

Growing in Grace. Becoming Like Christ (Luke 2:39-52)

(39) And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

(40) And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. (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 according to custom. (43) And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, (44) but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, (45) and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. (46) After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. (47) And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. (48) And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." (49) And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (50) And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. (51) And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. (52) And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

(3) ...that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified. (Isa 61:3)

(5) He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, (6) that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, (7) so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; (Psa 78:5-7)

(1) Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. (2) It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. (3) Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. (4) Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. (5) Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. (Psa 127:1-5)

(4) "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (5) You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (6) And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. (7) You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (8) You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. (9) You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9)

(4) Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:4)

(6) Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Pro 22:6)

(18) Discipline your son, for there is hope;... (Pro 19:18)

(15) Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him. (Pro 22:15)

(13) Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. (Pro 23:13)

(28) Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (Col 1:28)

1. Do you have a deep desire to perform all that God has revealed in His Word? Do you have a deep desire to obey the Lord, your Master, your King, in all He desires for your life? God's law is good when it is understood properly, applied properly, and lived properly. God wants us to live obediently from the heart, out of deep love for Him, and in response to His deep love for us.
2. Parents, grandparents, and the entire church community ought to be prayerfully devoted to helping children grow, become strong, and be filled with wisdom. What part are you playing among God's work in the next generation? We can't do this without God's grace/favor, and children can't grow this way without God's grace/favor.
3. Do you want God's favor/grace more than you want the favor of any person or group? Do you ask God for His favor/grace? In Jesus we can have the favor/grace of God in our lives. We need forgiveness, mercy, patience, and we can have it in Jesus. God wants us to live lives of repentance and faith, daily confessing and daily receiving fresh forgiveness and grace. We can live in faith, with peace, hope, and joy in Jesus.
4. Are you committed to your own personal growth spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially? What practical steps are you taking to grow in these areas? What ways can you grow in these ways over 2016? Children, teenagers, and adults can all keep growing until the Lord brings us home and finishes the work He began in us. We need God's grace/favor for all of this because we can't do it in our own strength and power. God delights in giving us what we need to grow in these ways when we ask Him, seek Him, and depend on Him for everything.
5. One of the best things Christian parents can do is to faithfully and consistently live out their faith by gathering habitually with the community of faith (church/faith family). Godly men and women have consistently done this throughout redemptive history in the old covenant and the new. Mary and Joseph were faithful people of God, and we can learn a lot from them as we examine their consistent and habitual devotion to God and His people. Spiritual habits, patterns, regularity, and consistent devotion is a healthy feature in the lives of godly men and women, boys and girls.
6. The Feast of Passover was a yearly reminder that God's people needed God's grace, God's power, and the atonement provided for by a sacrificial lamb in order to enter into God's promise, purpose, and paradise. The atoning blood of this lamb pointed forward to the full and

final atonement provided by Jesus Christ and His substitutionary death on the cross. The blood of Jesus alone can cover and wash away our sins. We too ought to celebrate the true Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, as individuals, families, and a community of faith.

7. Some customs and traditions are good. The customs and tradition laid out for us in God's Word are good. We need to know what they are, and how to live them out in our lives in the power of the Spirit. According to Jewish custom a boy entered into manhood at age 13. Parents were to prepare their sons for manhood through teaching them God's Word (God's law), helping them grow spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. Are we thinking this way as we raise our children, grandchildren, and the children of Christ Fellowship? Are we thinking about how to make a healthy transition from boyhood to manhood and from girlhood to womanhood?
8. We need to be sure we don't leave Jesus behind???
9. Do you intentionally put yourself around others who may know more than you, have more wisdom than you, are more spiritually mature than you, and who are a few steps ahead of you in their spiritual journey? Do you sit with them? Do you listen to them? Do you ask them questions? Are you committed to being a lifelong learner? Are you growing in your understanding of God, yourself, the world, reality, nature, other people, etc.? Leaders are learners and learners are leaders. God wants us to continually be learning and then applying what we learn that is truth, good, right, and according to His ways. God wants us to be an influence for good in this world. It's never to late to learn, grow, mature, and move into more of what God has for you. As you learn, look for ways to pass on what you are learning to others by living it out and teaching it. Be a disciple and a disciple-maker for the glory of Christ!
10. Jesus was and is amazing! Like every other human, the Son of God grew into maturity. Though He was fully God, He was also fully man. As a man He grew and developed like all other people, yet without sin. He had to be fed, changed, and cared for. Jesus had to learn to crawl, walk, run, and work. Jesus had to learn, mature, understand, and apply like us. He did it perfectly, of course. Jesus is our example of how to grow and/or how to help others grow. As a Christian, Christ lives in us. No matter our age we too can grow as He did, even though we will never do it perfectly, we can do it progressively. If you have not already, will you commit to growing and learning like Jesus from this point forward, whatever it takes? It's never to late to reach your full potential as a man or woman, boy or girl.
11. Sometimes our distress is unnecessary. As we develop the mind of Christ and grow in our understanding of God's ways and God's will, the unnecessary stress and anxiety that comes as a result of our ignorance or sin will become less and less. Mary and Joseph were distressed for no reason. They should have known what Jesus was doing by now. They should have understood better the Fathers ways (business). We need to be sure we are living in light of The Father's business and for His house instead of for our own "business" or only our own "house." As Christians we can walk in freedom from unnecessary distress because of Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us, and the love and goodness of our heavenly Father.
12. God expects us to grow and mature in our understanding of Him, His ways, His purpose, and His Word. We grow over time by walking closely with Jesus, spending regular and consistent times taking in God's Word, living a Spirit-filled life, and growing in biblical community and mission. We grow as we commit ourselves to being disciples and disciple-makers. Are you growing in your understanding of Jesus' words, works, and ways? Are you more spiritually mature today than you were 5 years ago? If not, why not? What steps do you need to take today to grow for your good, the good of your friends and family, and the glory of God?
13. Jesus is our Savior, Lord, and our example. Jesus shows us perfectly how to submit to God as Father and how to submit to those that God has placed in our lives as authorities. Submission does not equal inferiority. Submission is godly, Christ-like, and holy. God talks a lot about healthy submission in His Word. There is submission to Him first and foremost, government, wives to husbands, children to parents, employees to employers, the church to her leaders, and God the Son to God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit to God the Father and Son. Submission is good when it is done God's way.
14. Do you treasure the words and works of Jesus, the words and works of God in your heart? Even when you don't understand God and His ways fully do you still trust Him with faith that is seeking understanding? Understanding often takes time, wisdom often takes time, growth and maturity take time. We need to be patient with ourselves and patient with others. God is patient with us. Jesus is patient with us. Jesus is our example of how to patiently and lovingly wait on people to grow and mature. Keep meditating on God's Word and ways, keep talking to God and listening to God. Put yourself around godly people who know God and are wise. Consider how they live and emulate their faith.
15. Jesus is our perfect example of what it looks like to grow and mature under God as our Father. We are to increase in wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and application of God's ways. We are to increase and grow healthy in stature physically as we take care of the bodies that God has given us to the best of our abilities. We are to increase in our favor with God as we come to know Him in deeper and more accurate ways. We are to increase in our favor with God as we grow in obedience to Him by grace through the power of the Holy Spirit as His children. We are to increase in favor with people as we learn more and more how to relate to them all in loving, holy, and godly ways.