

July 12 Lesson 6 (NIV)

THE BOY JESUS

DEVOTIONAL READING: Leviticus 12:1-8; Numbers 3:11-13

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15; Luke 2:39-52

ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 7B

¹ There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens.

.....
^{7b} A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.

LUKE 2:39-52

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

⁴¹ Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ 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. ⁴⁸ 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."

⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

KEY VERSE

The child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him. —Luke 2:40

MANY FACES OF WISDOM

Unit 2: Wisdom in the Gospels

LESSONS 5–8

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Raising a Child Star
- B. Lesson Context: Ecclesiastes
- C. Lesson Context: Luke
- I. Wisdom in Seasons (ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 7b)
 - A. In All Things (v. 1)
There's a Reason for a Season
 - B. In Speech (v. 7b)
- II. Wisdom in Exceptions (LUKE 2:39–52)
 - A. Ordinary Holiday (vv. 39–42)
 - B. Disrupted Travel (vv. 43–48)
Book Smart
 - C. Precocious Saying (vv. 49, 50)
 - D. Return to Ordinary (vv. 51, 52)

Conclusion

- A. Defying Expectations
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

bar mitzvah (*Hebrew*)bahr mihtz-vaw.

EcclesiastesIk-leez-ee-as-teez.

GalileeGal-uh-lee.

Mishnah (*Hebrew*)Mihsh-naw.

NazarethNaz-uh-reth.

SimeonSim-ee-un.

Introduction

A. Raising a Child Star

Ever since Shirley Temple (1928–2014) appeared in movies as a child, preteen actors have been a feature of popular entertainment. Children with exceptional talent consistently attract large audiences eager to be amazed at youngsters who can outperform adults.

Imagine being the adult who nurtures and guards such a child. It might seem that all the usual principles of parenting have to be ignored so that the child’s full potential can be realized. Friends? School? Play? Discipline? There is no time for such matters when practice and performances beckon. How can caring parents ensure that the child’s life is as “normal” as possible in the pressures of the limelight? The sad stories of many child stars suggest that their path to adulthood is not easy. Today’s text narrates a never-to-be-repeated first-century version of this dilemma.

B. Lesson Context: Ecclesiastes

As one of the Old Testament books known as wisdom literature, Ecclesiastes explores the accumulated wisdom of its time and place. In so doing, it asks whether life has meaning. Its writer, “the Teacher” (Ecclesiastes 1:1), has long been identified as King Solomon. He alternates between principles of wise living and his own discouraged impression that “all of it is meaningless” (2:17). But in the end he concludes that the purpose of human life is to remember the Creator before our lives slip away from us (12:1). Therefore one must read the entirety of the book to glean the ultimate truth of it.

C. Lesson Context: Luke

Of the four Gospels, only Matthew and Luke give stories of Jesus’ birth, and only Luke includes a story from Jesus’ childhood. It comes just after the accounts of the announcement and birth of both John the Baptist and Jesus.

Luke portrays both births as vital parts of God’s plan, closely linked to one another as the two men’s ministries later would be linked. Even so, Jesus’ uniqueness is evident from the beginning (Luke 1:32, 35; 2:11). As his story unfolds, we see that Jesus is greater than all others because he has the nature and authority of God himself (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:6). In Jesus, God entered the world to rescue his people (John 1:1, 9–14).

How we understand something so unusual, something that is fundamentally different from every other thing, is answered by today’s text.

I. Wisdom in Seasons

(ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 7b)

A. In All Things (v. 1)

1. There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

This verse introduces a meditation on the regularity of life (see all of Ecclesiastes 3:1–8). This introduction takes a form characteristic of Hebrew poetry: parallelism (see lesson 2). *Everything* and *every activity* are parallel, as are *time* and *season*. The writer considers how life begins, develops, and ends in largely consistent cycles. The wise person will understand those cycles and live in harmony with them. Since God created the emotions that attend these rhythms of life, those emotions should not be suppressed. Wise people accept even the burdensome or painful realities that we cannot change.

B. In Speech (v. 7b)

7b. A time to be silent and a time to speak.

The human capacity for communication is one of many things subject to regular patterns. We have many occasions *to speak* to one another, but no less important are occasions when speech is unnecessary, unwanted, or even harmful. In sickness or sadness, being *silent* may be more meaningful than speaking. In loving companionship, time spent in silence can be reassuring (compare Job 2:13; 13:5; 16:2, 3; etc.). And when standing before those who are older and wiser, we do well to listen silently.

II. Wisdom in Exceptions

(LUKE 2:39–52)

A. Ordinary Holiday (vv. 39–42)

39. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

This verse picks up just after the small family's journey to Jerusalem to dedicate Jesus to the Lord (Luke 2:22–24). Jesus' parents have been careful to observe all that *the Law* requires for a firstborn child (example: 2:21). In the 12 years since Jesus' birth (2:42, below), Mary and Joseph undoubtedly continued the ordinary rhythms of life. These include raising their firstborn and their other children in *Nazareth* (Matthew 2:23; 13:55, 56; see lesson 7).

40. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

We might compare and contrast Luke's depiction of Jesus' physical and spiritual growth with those of the prophet Samuel and Jesus' own cousin John the Baptist. Both of the latter seem to have developed in ways out of the ordinary (1 Samuel 2:26; Luke 1:80). But their growth in *wisdom* is not highlighted as it is with Jesus (also Luke 2:52, below). Jesus' experience of God's *grace* may compare with Samuel's "favor with the Lord" (again, 1 Samuel 2:26).

41. Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover.

As they had faithfully observed the laws regarding Jesus' dedication, *Jesus' parents* do so again throughout his life by traveling *every year* from their home *to Jerusalem* for *Passover*. That is the annual *festival* given to Israel by God to celebrate Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 12:1–28). This observance is part of the family's annual experience, along with thousands of other pilgrims. Because the temple was established in Jerusalem, the customary practice is for all faithful Israelites who can do so to go to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover (Deuteronomy 16:1–8; 2 Chronicles 6:4–6; Luke 22:8).

42. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.

At the age of *twelve*, Jesus is not yet part of the adult world. But he is old enough no longer to be considered just a child. The Jewish custom of the bar mitzvah (meaning "one who is responsible for performing the commandments") to mark the passage to adulthood was not yet developed in Jesus' time. But records from the second century AD, such as the Mishnah, suggest that 13 was generally considered the age when a boy became a man.

B. Disrupted Travel (vv. 43–48)

43. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.

The Passover consists of an evening feast—the Passover proper—followed by seven *days* of additional celebration—the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:5, 6). Mary and *Joseph*, doubtless with thousands of other travelers, begin their journey home the next day. But in an extraordinary act for a 12-year-old, *Jesus stays behind in Jerusalem*, the center of Israel’s devotion to God. Why he has done so is not immediately known (see Luke 2:46, below).

44. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.

The road north from Jerusalem, crowded with pilgrims going home to Galilee, is likely a chaotic, confusing place. Entire communities travel together, alleviating parents of specific responsibilities for older children because of the safety of their caravan. Mary and Joseph may be traveling with their respective friends, not as a couple or family, thus leaving each to assume that Jesus is with the other.

Only at the end of the day, when they make camp for the night, do the parents discover that their eldest son is not with either of them! Their first thought is that he is with other *relatives and friends*. We can imagine the fear and confusion the parents experience as they ask everyone about Jesus and receive no answers regarding his whereabouts.

45. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

The parents have no choice but to return *to Jerusalem*. Though they surely hurry, the day-long journey back leaves no time before dark to look for the missing boy.

46. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

We cannot tell whether the *three days* include the first day of journeying away from Jerusalem. But this time frame does suggest at least two very difficult nights while Joseph and Mary do not know where their son Jesus is. These three days also foreshadow the three days between Jesus’ death and resurrection (Luke 24:7).

When they find Jesus, he is *in the temple courts* where Simeon and Anna had identified him 12 years before as God’s promised king (Luke 2:25–38). The temple is a magnificent structure, with a huge outer court surrounded by shaded porticoes. There people can meet for teaching and discussion of God’s sacred law.

One group this particular day includes Jesus, who interacts with important *teachers* of the Scriptures (see Hebrews 5:12). The reader readily assumes that Jesus is not asking childish *questions*, which can be answered by expert teachers quickly, not requiring lengthy conversation.

47. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

The picture is clearly that of Jesus talking deeply with experts in Israel’s Scriptures. A boy of 12 doing such a thing reveals an impressive interest in God’s Word. Adult experts engaging the questions from a boy over several days signals the youngster’s extraordinary insight.

Many Jewish boys Jesus’ age are in the process of learning the text of the law by heart. Consideration of the meaning of the law often comes after this exercise. As a resident of an insignificant town in Galilee and a member of a relatively poor family, Jesus likely doesn’t have many resources for his own education. Yet Jesus already has an exceptional *understanding* of the law, as evidenced by his thoughtful, informed *answers*. His grasp of God’s Word apparently

surpasses greatly his youthfulness. His answers will astound others even more so during his adulthood (see Matthew 7:28).

48. “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.”

The parents’ amazement at first is not that Jesus is able to talk on an expert level with teachers of the law. Rather, it is that Jesus behaves in such an unconventional way, leaving them in great fear. They have been without their son for three days, not knowing whether they would see him alive again. Jesus’ mother can imagine no possible justification for her son’s having acted as he has done in causing them the pain they have experienced.

C. Precocious Saying (vv. 49, 50)

49. “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”

Jesus’ response implies that his parents should have known exactly where he was when he was not with them: he was engaged with the things of God. The expression translated *had to be* in this verse is one that Luke often uses to indicate things that occur because of the fulfilling of God’s purpose (elsewhere translated “must”; examples: Luke 4:43; 9:22; 13:33). As “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of ... Israel” (2:32), Jesus engages the greatest of his contemporaries to consider the true implications of God’s Word. These conversations are a preview of his later disputes with the religious leaders and his final conflict with the temple authorities (22:52–23:25).

