

SIX SECRETS FOR A SUCCESSFUL HOME

Luke 2:41–52

Dr. George O. Wood

Luke 2:41–52 (NIV)

“Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast 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. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

Whenever we come to any portion of God’s Word, we should approach it in two ways.

The first way to approach a portion of God’s Word, is to simply ask the question, “What information does this passage of Scripture give to me?” In this particular instance, we have a piece of information from the Lord’s life that is unique. That is, out of the time from when He was born in Bethlehem, until the time in which He begins His public ministry at the age of thirty, we know nothing. Those years are called the silent years, the years of obscurity. The silence of

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those thirty years is broken only this one time, here, when Jesus was twelve. The passage shows us that, at that age, that pre-teenage moment, He is already very acutely aware of His special relationship as God's Son. He is aware of who His Father is: God, the Father.

The passage also tells us that He was very aware and responsive to His human obligations. That, although He was God's Son, He nevertheless was subject to Joseph and to Mary. That is one piece of question that we ask of this passage, as well as any passage—what information does it provide?

But the second question we ought to ask of any text in Scripture is, “What insight does it give us for our own lives?” This Scripture will not be complete if it only provides us information about Jesus. To be complete, it must also provide us information about ourselves. We must let the Scripture be the window through which the Holy Spirit allows us to look, to see our own lives, what's important in our own lives and in our own families.

So, as we look at this Scripture this week, it seems to me that this passage affords us an excellent opportunity to see what the ingredients in a successful home and in a successful life are.

Certainly, Mary and Joseph had one of the most successful homes in all of human history. Not only were they given the responsibility of raising the child Jesus, but they had other children also, who turned out well. We know that they had at least four other sons. These four are named in the Gospel of Mark. And they had at least two daughters. We know they had at least two because, the phrase used indicating that Jesus had sisters was plural, meaning at least two.

So, in addition to Jesus, there were at least six other children born in their home. Two of whom became Apostles and wrote two of the twenty-seven works of the New Testament—James and Jude. And if a home is indeed judged by the children it produces, one would have to look at Mary and Joseph's home and attach to it the designation successful. That is what I want to look

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at through this passage. I think there are some facets of this passage which tell us the secrets of a successful home.

If you're here today and you're a single head of household, or you're a single adult, I'd like for you to simply take that word "home" and use the word "life" instead. Because the principles that are reflected here not only have an application for the family, they have application for each one of us in our own individual life settings.

I. The first secret in a successful home or in a successful life is that spiritual priorities dominate.

You see that every time you come across Mary and Joseph in the text of the Scripture. Their lives are being lived out in accordance to God's will. Their first and fundamental devotion of life is to love God and to serve Him with all their heart, mind, soul and strength.

The particular manifestation of their spiritual priority in this text is the fact that they are going up to Jerusalem to the Passover. That reflects the spiritual commitment on their part to obey the Old Testament law. The Old Testament law held that every Jewish adult male who lived in Israel was required, three times a year, to present Himself in Jerusalem at a major festival: the Festival of Passover, the Festival of Pentecost, and the Festival of Tabernacles. It was not required that women and children go along. It was also to be noted that Nazareth was a distance of about a hundred miles from Jerusalem. Using the trip by which Mary and Joseph would have come, avoiding Samaria and going down across the Jordan River through the valley and up the mountain to Jerusalem, it would have taken them a good three or four days one way and another three or four days coming home. They would have spent one week in Jerusalem during the feast. That meant they had to take two weeks time to make this trip and Joseph wasn't employed by a company that was giving him leave or vacation pay to make the trip. They had to save up for it.

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They had to put their priorities toward it and they went, in accordance with the custom of the law, and beyond the requirement of the law, taking family as well. Mary and, certainly, Jesus was there and possibly the other children as well.

