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| [How God Became a Man: What Jesus Did for Thirty Years](http://desiringgod.cmail20.com/t/j-l-urlidtl-vuttjudiu-t/)David Mathis / December 7, 2016How God Became a ManIt is striking how little we know about most of Jesus’s life on earth. Between the events surrounding his celebrated birth and the beginning of his public ministry when he was “about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23), very few details have survived. Given the influence and impact of his life, humanly speaking, we might find it surprising that so little about his childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood is available — especially with the interest his followers, who worshiped him as God, took in his life. That is, unless, divinely speaking, this is precisely how God would have it. After the birth story, the first Gospel tells us about the visit from magi, pagan astrologers from the east (Matthew 2:1–12), the family’s flight to Egypt for haven (Matthew 2:13–18), and their eventual return upon the death of Herod (Matthew 2:19–23). Matthew then jumps immediately to the forerunning ministry of John the Baptist, and Jesus as a full-grown adult — with nothing at all about the intervening thirty-plus years of childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood.**Development Dignified**The third Gospel has more to say, but captures three decades of the most important human life in the history of the world in remarkably simple terms. Luke tells of the high angelic announcement to lowly shepherds (Luke 2:8–21) and the young family’s first visit to the temple (Luke 2:22–38). He then summarizes Jesus’s first twelve years of life in astonishing modesty: The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. (Luke 2:40)Then, after recounting the story of a 12-year-old Jesus impressing adults at the temple (Luke 2:41–51), Luke reports some two decades — well more than half the God-man’s dwelling among us — in this simple sentence: Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:52)How fascinating would it be to know what life was like for the boy Jesus? Did he plainly outpace his peers in learning? Did his sinlessness infuriate fallen siblings? How skilled was he as a worker? Was his carpentry “perfect,” or did it make good sense around town when he transitioned into public ministry?But it’s easy to digress into speculation and miss the powerful point of these important summary verses in Luke. God has something to teach us here in the precious few details. That he would send his own Son to live and mature and labor in relative obscurity for some three decades, before “going public” and gaining recognition as an influential teacher, has something to say to us about the dignity of ordinary human life and labor — and the sanctity of incremental growth and maturation.God could have sent a full-grown Christ. And from the beginning, he could have created a world of static existence without infants, children, awkward teens, middle-agers, and declining seniors — just a race of young, spry, “mature” adults. But God didn’t do it that way. And he doesn’t do it that way today. He designed us for dynamic existence, for stages and seasons of life, for growth and development in body and in soul, both toward others and toward God.The lion’s share of Jesus’s earthly life powerfully dignifies the everyday pains of maturity and growth common to humanity.**Jesus Grew in Stature**The ancient creed confesses his full humanity, in both body and inner person. Jesus is both “truly God and truly man, *of a reasonable soul and body*” (Chalcedon, AD 451). Having a “true human body,” Jesus was born, he grew, he thirsted, he hungered, he wept, he slept, he sweated, he bled, and he died. All four Gospels unfold his three-year public ministry, and give nearly half their space to the final week of his life. But what was the God-man doing most of his earthly life? He was growing. What did he do for three decades between his celebrated birth and his unforgettable ministry? He walked the ordinary, unglamorous path of basic human growth and development. He grew.The man Christ Jesus did not simply emerge from the wilderness preaching the kingdom. He learned to latch and crawl, to walk and talk. He scraped his knees. Perhaps he broke a finger or wrist. He fought off the common cold, suffered through sick days, and navigated his way in the awkwardness of adolescence. He learned social graces and worked as a common labourer in relative obscurity more than half his earthly life.**Jesus Grew in Wisdom**But Jesus grew not only in body, but also in soul, like every other human, in wisdom and knowledge. Even by age 12, Luke could say Jesus was “filled with wisdom” (Luke 2:40), not because he got it all at once, or always had it, but because he was learning.Through sustained effort and hard work, he came into mental acumen and emotional intelligence that he did not possess as a child. And he didn’t receive it all in one moment, but he *grew* in wisdom, through the painful steps of regular progress. His human mind and heart developed. He grew mentally and emotionally, just as he grew physically. As Donald Macleod captures it, “He was born with the mental equipment of a normal child, experienced the usual stimuli and went through the ordinary process of intellectual development” ([*The Person of Christ*](http://desiringgod.cmail20.com/t/j-l-urlidtl-vuttjudiu-i/), 164).Surely, we find extraordinary instances later in his life of supernatural knowledge, given by the Spirit, in the context of ministry. He knew Nathanael before he met him (John 1:47), that the Samaritan woman had five husbands (John 4:18), and that Lazarus had died (John 11:14). Once he even knew that Peter would find a shekel in the mouth of the first fish he caught (Matthew 17:27). But we shouldn’t confuse such supernatural knowledge, given by special revelation, with the hard-earned, infinite learning of his upbringing.Jesus learned from the Scriptures and from his mother, in community and in the power of the Holy Spirit, and he increased in wisdom by carefully observing everyday life and how to navigate God’s world.