Notably, Jesus refers to God as his *Father* in response to the implications from his mother’s use of the word “father.” Though it was not common for Jews in those days to call God “Father,” the concept that God is the Father of Israel is important in the Scriptures (example: Deuteronomy 32:6).

Consequently, God can be called “our Father,” though generally such an address is considered to be too familiar. Even so, Jesus says *in my Father’s house* (compare John 2:16). This expresses Jesus’ awareness of his (Jesus’) unique, divine identity even at this young age. He undoubtedly knows the Old Testament Scriptures in which God refers to his promised king as his “son” (2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 17:13; compare Psalm 2:7). He surely is also aware that the angel Gabriel had told Mary that Jesus would be God’s Son (Luke 1:32, 35).

Further, Jesus expresses no surprise that his role in God’s plan will cause distress to those who love him. Simeon had warned Jesus’ mother that “a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:35). Jesus’ three day absence from his parents ends in a joyous but perplexing reunion.

This is only the first time that Jesus’ vocation will cause his mother grief. Her grief will be all the greater when Jesus surrenders to death (John 19:25). In the wisdom of God, the solution to human brokenness is for the divine Son of God to take the punishment for humanity on himself.

The word *house* translates a phrase that is very broad in the original language. In context, it can refer to anything associated with God. Whatever Jesus does, he does as the work of God (John 5:19). This contradicts the notion that Joseph is the father with whom he should most identify (Luke 3:23; 4:22). Although Jesus is adopted by Joseph and brought up in his house (Matthew 1:25), Jesus’ work of his Father does not refer to carpentry (13:55); it refers to salvation.

50. But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Mary and Joseph know well the angelic and prophetic words spoken to describe their uniquely born son (example: Matthew 1:18–23). Yet the fulfillment of those prophecies must wait, as ordinary life demands attention. To outward appearances, Jesus is a child like any other. We safely assume that his family life mirrors that of most others in first-century Israel. That Jesus should do something so unconventional makes no sense at the time. Thus Jesus' parents cannot understand the significance of what he declares.

This is the first of many occasions when Jesus challenges his listeners with sayings they don't immediately comprehend (examples: Mark 4:1–20; 9:32). In Jesus, God is doing a work unlike anything that people expect (compare Matthew 16:15–23). God's wisdom demands that human values be turned upside down (Matthew 16:24–27; 1 Corinthians 1:18–29). His wisdom requires the almighty Son of God to take on human flesh and suffer a tortuous death to reconcile God with unworthy people (Isaiah 53; Philippians 2:6–11; 1 Peter 2:21–25). Jesus' wisdom and knowledge of God's plans challenge everything that people believe. Every difficult word that Jesus speaks provokes the listener to ponder in order to understand.

D. Return to Ordinary (vv. 51, 52)

51a. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

The whole family now returns to their home in *Nazareth*. The expression *went down* is used because Jerusalem is at the summit of the Judean highlands; all roads leading away from it go down in elevation. Until his ministry begins when he is "about thirty years old" (Luke 3:23), Jesus apparently remains *obedient* to his parents in some sense. This implies not acting in unexpected ways as he has on this occasion.

51b. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

Even though Mary does not immediately understand the implications of what has just happened, she remembers this event and ponders its meaning. She reacted the same way regarding the events of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:19). These unexpected, unique episodes can be understood only on the other side of Jesus' death and resurrection, when the wisdom of God revealed in Jesus comes to its unexpected, victorious climax (24:1–7, 25–35, 44–49; etc.). We can imagine that Mary tells these stories over and over to fellow believers in the early years of the church.

52. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Jesus' growth *in wisdom* is again noted (compare Luke 2:40, above). Human approval is fickle; approval by God endures (3:22; etc.). God's wisdom, on display in the boy Jesus, will have the final word.

Conclusion

A. Defying Expectations

How do we comprehend something that is fundamentally different from every other thing with which we have experience? Ecclesiastes speaks of the regularity of life's cycles, showing the wisdom of understanding circumstances. Luke shows Jesus' uniqueness in how Jesus defied the conventional wisdom of those cycles as he spoke in the temple at age 12. But Jesus' words come to us as the first divine revelation from his lips at the time the uniqueness of his identity began to build.

As people called into fellowship with Jesus, Christians are to follow God's purpose in mundane, daily ways—ways that can give way suddenly to our saying and doing the unexpected. For us to expect to do only and always the unusual is not God's way. Even so, God's will can run counter to conventional expectations on many occasions. Expect the world to scold us for defying its expectations as we continue to follow in the surprising direction of Jesus' footsteps.

B. Prayer

Father, challenge us to grow in your wisdom as Jesus grew. In his name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Being about our heavenly Father's business is our task—no matter what.¹