This isn't the only time in Mary and Joseph's experience when their priorities show. We know, by working backwards through the text of Luke, that they were present at the purification rights for Mary at the temple. They circumcised Jesus according to the law. Mary's song of praise, when she discovers she is to be expectant with Jesus, is one that is laced with a tremendous knowledge of God and perception of the Old Testament Scripture of Hanna. Mary's moral purity is a sign of her fidelity to God. Joseph, in his life, has a balance of justice and mercy. Justice, in that he would not marry Mary because of what he perceived as moral impurity, and yet mercy, in that he would not publicly divorce her. There is kind of a unique fine-tempered balance, spiritual balance, in his life between justice and mercy. Of course, all that was rearranged when he was given the news that Mary was with child without being with a man. Joseph was also a person who was spiritually led by God in his dream life. So, you have in these two people—the earthly father, not the biological father, the earthly father of Jesus and his biological earthly mother—two people who had an intense commitment to the Lord. Spiritual priorities dominated their life. They know that Jesus' bar mitzvah is coming. Every Jewish boy, at the age of thirteen, went through bar mitzvah. Probably the appropriate time for Jesus' bar-mitzvah would be at a festival, a Passover. Bar mitzvah meaning, bar: "son" and mitzvah: "law"—"son of the law." It was when a Jewish boy became a Jewish man. They were bringing Jesus with them to Jerusalem perhaps as a preparation for that later bar mitzvah in His life. They were strong in showing spiritual priorities.

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It should be noted that when they went to Jerusalem, they took Jesus with them. How important it is for us who have families and children to include our children in our spiritual priorities. So what is important to us shows also to them.

At the staff level, we've been concerned and praying about this in recent days—spiritual priorities in individual lives, in the church and in families. We realize that the greatest struggles that each one of us, in this congregation, have is establishing a daily priority of prayer and reading of the Scripture; if we're in family groups, to do that in family groups together. One of the things that we purpose to do to help us all do better in this area of manifesting spiritual priority is, when you receive a Christmas card from the staff shortly in another couple of weeks, enclosed with that Christmas card will be a devotional booklet, a daily devotional booklet for the month of December. We'd like you, if you're a single adult living alone, to take that and use that as your daily devotional guide each morning. If you're in a family group, we ask you to take that and use it in your family devotions—and if you don't have family devotionals for the month of December, take that and read that and share some prayer together as a family. Then, to follow that up beginning in January, we want the whole congregation to walk through the Bible in a year. Each month, we're going to be providing you a daily Bible study guide which will help you read through Scripture, have meaningful applicative questions to ask, and kind of create a context where we can have prayer together in families or in households.

We need to find ways to serve Christ together. I think of families in this church who have found delightful ways of involving their children in the work of God. This week, we were having a discussion about the fact that we still have some stockings to go. I had the idea, which was actually given to me by another member of the congregation, "Sometimes people don't take a stocking because of all that work... you've got to go to K-Mart to buy the toothpaste and what

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all goes in the stocking. Why don't we just get the stuff in cases? A case of toothpaste, a case of soap, put it out there and say to people, 'Just write a check and fill the bag yourself. Take some toothpaste, take some soap, put it in the sack, close it and that will be fine'." This person protested, "No! For years, in our family, that's part of our Christmas tradition, part of teaching our child that it's important to be involved in the care for the poor. So we make a thing, every year, out of going shopping." So we have to do it both ways.

I think, another part, on a family level—of showing children our spiritual priorities—is the fact that we are faithful in attending and being a part of the church family. We know that Jesus' custom was to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath. His parents modeled for Him what commitment to the people of God and the church was all about.

