus seems to have understood that He had a special mission from God. But to Mary and Joseph, He was only a boy who was lost and needed to be found.

Through this narrative, Luke demonstrates several points. First, Jesus has a way with words. Already at this young age, He is enigmatic and wise. His words convey the messages of God, and those who listen and obey are blessed (Luke 11:28). Second, He has a close relationship with the heavenly Father. Like key figures of Israel's past, Jesus speaks of God as His Father. But none of those past individuals were conceived without a human father. When He eventually comes to be baptized, a voice from heaven proclaims, "You are my Son, whom I love" (Luke 3:22).

Finally, Jesus is an obedient son to His earthly parents. Even with the authority of God, Jesus was devoted to them. While His stunt may have caused some anxiety, the story was memorable in the mind of Mary. She saw something in her son that day, something that she did not expect.

- 9.** *How have Jesus' actions surprised you personally?*
- 10.** *What else about Jesus' life and ministry would turn out to be surprising?*
- 11.** *Why do you imagine that God so often surprises His people?*

Sharing the Generosity of God

We serve a God who is faithful, sometimes in ways that we don't anticipate. There's no way to prepare to be surprised. But we can participate in God's restorative plan by sharing God's love and kindness. You are invited to surprise a friend, family member, or a stranger in the week ahead through an act of kindness. (Suggestions: offer to take a friend to lunch; give an especially generous tip; write a note of encouragement to leave in an unexpected place.)

► *Because I serve a God whose generosity is surprising, I plan to share this gift with _____ in the week ahead.*

KEY VERSE

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? —Luke 2:49 KJV

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" —Luke 2:49 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 7 through July 13

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Deuteronomy 5:1-7, 12-15—Honor the Sabbath Day.

Tues. Hebrews 4:1-10—Rest for the People of God.

Wed. John 7:14-24—Who Defines the Sabbath?

Thurs. Psalm 92—Hymn of Eternal Gratitude.

Fri. Luke 13:10-17—The Sabbath Healing.

Sat. 1 Samuel 21:1-6—Holy Bread for the Journey.

Sun. Matthew 12:1-8—Lord of the Sabbath.

A GOD WHO RESTORES

The book of Genesis tells of a God who does not step away after creating the world. Yahweh does not set the universe in motion to leave it alone—the earth spinning on its axis with creation left to manage itself. Rather, God creates humans in His own image, with their own creative and productive capacity, in order that they might be agents of order and justice for the world (Gen. 1:27–28). But that is not how the story would go.

In a crushing blow, men and women walk away from God's designs and follow the serpent's twisted logic. Instead of bringing order, they bring chaos. Instead of bringing justice, they cause harm. As a result, God excludes them from the garden and from the Tree of Life (Gen. 3:21–24). And death becomes part of the human story.

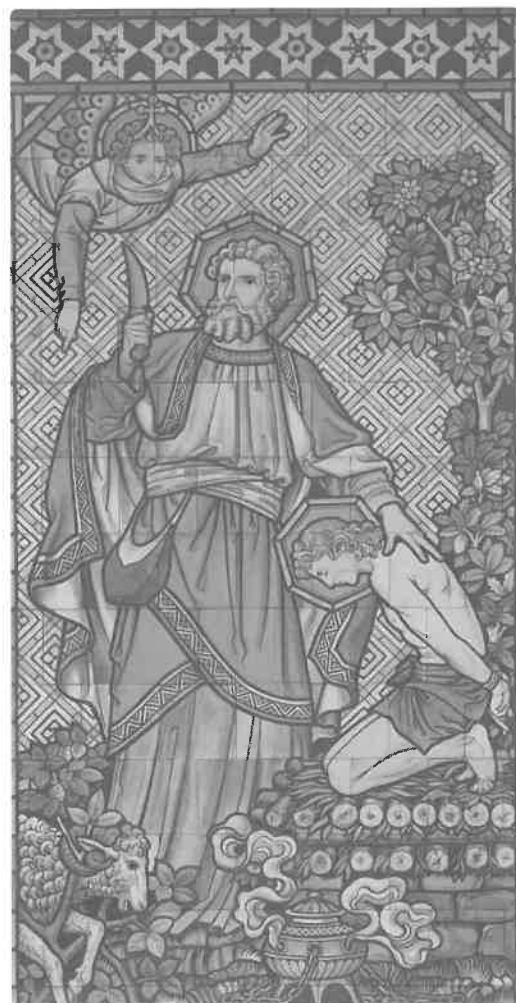
The first family of the Bible—the children of Adam and Eve—test the limits of God's patience. For when the first shepherd and the first farmer bring offerings, God looks with favor upon the sacrifice of Abel, in contrast to the offering of his brother, Cain (Gen. 4:2–5). God knows the human heart, and He pleads with Cain to master sin. But it is Cain who is mastered; he does the unthinkable by murdering his brother (Gen. 4:6–8).

And yet, God does not turn away from the humans He has made. Since they are no longer following the order of God's design, God chooses one righteous man—Noah—whom God preserves from destruction, along with his family (Gen. 6–7). Noah and his kin receive God's blessing, just as Adam and Eve had been blessed before (Gen. 9:1). And Noah's offering prompts God to promise restraint, to hold back from sending another flood and wiping evil away (Gen. 8:20–22).

