



TENSION

LUKE 2:40-52

Lesson Focus

From the beginning, Jesus lived in a tension between his God-given mission and who the world would have him be. Whether we know it or not, we live in this tension.

Lesson Outcomes

Through this lesson, students should:

1. Understand that, just like you and I, Jesus experiences growing up.
2. Understand that Jesus is caught in the tension of who God has called him to be and who the world, or his family, might hope he will become.
3. Realize that we live in the tension between what God has called us to do and become and what others might hope we become.

Catching Up on the Story

This week's passage is the final story in Luke's infancy narrative concerning Jesus. Up to this point in Luke, we've heard the foretelling of both John the Baptist and Jesus. Both men will be born in extraordinary ways. John will be a gift to an elderly couple who long thought they would not have children. Jesus will be born to a woman who was not married and who had never been with a man. Angels foretell both births.

We should be familiar with Luke's birth narrative for Jesus. It is one of the longest and fullest presentations in the Gospels. Of course, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, tenderly wrapped in bands of cloth, and laid in a manger. His birth announcement is written in the sky by stars and angels and delivered to shepherds. At his presentation at the Temple, elderly prophets proclaim the significant role that Jesus will play in the life of Israel. This is the last time we will see Jesus for 12 years.

The Text

This week's passage begins and ends with a statement about Jesus' birth and maturation. Luke tells us, in verse 40, that Jesus

grows up and becomes strong (presumably in body) and filled with wisdom after his presentation at the Temple. This statement, along with the one in verse 52, forms an inclusion or literary bracket around a statement or story. In this way, Luke marks the transition from Jesus as an infant to a growing boy at the beginning and from a child to a man in verse 52.

Some have speculated that a statement that Jesus grows in wisdom and divine favor might detract from his nature as a perfect human. For Jesus to take on all of our humanity, he must experience all of it, even the parts where we grow. Here, Luke tells us that Jesus, like you and me, experiences the growth and discovery common to all humanity.

The Passover Festival: 2:41-45

Mary and Joseph travel from their home in Nazareth to Jerusalem every year for the Passover Festival. Passover was the celebration of God's greatest act of salvation for his people up to that point: their escape from Egypt. The Passover Festival was also one of the festivals that Jewish men were required to keep in Jerusalem. Of course, by this time, whole families had come to celebrate the Passover (Marshall, 126).

There is no reason to think this was the first time Jesus had accompanied his parents on this journey. The journey during this twelfth year is significant. At twelve years of age, Jesus began to transition into adulthood. While he would not have formally been considered an adult until the age of 13, he started to prepare for full inclusion in the religious community during his twelfth year (Nolland, 129). Being a pious family, Jesus' earthly parents prepared him well to undertake his God-given mission.

The Passover Festival would have been eight days long. Normally, not everyone who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem would have stayed for the Festival. Indeed, they were not required to do so. Jesus' family, however, remained until the festival concluded.

It was normal for families on a pilgrimage such as this one to travel in large groups to and from their destination. The traveling party would likely have included extended family, neighbors, and friends. Traveling in Jesus' day could be very dangerous, especially at night. Going as a group also lessened the stress and preparation that each family would have needed to make.

3. Is it important that Mary and Joseph go to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover Festival? How might this have helped Jesus grow and become strong and filled with wisdom?
4. How would you have felt if you had traveled a day's journey and discovered that your child was not with you?
5. In verse 48, Mary chastises Jesus for staying behind. Was she right in doing this? How might you have responded differently?
6. Read Jesus' response in verse 49. Do you think his response was one of frustration or shock at his parents' lack of understanding? Why?
7. The "must be" of Jesus' response could really be translated as "it is necessary" that Jesus be in the Temple. Why would it be necessary for Jesus to be in the Temple?
8. This passage displays for us the beginning of the tension that will constantly exist in Jesus' life. It is the tension between his God-given mission and what the world would have him become. How does Jesus deal with this tension in the text? How does Mary deal with this tension?
9. Have you ever experienced this same tension between the call of God in your life and someone else's expectations of you? If so, how have you handled it? Have you ever been the one placing this tension on someone else? How did you resolve the tension?

Works Cited

Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997).

I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978).

We are told that the traveling party sets out from Jerusalem to Nazareth, but Jesus is not with them. We are not immediately told why Jesus stayed or what he was doing; we are told that he remained and that his parents did not know it. Before we get too rough on Mary and Joseph, who, after all, have been tasked with ensuring that the Savior of the world makes it to adulthood, we need to realize that it is possible that Mary and Joseph believed that Jesus was with relatives or close friends for the day.

On the first day of travel from Jerusalem, they might have noticed he was not there. The text suggests that they began checking with friends and relatives during the journey but could not be sure he was not with the traveling party until they made camp that first night. At this point, they decided to travel back to Jerusalem. Where else could he be?