Teaching the children stewardship also. I was tickled to get letters from Evangeline. It's tough having your daughter away at school. It's been a whole new thing for us. I'm starting to go through the empty nest syndrome. One of the things our kids know about our own lives personally is we really tried, in terms of our personal stewardship of time and money, to seek first the kingdom of God. That's one of the most heartening things now that our daughter's away. She's picked up some of her mother's skills and she's working in a nursery in a church. Off that little income, I can expect, about every other week, for her to include in her letter home some cash—two dollars, three dollars, five dollars, and saying, "Dad, here's my tithes for this week. Make sure this goes into the offering." She picked up something by being with us. I'm suggesting that our children will greatly have a tendency to follow in our footsteps if we will model for them what our own priorities are. When we have priorities in our own life, even if we're not parents, other people are going to pick up on those priorities, and know them as well. Mary and Joseph modeled a home where priorities were present.

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II. The second secret in a successful home is being linked together with God's people.

The Feast of Passover lasted a week. It was a community time. It wasn't a time where just Mary and Joseph were going with their child, Jesus, to the temple by themselves. They were with family. They were with neighbors. They were with friends. They were part of this community of God. The pilgrims even traveled in companies together. That's probably why Jesus got lost, because, generally, those pilgrimages involved a hundred people or so. The women and children would be up front, during the walk, and maybe the animals would come in between, and then, the men and older boys would come behind. Jesus is at that transitional age where he's young enough to be with Mary, but old enough to be with Joseph. So Joseph's thinking, "He's with Mary"; and Mary's thinking, "He's with Joseph." But at the end of the day, they all get together in the encampment, and they discover Jesus is not there. So they turn around and, the next day, come back. The third day, they find Him in the temple.

But Mary and Joseph had a commitment to be involved with God's people. Jesus was not in a religiously, culturally, or socially isolated home. He was brought up in the context of being with God's people and receiving all the input that God's people can give regarding His life. Whether it was an elderly Simeon or Anna, or whether it was neighborhood people or family people, or whether it was synagogue people or people going to the temple, they chose not to isolate their child from others.

One of the things that happens in the church is that, if we involve our children and our families in the church of Jesus Christ, they're going to be deeply touched by other people. We need one another. There's too much Lone Ranger Christianity in Southern California, where we almost have a sense of taking or leaving church, and we see worship as theater rather than the church as a body, interlinked together in more than simply a Sunday morning worship context. I need the

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church of Jesus Christ. I need people in this body, who act as a buffer for me on occasion. There are rough edges in my life that need the buffering of the body. I need people, too, that will encourage me and help me and spur me on.

My parents never gave me an option about whether or not I was going to attend church. They said, “As long as you live in this house, you re going to live by our rules.” That’s the way it is. I never really bucked that too much. My brother did, but he still had to live with it. Through their exposure of me to the body of Christ, I met some of the greatest people in the world.

When I was a junior in high school, our church—Central Assembly of Springfield, Missouri—had its Sunday School classes for us. We had a very large youth group. They were broken down in varying age levels. So we had a class for junior boys. We had about eight to ten of us guys who would meet in the classroom every week with a teacher. It seemed to be our main goal was to get the teacher off the quarterly and into a discussion of some subject we had dreamed up to get him sidetracked. Why in the world that was our goal, I don’t know. I don’t know why we didn’t want to study the quarterly. A lot of people put a lot of work into that. But we wanted to get him sidetracked and he would sidetracked. He was an older man. He was in his early seventies at the time, a former missionary to Latin America. I don’t remember anything he ever said, but what I do remember is his spirit that reached out and touched my life. I remember a man who was an old man but still concerned about reaching fifteen and sixteen-year-old boys. I remember an old man who prayed for me. I remember an old man who had me and the other boys in his home, with his wife, and would sit down and talk with us and pray with us. Today that old man is in his early nineties, and he’s still starting churches in San Antonio, Texas. His name was H. C. Ball. He had a powerful influence on my life. It’s because he chose to be

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plugged into the body and because my parents chose to cause me to be plugged in as well, a connection took place in my life.

Mary and Joseph don't have this view of Christianity or this view that it's just between me and God and nobody else counts. But it's the body together that matters. They exposed Jesus to the people of God.