Since evil is allowed to endure, God turns to another individual, Abram, whom God renames Abraham. After receiving covenants and promises, Abraham comes to trust Yahweh as a God who keeps His word (Gen. 15:6). Abraham and Sarah have a child in their old age, and this child is destined to receive all of God's covenant blessings (Gen. 21:1–7). Yet even when God tests Abraham by commanding that he sacrifice his beloved child of promise, Isaac, Abraham is ready to obey (Gen. 21:9–12).

Years later, after Abraham has died, Isaac is left to question whether God shall be faithful again. Yet God is able to turn Isaac's enemies into allies, and Isaac discovers the water his family needs to survive (Gen. 26:28–32). God is faithful indeed. Isaac's own children appear ready to repeat the pattern by engaging in trickery and murder. But God's faithfulness does not relent or turn away. God chooses the trickster Jacob as the recipient of covenant blessings, and when Jacob is at his lowest, God appears to him and brings consolation: "I . . . will watch over you wherever you go," says God (Gen. 28:15).

Through these dealings with humanity, God displays a redemptive purpose that cannot be matched. The sin that might lead a person to murder cannot be wiped away in a flood, but it can be defeated by a faithful God who enters covenant relationships with utmost fidelity, promising to restore what has been broken. We serve a God who restores.



This tiled mosaic by Matthew Digby Wyatt (1820–1877) depicts Abraham's offering of Isaac. It is found in All Saints Church in London.
sedmak/Getty Images Plus



The discovery of water and the building of a well in the desert meant survival for Isaac and his family. God gave precisely what they needed to survive (Gen. 28:32).

Tatsiana Volskaya/Getty Images



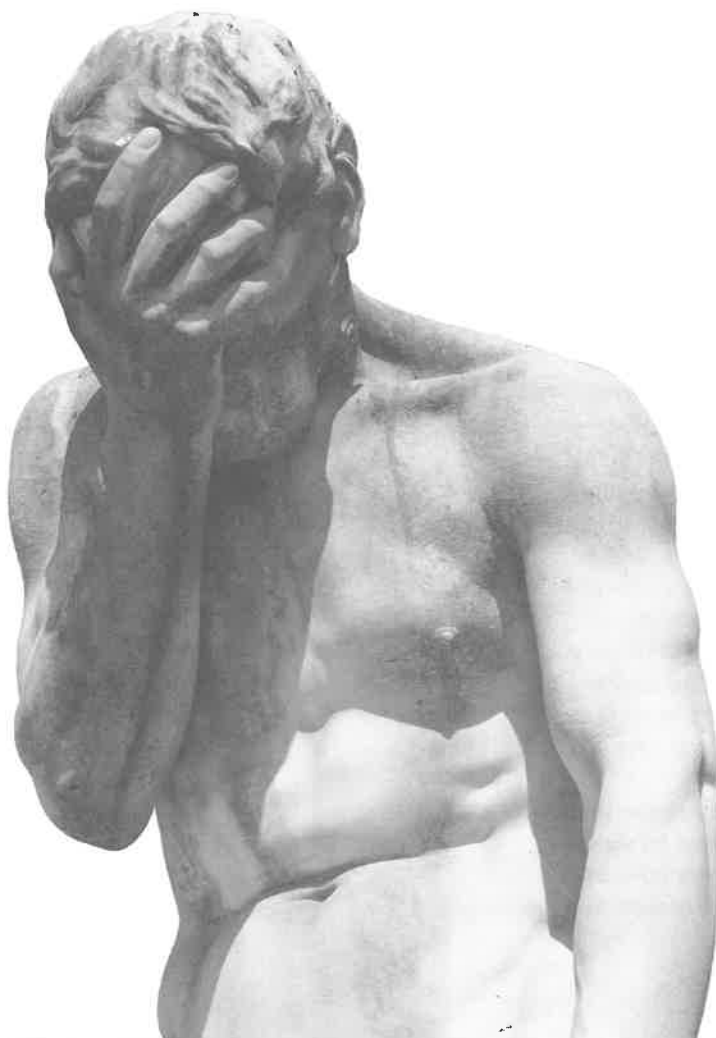
When Jacob was at his lowest, on the run and using a rock for a pillow, God appeared to him. God promises to be with Jacob wherever he might go (Gen. 28:15).

5 Cent Dollar



This mural dates to the eleventh century and is found in the Abbey Church of Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe in France. It is sometimes called the “Romanesque Sistine Chapel”.

GO69



This nineteenth-century statue by Henri Vidal is located in the Tuileries Garden near the Leuvre in France. It is titled *Cain venant de tuer son frère Abel* (“Cain has just killed his brother, Abel”).

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Beyond Your Years

Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. —Luke 2:47

In a small group, reflect and discuss two or three expected physical and mental milestones for the ages below. Write them in the appropriate boxes. For example, 1-year-old child is expected to try to walk a few steps independently. Or a 10-year-old is expected to know her multiplication tables.

	Physical Development	Mental Development
1-year-old child		
5-year-old child		
12-year-old youth		
16-year-old youth		

How do we react when a child or young person exceeds expectations?

Why Jesus was able to exceed what was expected of Him as a 12-year-old (concerning God's Word and understanding His ministry)?

How does understanding and obeying God's Word get *easier* or *harder* with age?