**Jesus Learned Obedience**An essential aspect of his growth in stature and wisdom was his learning obedience, both to his earthly parents (he “was submissive to them,” Luke 2:51) and his heavenly Father.In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he *learned obedience* through what he suffered. And *being made perfect*, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. (Hebrews 5:7–9)That he “learned obedience” does not mean that he began as disobedient, but that he began as unlearned and inexperienced, and the dynamic existence of human life gave him experience and know-how. That he was “made perfect” doesn’t mean that he began as sinful, but that he began in sinless immaturity and grew into maturity.**In Favour with God and Man**When Luke 2:52 echoes the words of 1 Samuel 2:26 (“Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the Lord and also with man”), he breaks through a potential hiccup in our perspective on human growth — both Jesus’s and our own.True human growth is not Godward at the expense of love. And development in love should not serve as a distraction to Godward advance. The first commandment is love God. And the second is like it: love your neighbour as yourself.No human, not even the God-man himself, skips the growth and maturation process, and no true growth is one-dimensional, but both toward God and man, with all the attendant pains.Don’t begrudge God the glory of your long, arduous maturation process. In it you taste the growing pains that Jesus knows very well. And he stands ready to help you persevere until God’s process is complete. |
| [Six Ways to Love a Wayward Child](http://desiringgod.cmail20.com/t/j-l-urlidtl-vuttjudiu-d/)Denise Kohlmeyer / December 7, 2016Six Ways to Love a Wayward ChildDaily he stood outside his door, searching the horizon for the lone figure of his son. Only to be disappointed. Heartbroken. Not today, it seemed. Not today. But someday, he might return. Until then, this forlorn father would wait. And watch. And pray. And hope.The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32 now has new meaning for me. I don’t focus so much on the son, as I have in past readings. I focus now on the father. Watching him. Studying him. Learning from him.Why? Because now I am standing in his shoes — worn-through with worry, wondering, and weariness. Worry for my own child’s spiritual lostness. Wondering when she will return. Weary about what it will take to bring her home. Reading this story from this new — although unwanted — perspective has helped me to discover six principles that were previously lost on me. Principles which I am daily trying to put into practice now. Principles that I hope will help other parents of prodigals, too. **Release Them (Luke 15:11–13)**When confronted by the son’s demand for his inheritance, I am struck by the fact that the father did not refuse him. He did not put up a fight or speak a word of warning, even though he certainly could have done so. He simply complied.And in complying, I realized, he was really releasing this son. Releasing him to step into his own journey. Releasing him to face the uncertainty of his own future and the consequences of his choices and actions — good and bad. At some point, every parent faces this release.From this father’s example, I have accepted that I too must let my daughter step into her own journey (while using wisdom and discernment within certain boundaries). I have had to release her, to allow her to make her own choices — good and bad — and to experience the highs and the lows, the sins and the joys. To explore and embrace the beauty and ugliness of it all for herself.**Accept Them (Luke 15:13–14)**This son made poor choices — *very* poor choices. In all the wrong ways, he “lived it up,” to put it into our vernacular. His father had given him his lead, and now, without any parental restraint, this young man gave in to the appetites of the world, to his selfish desires, and to sin. Debauchery. Prostitutes. All manner of reckless living.In the end, he was left destitute and desperate.Like this wayward son, all of our children have been wonderfully created with a will of their own. They have real choices to make. Between godliness and evil. Between God and Satan. Between righteousness and sin. God is sovereign over their will, but their parents are not.While it is hard, I accept this. I accept that she has a will to choose. And I wouldn’t have it any other way. Because I know that she can, and hopefully, by God’s grace, will one day *choose* Jesus.**Uphold Them (Luke 15:17–18)**The son had reached the end of himself. How long it took is uncertain. But his sin had left him senseless and sore. It was only then that he “came to himself.” Other translations say, “came to his senses.” Either way, his soul was finally awakened to its sickness, and he began to stumble homeward.While this son was living it up, wasting his life and his inheritance, the father, I imagine, was on his knees in prolonged prayer, upholding his son before his God. I too am upholding my daughter. And I pray specifically. I pray that, like the son, she too will come to her senses. I pray that the Holy Spirit will stir her heart and awaken in her an unbearable desire to “go to her Father,” repent, and be wonderfully restored.**Wait for Them**For how long this father waited is uncertain. Scripture doesn’t say. But he waited. Every day. Expectantly. Prayerfully. Hopefully. May God grant parents of prodigals that kind of Spirit-filled patience?**Receive Them (Luke 15:20)**Again, I am awestruck by the father’s response. The day had finally come, at long last, when the son came home. And compassion propelled this father forward. Toward his son — at a dead run, no less. Arms open wide. Love pouring forth. His heart overwhelmed.There was no reprimand. No finger-wagging. No “I told you so!” No “How could you!”I pray that my response will be as compassionate, loving, gracious, and welcoming. I must put the pain aside in that moment. With God’s help, I will enfold her in an embrace that announces forgiveness, restoration, and unconditional love.**Celebrate Them (Luke 15:22–23, 32)**The rebellious one had come home. Repentant of his sins. Restored in his salvation. He was lost. But now is found. Home. For good.It was indeed cause for celebration. What other response could there possibly be?And that, I believe, is one overarching message of this powerful story: There is celebration, not condemnation, when a lost soul has come to its senses through repentance — has appropriated the free gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9) and thus has found its way Home into the open arms of a loving and forgiving Father.How could I do anything less if and when my own prodigal returns? I too will celebrate her return with an abandon and an abundance that only God and his angels can rival. |