III. The third secret of a successful home is when parents are concerned about where their children are.

Mary and Joseph were concerned about where Jesus was. If you'd been trusted to be the parents of the Christ, wouldn't you be worried if you'd lost Him? Any parent who's ever had a child who has come in late, can immediately identify with Mary and Joseph's concern.

Several weeks ago, there was a Christian night at Knott's Berry Farm. George had always been very dependable. Usually, we don't set a time for him. Sometimes we do but he knows that past twelve is unacceptable. It's kind of an unwritten kind of thing. So we were out late that particular night. It was a Friday night. We came in and at twelve, we just went to bed. I thought George would be in in about five minutes, and I'd get some sleep. Jewel, however, is always the worrywart and she has the ability to stay up. So she stayed up. About a quarter till three, she comes and wakes me up, and says, "George is not home yet." When your fifteen-year-old is not home at quarter till three and is always a dependable child, you get worried instantly. I knew that the worst had happened. I decided to wait for a few minutes and see if he came in. When he hadn't come in five minutes, I decided to make some calls. In the next twenty-five minutes, I contacted four trauma centers and two police stations from here to Anaheim. I woke up some parents of another child whom George was with and got them all worried. And we still didn't know where he was. But I thought, "At least he's not in a trauma center." At a quarter till four,

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George comes strolling in. No sense of emergency on his face. I said, “Where have you been?” He said, “The thing at Knott’s Berry Farm lasted till one. The crowd was late getting out. We didn’t get out of the parking lot until two, we were hungry. We decided to go down to Denny’s to get breakfast. I decided to witness to some there, and the time got away from us. Suddenly, we realized it was three thirty and we better get home.” I said, “You’re on restriction forever!” He said, “Why are you upset?” And then, this classic line, “When I’m a parent, I’m not going to worry about when my kids get in.” I could have killed him! Normal parents worry about where their children are.

Some children are lost without ever going away from home, however. I’ll give a parent test for a moment. Do you know who your child’s closest friends are? Do you know what subjects they’re taking in school and who their teachers are? We often, as parents, just look at the grades. Do you know what subjects the grades represent? Do you know the names of their Sunday School teachers and youth workers? Do you know what movies they see? Do you know how much your children need you?

I was talking with a father in our church, who was working all hours of the day and night to make it possible for his family to enjoy some extra things. He began to realize that his children were growing up, and he was missing it. He was missing their soccer games. He was missing their school events. He was missing everything. At a considerable cost to his family’s financial picture, he decided to cut out all evening and weekend work so he could have time as a father to help his children with their homework, schooling, and athletic events, and encourage them in their church events as well, and become active there. He was sharing with me this week—I have his permission to share this—what a difference it made in his family life, because he began to find out where his children were, and they began to find out who he was.

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We find our children as we pray for them and spend time with them and listen to them and praise them, build positive memories with them, have the courage to direct them and say no, and hug much.

I heard a great definition of a parent this week: “A parent is a person who has to give a lecture on nutritional values to a kid who has reached six feet six inches by eating potato chips.”

Mary and Joseph model three qualities as parents in a successful home. Spiritual priorities dominate, they’re linked up with the people of God and they are concerned with the whereabouts of their children. Jesus models the other three qualities, additional qualities that total up to six in a successful home.

IV. The fourth quality in a successful home, and one modeled by Jesus: children to whom God has become their Father.

Jesus, at twelve, is showing the transition. He knows that Joseph has been His earthly father. Not His biological father, but His earthly father. In this passage of Scripture He shows that He clearly perceives His unique relationship to the heavenly Father. He says, “Do you not know that I must be about My Father’s or do you not know I must be in My Father’s...” The Greek text here doesn’t fill in what the possessive stands for. In my Father’s what? Some translations say, “About My Father’s business.” Another translation says, “In My Father’s house.” Jesus is simply saying, “Don’t you know I must be in My Father’s.” The emphasis is upon that unique understanding that He is aware, at the age of twelve, who His Father is. His real Father is God, the Father.

