

DCF:

It seems every child sooner or later enters the “I want to grow taller” phase. Sometimes it comes when they realize they’re the shortest person in their class. Other times it happens when they go out for a sport. They think “If I was taller, heavier or stronger, life would be better.” So, they ask their parents for vitamins or some other supplement to help them grow.

But what really helps a person to grow? Our height is determined by our genes, so our size is generally maximized when we eat right and get the nutrients that our bodies need to grow. Once we reach our physical limits, that’s it. We don’t grow any more.

It’s a little different when it comes to our spiritual maturity. We can continue to grow in our faith no matter how strong or deep it becomes. **“HOW CAN I GROW?”** How can I grow in my faith? Today Jesus shows us. We grow in our faith when we listen and ask, when we are obedient to the will of God.

### ***Part One: Listen and ask***

Today’s story of Jesus in the temple is a familiar one to many of us. It’s the only picture we have of Him between His birth and His entry into the public ministry when He was in His 30’s. But it gives us a good idea of how He conducted His life here on earth. Until the age of 12, children stayed at home while dad went and fulfilled the ceremonial obligations of worship on this special occasion. So, this was the first time that Jesus went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover.

Jesus’ earthly parents certainly set a good example for Him, didn’t they? Mary didn’t have to go along - that wasn’t required. She went because she too wanted to honor God with her presence. They stayed for the entire feast - didn’t cut out early because they were tired or bored. At the end of the feast, the entire group of relatives and neighbors left for home. ***“Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.”*** They didn’t find him, so they went back to Jerusalem and searched for him, finding him at last at the temple.

What had Jesus been doing all that time? Playing games, or getting into trouble? No. Jesus wasn’t goofing off. He had spent His time actively pursuing God’s will. He was increasing His knowledge of God and His understanding of God’s will. You see, Jesus wasn’t born with a complete and total understanding of God’s will. No, He needed to “grow in wisdom and stature,” just like us.

It is instructive to see Jesus intently studying the Scriptures. Here in Jerusalem you had the best and the brightest scholars, the doctors of theology, the cream of the intellectual crop. Here in Jerusalem you had scholars who did nothing else than study God’s Word. Quite a change from Nazareth!

Joseph and Mary found Jesus in the midst of these scholars listening and asking questions. He wasn’t sitting in a desk passively listening to some lecture. He was engaged in conversation about His Father’s business. He wanted to know. He wanted details and explanations.

It seems that Jesus was surprised that His earthly parents were searching for Him. Really, where else would He have been? Did Mary assume that Jesus would have known about their concern, because He was God and God ought to know these things? Jesus’ reply to her question gently points them to the truth. “Why were you looking all over for me? Wouldn’t the temple be the obvious place to start?” Jesus knew what His Father’s business was. It was that we all grow in the grace and understanding of the will of God, and that’s exactly what He was doing. He was listening and asking, not only for Himself, but for us. You see, Jesus came to this earth not only to suffer and die for our sins, but to craft a perfect life, to do all those things that God requires of us. And one of those requirements is to grow in our knowledge of the Lord.

If we want to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord, we need to do what Jesus did. We need to listen and ask as we study His Word. We grow as we listen. As we listen to sermons and Bible class presentations. We grow as we listen to Him speaking to us in our daily Bible reading. And, we grow as we ask questions. We ask in our prayers that God would open our eyes to understand His Word deeper and more fully. We also grow as we ask in Bible class, trying to clarify a thought that has just popped into our hearts. Why do we listen and ask? Because we want to grow. We want to know more about the Lord who loves us and forgives us of all our sins.

Oh, if all Christians had that Christ-like attitude! How lively our classes would be! How intense our worship would become! But sadly, how often doesn't our sin show itself. How often do we zone out in worship? How often do we skip Bible class or reading the Word because we don't want to engage our brain and listen and ask. How often do we fail to go and grow? And yes, in the decision not be obedient to the other commands of our Lord.

### ***Part Two: Be obedient***

We have been disobedient in every area of our lives. Oh yes we have! So often we do what God has commanded us not to do. We sometimes lie, or cheat or become jealous. We sometimes think the worst of another human being. When we do anything that God forbids us to do, we sin. Plus, we are disobedient if we don't do the things He commands us to do. When we don't worship with our whole heart. When we don't love our neighbor as ourselves. When we don't love and honor our marriage partners totally.

In today's story we see Jesus starting to craft that perfect life for us that will fill in the holes of our disobedience, our failure to do all things perfectly. He obeyed His earthly parents at all times, doing what they told him to do. These words of Jesus are not an attempt to "get away" with something by splitting hairs or arguing with Joseph and Mary. No, He obeyed them perfectly. He was obedient to them.

With this perfect obedience, He crafted a life that would save us. He is our Substitute, our stand in before God when it comes to perfection. Remember, God's command is to be perfect as He is perfect. God will allow nothing imperfect to enter heaven, so we need not only to be washed clean of any sin that we have committed, but also we must have a perfect life. That life has been crafted and earned by Jesus while He was here on this earth. That perfect life is credited to whoever believes and trusts in Jesus Christ. His perfect life is our robe of righteousness that covers our imperfect life.

That's what Jesus was doing for all those years here on earth. We don't have any other details than this story, but it shows us what He was accomplishing. Listen to that last verse: ***"And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."*** He found favor with men because He was trustworthy, honest and kind. He found favor with God because He was building a perfect life for us. That's what God wanted. That's what Jesus was doing. That's what found favor with God.

What a great example for us to follow! We grow in our faith as we listen, ask and are obedient. When we know what God wants, repent of our sins, believe in the forgiveness Jesus earned for us, and then in thanks strive to live according to His commands, God is pleased. You see, God's commands aren't meant to keep us from having "fun." Oh, no! They're meant to first of all show us our sin and lead us to repentance. But they are also meant to guide us in our daily lives. They're meant to keep us safe from evil and keep us close to our loving Lord. They're meant to help us grow in our walk with God. They're meant to help us grow.

So, if you want to grow, use the right supplements! Use the will of God first of all to see where you've gone wrong. But then use the will of God to see where you can live right. It reminds me of a video that a golf pro will take of your swing. He'll point out all the things you do wrong, but then he'll often show you a video of a real pro. Why? So he can show you how to do things right. Take a look at Jesus' life, and learn. Take a look at the Word of God and grow. Don't just skim the surface of the Scriptures, but listen, ask and be obedient to what you read and learn. That's how you can grow.

Maybe you've stopped growing physically. Maybe you're as tall as you're going to get. If so, there's nothing you can do to change that. That's genetically set. But you don't need to stop growing spiritually. No matter how strong your faith is, you can still grow. How? It's simple, isn't it? Just listen and ask, and be obedient to the will of God.

If you do, you'll grow. God guarantees it.

AMEN