They Were Amazed: 2:46-47

When they arrive in Jerusalem, they spend some time looking for him. On the third day of looking (day one: travel from Jerusalem, day two: travel to Jerusalem, day three: looking in Jerusalem), they find him in the temple. There he was, sitting among the teachers of the Law, soaking up their teaching and asking his questions. The educational model used by teachers on that day was very dialogical. Teachers would have used questions posed by their students as a springboard for significant teaching.

Jesus was not just participating in the discussion as others might have been. Jesus amazed all who heard him with his understanding of the Law and the answers he gave. The Greek word, which both the NRSV and the NIV translate as "asking them questions," can imply that Jesus was asking questions that probed and were intended to illicit firm decisions from the Rabbi (Marshall, 127). Indeed, Jesus has grown in wisdom and maturity and will grow even more by the time we meet him as an adult in chapter 3.

Why Have You Treated Us Like This? 2:48-51

Finally, Mary and Joseph discover Jesus in the Temple. Those who are parents are sure to understand Mary's frustration. I'm sure Mary and Joseph experienced relief, anger, and frustration upon finding Jesus. I'm also sure many parents have uttered Mary's words in verse 48, "Child, why have you treated us like this?" Even parents of young children are often amazed and confounded by their children's behavior. Parents of adolescents surely know how Mary feels.

Mary wants to know why Jesus would do such a thing—why would he cause his parents such great anxiety? This question sets up the tension in the text. Certainly, Mary and Joseph have done a great job raising Jesus. They have provided him with an environment where he can grow and mature as a person of learning and faith. They are a pious family that values the story and practices of their faith. Mary's reference to Joseph as Jesus' father also highlights the tension in the text.

Tension is normal in adolescents' lives. It is the tension of belonging to two different worlds. For normal, non-Son of God teenagers, tension exists in finding one's own identity apart from the one created for them by their parents. The tension in this text is not normal but between the pious life of his human family and the call of his heavenly Father.

Jesus' response to his mother highlights this tension, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Two things need to be noted here. First, I do not believe that Jesus' response is one of frustration or disappointment at his mother's rebuke. Rather, Jesus' response is one of surprise and astonishment. "Surely," Jesus wonders, "you should know that this is where I need to be!" The Greek phrase translated here by the NRSV as "must be" and as "had to be" in the NIV carries with it the sense of necessity. Jesus is saying that "it is necessary" for me to be in my Father's house." This phrase, "it is necessary" in Greek, is employed regularly throughout Luke and Acts to indicate what must take place so that God's plan of salvation can take place (Green, 156). In other words, Jesus is telling his mother that for God to do all that needs to take place so that salvation can come to the whole world, he must be in that place. Mary, for her part, fails to understand what Jesus is saying. She will, however, continue to wonder at what her son says and does.

Second, Jesus does not negate the wonderful formation that he has received at the hands of his human family. He is, however, declaring, even at the age of twelve years old, which "father" must take prominence in his life. Jesus declares that his Father is the God of the Temple, the same God who brought Israel out of Egypt and established them as God's people in the Promised Land. Jesus' first recorded words in the Gospel of Luke establish who Jesus is and to whom he belongs.

So What?

We are constantly under the same tension as Jesus in this passage. There is always a pull from one side, be it our family, our friends, or the culture to which we belong, that seeks our allegiance. On the other side, our heavenly Father calls us to posture ourselves so we can do his will. Sometimes, we are the ones caught in the tension; other times, we are the ones causing it.

We may not know that we are placing this tension on our children. I was lucky. The call of God in my life to become a minister of the Gospel did not put me at odds with my family. They fully supported my call, sacrificing financially so that I might receive the proper education and training. I wonder, though, as parents and friends of children, teens, and young adults, if we are willing always to support our children when they express God's call on their lives. It doesn't have to be a call to full-time ministry; it may be a call to enter a helping profession that won't earn them the kind of money we think they should make, but that actively places them in a position to bear witness to the Kingdom of God.

If we were Mary, would we have been so supportive of Jesus' call in life? Would we have actively worked against him to ensure he can live a long and safe life?

If we raise our children right with the help of our church family through the power of the Holy Spirit, they will need to decide where their ultimate allegiance lies. For some, God will call them to do things that we would rather not have them do. We should rejoice when this happens because it means we have helped them into a posture that has allowed them to hear the voice of God. We should also release them into the very capable hands of God even when it is unclear that doing so will bring them harm.

Discussion Questions

Read the text aloud. Then, read the text to yourself quietly. Read it slowly, as if you were very unfamiliar with the story.

1. What do you think Luke means in verse 40 when he says that Jesus "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him."
2. What is the Passover Festival, and why was it an important celebration for the Jewish people?