I understand, of course, that Jesus enjoys a unique relationship with God, the Father, as His only begotten Son, that we do not have access to. Yet this very Jesus taught us all that we are children of God and that, through coming to believe in Him, we could acknowledge and call God

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“Father.” Up until the time of Jesus, “Father” had been sort of a remote Word for God. Like “Eternal Father of mankind.” Jesus is the first to take it down to the personal level—My Father.

He says in John, “My Father and Your Father.”

There is that wonderful time in life—and it may come for some at the age of seven and for others at the age of twelve and for others, as it did for me, at the age of nineteen and for others at the age of seventy-five—where suddenly you realize that it’s not enough to be going on what your parents believe or what your church believes or what some external thing about God was in your background, but where you come to that personal breakthrough encounter with God Himself, so that He becomes your Father and your God. And Jesus, at the age of twelve, is showing that marked understanding that He has of His relationship with God.

Bruce Larson has a sermon on this passage of Scripture, which he calls “Triangular Living.” He says, basically, in this sermon, that we all have a choice of living in one of three dimensions.

Jesus here is showing us what dimension to live in.

A. One-dimensional living is where we’re living with self at the center of life. Life is organized around our ego, around our own interest. For example, it is said that Teddy Roosevelt had to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral. He had to be the star, the attraction, the thing that stood out.

I’m reminded of the story of the guy who at Valentine’s Day time went to the card shop. He found a Valentine, a very beautiful valentine with little hearts on it. It said on the outside, “To the only girl I’ve ever loved.” He told the clerk, “That’s wonderful. I’ll take four of those.” He had four planets revolving around him. His life was centered in self.

B. The second-dimensional living is where other people are involved. These are the trade-offs in life that say, “I laugh at your jokes, you laugh at mine.” I’ll do this for you, you do that for me.

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So many marriages are that way: fifty-fifty. We don't meet one another a hundred to a hundred. We meet fifty-fifty. When we try fifty-fifty relationships, they never work.

C. The third dimensional living is where Jesus—God—is at the center of our life. Jesus lived in this sense. “I must be in My Father's....” He lived also with a sense of necessity: “I *must* be.” That simple word *dei* in the Greek is present throughout the ministry of Jesus. I must be. He says, “I must preach, I must suffer, I must be delivered up, I must be crucified, I must be raised, all the things written about Me must be fulfilled, I must enter into My glory.” He had a very strong sense of mission in life—must.

Unfortunately, there are some who live the Christian experience with a sense of “must” as external control. They have to do this because “somebody is telling me to do it.” The Bible is telling me to do it, or God is telling me to do it or the church is making me do it or my parents are making me do it. When people live by external “musts,” sooner or later they crack because you will not successfully live with somebody else's ideas imposed upon you. The must ought to become internal. It must be generated from within. This is where Jesus' “must” was coming from. Not because, “God is making Me go to the cross, I wouldn't do this on My own, but He's making Me do it and I have to do it.” But because, in His life, there came this sense of necessity arising out of His own choice—I must do this.

If we're to experience liberation of what it means to be walking with Christ in a deeper sense, it is by coming to an awareness that we must do certain things in life. Not simply because they're in the Bible, which they are, but because God calls us to embrace these as our own and, in our life, we are to seek the Father's. I find it so true that when spiritual priorities are right in my life, other thing things fall into place.

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V. The fifth step in a successful home is children who voluntarily come under the control of their parents.

Jesus did that. Even though He acknowledges His relationship with His eternal Father, He is willing to go back to Nazareth with His earthly father and mother. He doesn't have this hotshot attitude of, "Here in Jerusalem I could learn more, because this is where all the rabbis are. I'll stay here. I'm old enough now to take care of Myself. You can go back to Nazareth on your own. It's a sleepy little village anyway. What could come out of Nazareth?" But, knowing all, and knowing His relationship with the Father, He submitted to His earthly parents.

