

God created the family (of every variation). God cares about every family. God relates to us as His family. God entrusted Jesus to be raised in a family. God is all about relationships and the Bible has much to say about them. We consider children today, marriage next week, parenting on Mother's Day, then Youth Sunday, Memorial Day weekend on memories, Pentecost on new beginnings, and Graduation Sunday on the generations. Through all of these, I want us to be sensitive to those in our midst who have family hurts...childlessness, divorce, estrangement, abuse, abandonment...family hurts and family issues have been with us since Adam & Eve...and Cain & Abel. The Good News throughout this series is that as Christians we know God loves us as his own and that God our Father blesses, heals, values, and helps us in every possible way.

“Children are a blessing from God” says Psalm 127:3. Children are our starting point because we all start out as children - and to God we will always be His children. Every child needs to know that he or she is a blessing...a gift from God...valuable, wanted, and loved. This is what God wants every child to know...and for every one of His children to know. Martin Luther used to look into a mirror every morning and say “You are a child of God...and there is nothing that anybody can say to you or do to you that will change that fact!” Our identity and our value is established by God. I love the way 1 John 3:1 puts it: **“How great the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”** Amazing. As God's family, we are a church family - and we are god-parents to every child in our congregation. We need to view every child – and every person – as a blessing from God.

Jesus is our example in all things, so let's take a look at his life. We don't know much about Jesus' growing up, but what we know – or understand – is interesting, fun, and helpful.

Luke 2:5-7 **“(Joseph) went to (Bethlehem) to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was not room for them in the inn.”**

Jesus was born in a conquered country. Jesus was born out of wedlock. Jesus was born into poverty. Jesus was born to 2 young people just starting out. But Joseph and Mary loved God. Joseph and Mary were honorable, determined, law-abiding Jewish people. Joseph and Mary loved each other. And Joseph and Mary knew God had blessed them with this baby. The birth of Jesus was full of joy and excitement. And though the world had no room for him, Jesus was born into the arms of a loving family.

It is not the number of adults present that make a family – or even their official relationship – it's the love and commitment that is present. The love between Jesus and his mother remained throughout his life until he entrusted her to his best friend John to care for her as his own mother. Loving and trusting parents prepares us to love and trust our Father in heaven.

Luke 2:19, 33 **“Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart...The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.”**

Jesus was born with high hopes and great joy. The parents of Jesus remembered and treasured it all. All that Mary and Joseph were told about Jesus began to take shape in how they raised him. They saw his promise and they knew God's promises about Jesus. I like the fact that they knew this was God's child. Every parent needs to realize that God entrusts these children to us. We don't own them...they belong to God...the Lord and Giver of Life.

Do you ever look back at your childhood pictures? Do you ever see the person you are now in those pictures? What dreams, hopes, and aspirations do you have for your children? Jesus taught that the prayer God hears is the faithful prayer of a mother for her child. Jesus had parents who delighted in him – and dreamed a future for him.

Luke 2:39-40 **“When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.”**

Jesus was raised with roots and wings. Jesus was blessed to have church-going, Bible-reading, God-fearing parents who raised their son Jesus and his siblings in their hometown. Jesus knew where he was from and to whom he belonged. He was raised with values and in community...no wonder Jesus thrived...physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Roots...that sense of belonging...to a place, to a people, to a family, to our God. That foundation and security gives children the tools they need to become the individuals God created them to be. This is why God chose Joseph and Mary for Jesus...and this is how God's grace comes upon us. When I was interviewing here 23 years ago, my prayer was for a hometown for my family and for a spiritual community where we could thrive. God answered that prayer and I pray for God to answer that prayer for you also. Roots and wings give us identity.

Luke 2:(41-48)49-51 **“Why were you searching for me?’ (Jesus) asked (his parents). ‘Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?’ But (his parents) did not understand what (Jesus) was saying to them.”**

Jesus was a teenager. I love this passage and that God inspired the Gospel writers to record it for us. Yearly, Jesus and his family and their extended family caravanned to Jerusalem for Passover. (By the way, it appears that the extended family of Jesus would have been present in Jerusalem during the events of Holy Week and the first Easter!)

Jesus was not talking back to his parents here (though this response would have gotten me into a heap of trouble!) I think Jesus was so focused on God and the things of God – that it should have been obvious to his parents where he was. We naturally gravitate to what fascinates us...and Jesus loved his Father in heaven...and it showed. His parents were... parents! They assumed he was with relatives...and when they discover he isn't they look high and low for him...3 days they look...of course, they are anxious. And though I do not think Jesus back talked, I do think that Jesus was a pretty typical teenager...oblivious and incomprehensible to his parents.

This is a natural and necessary stage of growing up. It's called differentiation – or coming into your own...not separating yet, but discovering who you are apart from others.

Luke 2:52 **“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and (people).”**

Jesus grew up. This is the goal of parenting. Jesus didn't just grow older...Jesus grew up. Jesus grew wiser. Jesus grew in character. Jesus grew in his relationship with God his Father in Heaven. And Jesus grew in his positive relationships with the people around him.

Raising children to adults with wisdom, character, and love...a blessing to all.