

What do you want to be when you grow up? This question is not my favorite. Why do we have to choose just one thing? Why do you have to choose before we've even done the thing we know whether or not we'll like it? Why are we expected to answer such life-determining questions when we're so young, long before we're anywhere close to being equipped to answer them? We usually ask this of youth, but ask a bunch of adults the same question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and pay attention to the reactions. Some laugh dismissively at the comical nature of the question because, "I'm already grown up, what a silly question!" Others think about it more critically, maybe think about a critical juncture in life when a decision to do this or that, live here or there, is called to mind again. "Was that the right move? Did I do the right thing? Sure, it was the wise choice, but what would have happened if...?" accompanied by maybe more than a tinge of regret.

These questions never plagued Jesus. As the Son of God and Son of Man, he knew his purpose in life with perfect understanding and performed his purpose perfectly as the Way, the Truth, the Life, the ransom to save sinners. The interplay between Jesus' natures, fully divine and fully human, is always a fascinating thing to ponder and, to me, it's especially fascinating to consider the dynamics in Jesus' younger years as he's growing up. We know about the escape to Egypt and return to Nazareth, but we don't hear anything about Jesus' first steps or him tying his sandals all by himself for the first time or him getting whatever the equivalent of a homerun was in whatever the equivalent of baseball was. None of that. We do hear about this though, a time arranged by God for the boy Jesus to show and explain what his purpose in this world was: he came to do the Father's will.

Joseph went to Jerusalem every year for Passover because that's what the Law said God's people were to do. Jesus saw this. Then, one year, Jesus was brought along by Joseph and Mary to Jerusalem for Passover because this is what the Law said God's people were to do, teach their children God's ways. This was Jesus' example growing up, his lived experience. Taking God at his Word and doing what God said was the life his parents created for him. Barring the nature vs. nurture debate, they did such a good job that Jesus stayed behind in the Temple, God's House, to keep learning about God's Word!

Under the vast majority of normal circumstances, this would be wild disrespect and ignoring parents. Jesus isn't most kids. This act on his part set up a time to teach his people, which included Mary and Joseph that he was their God and savior, the one person in whom they had to place their complete trust in order to be saved. Tall order, but Jesus, their God and their boy, brought them along graciously. 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."* (Luke 2:46-47) Jesus hadn't been running around gallivanting with other youths, Mary and Joseph had probably come to not expect that of him, but parental concern and anxiety which was very much there gave way to a scene that was natural. They found Jesus in the Temple courts as comfortable as could be, like he was right at home, chatting with family.

What was that like? How did it work for Jesus to be 12, be God and a person, and actually learn things? We know he did, the end of this gospel lesson tells us so, but how did that actually go? Did he have to work hard on homework? We know he learned and that it was a process like it was for everyone else and that he didn't "cheat" use his power for his advantage as a man in the wilderness during temptation nor a middle schooler at recess. He learned and he, the Son of God, learned well and asked questions in the process. Now, in this case, Jesus asking questions of the teachers doesn't reveal a lack of knowledge but the profound possession of it, mastery of the material, so that he could lead along the teachers, in a respectful way of course, to show them amazing truths, deep insights into the Word. What

was that like to be a kid teaching the elder God's Word? He learned and had come to know that Isaiah the prophet had written about him. The boy Jesus knew God had instructed his tongue, that he'd always done the Father's will, that he would obey every aspect of it, even going to the cross to die in what would look like shame and defeat knowing he'll not be disgraced but vindicated by his just and merciful Father. Did Jesus use those words and many, many others to explain to the people that their salvation was at hand like Simeon, the old guy who hung around the Temple a few years before, had rejoiced to know?

What was it like to be in the zone studying and discussing God's Word at a high level for 3 solid days in Jerusalem with the pros and hear your mom say, "*Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.*" (**Luke 2:48**) Fair question, Mary! This came from expected parental concern and love. The expected answer of, "I don't know," as a cover up they did not hear. They heard something which redirected them and reminded them who they were raising. Their Lord said to them, "*Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?*" (**Luke 2:49**) Or, "about my Father's things/business." He was explaining to them that this is why he came, not only to Jerusalem, but into the world, to teach the word and will of his Father, to be the salvation of all people by being perfect in their place and sacrificing himself perfectly in their place in due time.

As amazing as all this is on the surface, a 12 year old astounding the teachers, what's happening behind the scenes is every more amazing. Jesus was a perfect kid, overcoming every temptation common to 12 year olds and he did this for you and me. Jesus didn't make comments about how a person looked either to mock them or draw attention to some unnecessarily sexualized thing. Jesus didn't join in with inappropriate talk or joking not adding a line or two about how lame out of touch Mary and Joseph were for making him go to synagogue like pretty much every single weekend. He was helpful, he didn't complain, he obeyed. He might have felt lonely thing this because when a person isn't saying or doing the same things as the crowd, it can be isolating. Jesus knew he was singularly unique, yes, but as 12 year old, the process humans go through of finding themselves, finding who they are is just beginning. The boy Jesus knowing his life's purpose as Messiah now had this galvanizing experience of helping people, in love and humility see, taste, and experience the richness and excellence of his Word, this was formative. Even though as God, he didn't need to learn anything, he probably "learned" very clearly what his purpose in life was as our substitute and savior, so he hungered and thirsted more ravenously than anyone else for God's righteousness, even at 12.

Then, we read this fascinating thing, "*Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.*" (**Luke 2:51**) This, and that Jesus grew physically, emotionally, and spiritually before God and people is all we hear about for the next 18 years until his ministry begins. Just this, "*And he was obedient to them.*" Parents of teens, you can attest to the monumental accomplishment this is. Current teens, I know this isn't easy, but parents are trying their best. Former teens, this wasn't easy and we failed! Jesus didn't though. He was going through the same physical, hormonal, and developmental things his peers were but with the added knowledge of dying for sin he didn't do at the end of a perfect life of submitting to Mary and Joseph and his Father in all things. This purpose, substitute and sacrifice, the Father sent his Son to do and Jesus performed perfectly because he's the perfect savior. Amen.