Christian art, I think, has sometimes misrepresented Jesus in the temple at twelve. We see the artist's imagination of Jesus, standing in a group, with the rabbis seated around Him and Jesus sort of lecturing the rabbis. He comes across as this precocious, wise, hot-shot kid telling His elders the way it really is. But Luke sort of shatters that image when He presents us the picture of Jesus, in the role of the model student who is simply listening and asking questions—not lecturing, but listening and asking questions and answering.

In the same spirit, He returns to His parents. Although He has already passed His parents in knowledge, He yet is willingly subject to them. If I were to ask all the teenagers and college students in here, "How many of you in your knowledge have already passed your parents?" everybody would raise their hand. Still subject to His parents, even though He knew more than His parents.

VI. The sixth secret of a successful home is children who advance mentally, physically, spiritually and socially.

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This is true in a successful life; people who advance mentally, physically, spiritually and socially. This is the great theme of verse 52, “Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”

It’s a very interesting thing happening here in the text of Luke on the word “grow” or “grew.”

Notice that the word also occurs in verse 40 of chapter 2, “And the child grew and became strong.” When it occurs in verse 40, it is a summary word that looks back over His first twelve years, up to the time of His visit to the temple. That’s when children grow. They grow automatically. You can’t put them in a three by three foot cubicle and say, “You can only grow three foot high,” because a child is going to grow. The genes within him are going to make it so the child is going to grow. We may even, in a certain sense, call it passive growth. It’s growth that doesn’t happen without a great deal of volitional choice on the part of the child. It’s growth. But in verse 52, the word “grow” or “grew” is used of Jesus again. This time, the “growing” describes the years between the time He was twelve and the time He was thirty. In that time of adolescence and teenage years and young manhood and mature manhood, He is described as growing. Interestingly, in the Greek text, the words for “grow” in verses 52 and verse 40 are different from one another. In verse 40, it is a word that simply indicates growth in the normal and natural aspect. But in verse 52, the word is a very strong and unusual word for growth. It is a word that can be used in several different contexts, and we have examples of this from the Greek language.

One is to describe someone who advances by cutting down. The idea behind that is an army that is getting ready to make its way through a forest, and somebody needs to go in advance and cut down the trees to give them a path. So, the idea of growth was to advance by cutting down.

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Another way the word was used was to describe a smith who took a white-hot piece of metal and put it on a forge and beat it and hammered it until its length and shape was the right size. His was in effect advancing by being beaten or by being shaped through pressure.

That is the word for grow that is used here. That the growth that Jesus enjoyed from the time He was twelve through thirty was a growth that encountered tremendous obstacles, and He had to cut His way through. He grew in wisdom. That is, like every other child, He needed to go through the mental rigor of schooling and education and, in His case, rigorous learning of the Scripture didn't just all fall upon Him out of the sky, and He suddenly knew it one day. It was the application of His life mentally to grow in wisdom. He grew as well physically. Not just growing up to be whatever height and weight He was, but He grew through work, through the pressure of being a carpenter. A carpenter, in those days, built houses—that's why He knew about foundations. He built agricultural implements, like plows and yokes and household furniture, like beds and tables and chairs and other kinds of things that involved carpentry. He grew, He advanced through the physical pressure and disciplines of being a carpenter.

And He grew in favor with God. He grew spiritually. And maybe some of that spiritual growth, some of that advancing, came through dark moments in His life. The Lord had a perfection of holiness which means that in all His life, He never made a wrong moral choice, substantially different than the perfection of Adam and Eve, which was the perfection of innocence. They never had the perfection of a holiness which obeys God. It was just perfection in the sense that they were created perfect and then they immediately chose to sin. But Jesus chose all the time to do the right thing. He had a perfection of holiness.

