

“What Have Your Children Taught You?”

Luke 2:41-52

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Fathers' Day

I thought Jackie had him. She thought I had him. When we got home, we realized neither of us had him. We left our three-year-old son, Jason, at church after a Sunday morning service. I drove back to church and found him curled up asleep on a pew, oblivious to the fact that his parents went home without him.

Finding Jason was much easier for me than it was for Mary and Joseph after they left Jesus at the temple. They searched for three days until they found him. That had to be a harrowing experience.

Why did they get separated from him, anyway? People traveled in caravans on their way home from the celebration of Passover. Usually, the women started the journey earlier in the day than the men because they traveled more slowly. In the evening, the men would catch up with the women and families would be reunited. Mary assumed that Jesus was with Joseph. After all, he was twelve and it was time for him to travel with the men not the women and children. Joseph, on the other hand, assumed that he had gone with Mary and left earlier in the day. To their dismay, he was no where to be found when families reunited at the end of a long day's journey.

This started a three-day search for him that ended at the temple where they found Jesus dialoguing with the religious leaders. He was listening to the rabbis and asking them questions. As Luke wrote, *“Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and at his answers”* Luke 2:47. I have no doubt that Jesus was both a student and a teacher that day.

Of course, Mary and Joseph were relieved to find him but also frustrated over the fact that he had not joined the caravan going home. His reply to them about this lapse gave Mary something else to ponder when he said, *“Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house (or as the KJV translates this portion, 'about my Father's business')?”* Luke 2:49.

Two questions emerge this morning from this story. **I wonder what Jesus taught these rabbis and his parents that day?** This leads to the second question. **What have your children taught you?**

I have a theory that I want to share with you today. I believe our children teach us more than our parents. This is not to say that our parents did not teach us. Certainly they did and we are deeply indebted to them for their instruction. However, we also learn a lot about God, life and ourselves through our children. I know I have.

So, let me begin with Jesus. What do you think he taught his parents the day he was found in the temple?

I would be willing to say that he taught them many things and they had time to think about them on their journey back home. Perhaps the first lesson they learned was that they must never assume anything. Mistakes are made when communication doesn't flow.

There were some deeper spiritual lessons learned that day, too. Children have a place in God's Kingdom. As a matter of fact, Mary and Joseph would be quick to tell us they learned that God can use children to do His work. He does not have to wait until they are adults. He used Jesus when he was only twelve and He can use our sons and daughters at that age or younger. This means our children need to be fed spiritually and listened to carefully.

Have you read any of Mattie Stepanek's writings? He's the twelve-year old author that struggles with a rare form of muscular dystrophy. He has been writing poems, essays and short stories since he was three. He is a wonderful example of how God uses children in His kingdom's work. In 1999, he won the Melinda A. Lawrence International Book Award for “most

inspirational work.” Millions of people have been touched by his writings in [Heartsongs](#), [Journey Through Heartsongs](#), [Celebrate Through Heartsongs](#) and [Loving Through Heartsongs](#).

One of my favorite poems that he has written is titled, “**Future Reminiscing.**”

It is good
To have a past
That is pleasant
To reflect upon.
Take care
To create
Such a gift
For your future.

I also like “**Rolter’s Wisdom.**”

You may be tall,
I may be small,
But inside...
We are the same
Length of strength.

What have your children taught you? Recently, I received an email titled, “Things I’ve Learned from my Children.” It was written by a mother in Austin, Texas. I’ll share a few.

She writes, “I’ve learned that:
A ceiling fan can hit a baseball a long way.
Even double pane windows cannot stop a baseball hit by a fan.
When you hear the toilet flush and the words, “uh-oh,” it is too late.
Brake fluid mixed with bleach makes smoke and lots of it.
No matter how much Jell-O you put in a swimming pool, you still can’t walk on water.
Pool filters do not like Jell-O.
VCRs do not eject peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.
Garbage bags do not make good parachutes.
Marbles in a gas tank make a lot of noise when driving.
Always look in the oven before turning it on. Toys are not meant to be cooked.
The spin cycle on the washing machine does not make earthworms dizzy.
It does, however, make cats dizzy.
Cats throw up twice their body weight when dizzy.
The fire department in Austin, Texas has a five-minute response time.

What have your children taught you? I’ve given this a lot of thought this week and want to share with you some things I have learned from my children. My three children are young adults, 23, 25, and 28. Two are married. All three are still teaching me.

My children taught me how much my parents loved me. I never knew how much my parents loved me until I had children. I recall the day I made this connection and was overwhelmed by the fact that someone could love me as much as I loved my children. I was deeply moved by the fact that my parents loved me unconditionally and would until they died.

My children taught me how much God loves me. I never understood the atonement until I had children. I realize now that parenting and sacrifices go together. There is nothing I would be unwilling to do for my children if it would help them. Laying down my life would be included on that list. John 3:16 has taken on new meaning for me since having children.

When I think, however, that God allowed His son to die to save me, I am overwhelmed. There are no words to describe this level of love. It is beyond comprehension. Each time I think of this, I recall the words of the evangelist that said, “I would not give my son on his worst day for you on your best day.” This is precisely what God did, though, and since I have had children, I have stood amazed in His presence.

My children taught me that I am not God. They were not very old before I realized my limitations. The first time I could not meet their needs, answer their questions, take away their pain or accompany them on a frightening adventure, it hurt me. I was reminded of my humanity and need for God to be with them and me.

My children taught me that the greatest joy and pain I would experience in life would revolve around them. I read recently that you are only as happy as your unhappiest child. I have discovered this to be true. Once you have children, you always have children regardless of their age or yours. Their experiences can take you to the highest heights or lowest depths you will experience in this world.

My children taught me that there is a fine line between guiding and controlling and listening determines the difference. When I talked more than I listened, I tried to control them. When I listened to them more than I talked, I helped them make wise decisions. I wish I had listened more.

They taught me there is a thin line between helping and hurting and rescuing determines that difference. When I let them own their problems and solve them, I helped them. When I took their problems away from them and took matters into my own hands, I hurt them.

Perhaps you have heard the story of the boy that tried to help a butterfly break out of its cocoon by carefully cutting a hole in the cocoon so the butterfly would not have to struggle. He succeeded in freeing the butterfly and eliminating his struggle, but he hastened the death of the butterfly by not allowing it to strengthen its wings through the struggle to be liberated. It is through that struggle that the butterfly prepares its wings for flight. Without that struggle, the butterfly is doomed to an early death because its wings are limp and lifeless. Likewise, when I took away my childrens' struggles, I robbed them of opportunities to grow.

My children taught me that what people need more than anything is encouraging. It was their greatest need. They needed to know that I believed in them even when they did not believe in themselves. They needed to know that I loved them when they did not love themselves because of what they had done. They needed to know that no mistake or missed opportunity would have the final word in their lives. This is because the most encouraging word in our language is hope. It is the flip side of love. Can you think of anyone that does not need to know these things? I cannot.

These are merely a portion of the things my children have taught me and by no means are the lessons over. As you know, in a couple of weeks, I'll be a grandparent. That three-year-old boy that we left at church years ago is now twenty-eight and he and his wife, Emily, are expecting their first child. The lessons will keep coming, won't they? I wonder what my grandchildren will teach me.

What have your children taught you? Why not write it down, let them know and thank them for being such good teachers. I'm sure Mary and Joseph thanked Jesus for all he taught them about God, life and themselves. I am also confident that meant a lot to him.