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He certainly went through testing times. I would imagine that, at an early age, somewhere after He was twelve, He lost His earthly father, Joseph; at least Joseph never again shows up in the text of Scripture after this event. He knew what it was like to walk through sorrow.

And He grew in social relationships. He learned the give and take, the dynamics of friendships and family. His perfect life was a winsome life because He grew socially as well. But He grew. He advanced through obstacles.

The best kind of growing that you and I do is the kind of growing that involves us in obstacles and hardships. That's different from automatic growth. I used to grow automatically, straight up. I grew so tall that I grew right through my hair. Now I've quit growing that way and I tend, sometimes, to think I'm growing the other way. That's automatic growth and it's not growing through obstacles. It's because I'm just eating too much. But growth through obstacles is taking difficult and adverse circumstances and persevering through them. And that's the kind of growth which the Lord is modeling here. A growth through the adversities and pressures that came on Him from the time he was twelve through thirty. He advanced in life. He advanced by cutting out beforehand.

One of my very favorite passages in all of Scripture is Romans 5:3–4, which says, “We rejoice in our sufferings.” If that's all there was in that text, you'd have to say, what kind of nut is that? What sort of masochistic person rejoices in their sufferings? But that's not where that sentence ends, “We rejoice in our sufferings because suffering produces endurance.” That word “endurance,” by the way, is the same word used when Jesus was twelve years of age. It says He stayed behind in Jerusalem. And the idea of endurance is a person who stays behind. He'd like to keep on going but He has to stay behind and endure the hardship. Staying power, we would call it. Perseverance. Gutting it out.

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Suffering produces endurance, if we will let it. Instead of running and fleeing, it produces staying power and staying power produces character, the kind of person we will really be. And character produces hope. That is, when we get done with all the suffering and get done with the process of enduring and making character, we see that God does work good out of trouble, so there's hope after all.

We go through that cycle of four steps then we're ready for the next cycle. That's why we can say, "We rejoice in suffering." That's growth through pressure. It's the kind of growth Jesus has. What makes a successful home? What makes a successful life? Let me, in closing, ask you six questions, from the message today, which you can simply answer "yes" or "no" to and gain some kind of idea of where you're at.

Do spiritual priorities dominate in your life?

Are you really linked up with God's people?

Are you concerned about another's whereabouts? If you're a single person, this means not living in isolation, not just living for self, but, are you concerned for another?

Are you living in the third dimension? Not where self is the center or others share the center, but where God is the center?

Are you under authority? Jesus modeled being under authority. Are you under authority, willingly so, not resentfully so? Under the authority of God? Under the authority of Scripture?

Under the authority of the church? Under the authority of family?

Do you have a sense of advancing through life? Of cutting through the obstacles to advance?

Those are the marks and secrets of a successful life at home, from this passage of Scripture.

Closing Prayer

SIX SECRETS FOR A SUCCESSFUL HOME

Luke 2:41–52

Our Father, we thank You today for Your Word, which comes as a light to our path. We pray that, again today, it would light up our life. I pray, Lord, for persons in here that have been really touched by one of these questions in particular, above others. I ask that You would minister to them and do far more than simply raising a concern in their heart about that in this service. I pray that You would stir us up, instead, to action and to commitment, to ask the Holy Spirit to make right things that are wrong in our life, that we might live right for You in the world. Speak to us, Lord. There are brothers and sisters here who are having to cut their way through life. Life for them, today, not only seems like a tremendous forest that they can't see their way through, but it's more like a swamp, where every step you take, you seem to be entangled with the undergrowth. They need a machete to cut through, an inch at a time. Give them, O Lord, the power and the grace to advance through life; to not just run, but to advance. We know that the Spirit, which raised Jesus up from the dead and dominated and controlled His life, is the same Spirit which raises us up and gives us the power to live. Holy Spirit do that today. For those in this congregation who have never opened their life to You, confessed You as Lord and Savior, we ask that this day they will come to know You. In the Lord's name we pray. Amen.