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## “Fixing Our Focus”

Sermon Series: *Jesus’s Healthy Habits*, No. 2

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### Luke 2:39-50

*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?”[a] 50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them.*

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We’re in Luke chapter 2 today, looking at one of the rare instances in Scripture that speaks of Jesus’ childhood.

Most of us would love to know more about those years, but we’re given, really, only this. Have you ever wondered why...why **this** event here was included and basically nothing else?

Maybe we’ll learn that today.

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Now, before we get into Jesus’ healthy habit for this week, let me make just a quick comment about last week, since I got a couple good questions about this idea of going, as Jesus did, “on our way” from even those we know and love who refuse to embrace faith. Is that what I, or is that what Jesus, was really advocating?

I think what Jesus **instructed** in Matthew 10 and then **modeled** in last week’s Luke 4 text is that we have to recognize there are times when we have done all we can, and it winds up being

*unhealthy* and actually *unhelpful*, for everyone involved, for us to, basically, *assume responsibility for the other person's decision*.

The whole, “shaking the dust from our feet,” *does not* mean that we don't still *care* about the *people* and the *decision* they make, or that we stop *praying* for them to choose Christ, or that we totally leave relationship with them or that we don't take opportunities that come along to speak Christ to them.

What it *does* mean is that we realize several things: (1) number one, that the decision is *theirs* to make and *not ours* to make *for* them; (2) number two, our ability to influence them is limited; and (3) number three, *they* (and *not we*) are *responsible* for their decision.

Of *course* we want *all* those around us, and *especially* our family members, to make *wise* decisions – and *especially* wise *spiritual* decisions; but there comes a point when we no longer have the influence that maybe we'd like to have, and if we don't release them, we can become so *consumed* with something that we *cannot affect*...that we fail to engage in what we *can* affect...not to mention that we have the potential to annoy them to death and push them even further from Jesus.

For us to live *our* lives and *not their life*, we have to be able to truly turn people over to God's Spirit, who is very capable of following up with people. He's actually better at that than we are, and we have to listen carefully to the Spirit about when and how to do that, *not* because we *don't* care, but *precisely* because we *do*.

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That was last week.

Today, Jesus' healthy habit involves what I'm calling, “fixing our focus,” which Jesus seemed to do early on in His life, and what I believe this text reveals.

Jesus was twelve, which is the age that Jewish boys celebrate bar mitzvah...entry into manhood...which meant being allowed, for the first time, to move from the court of the women to worship in the temple with the men.

Joseph and Mary had taken Him there, in Jerusalem, probably for this milestone, and on their way home to Nazareth, traveling in a large, family caravan out of a very busy city and then on a very congested road, it's not terribly surprising that Joseph and Mary would be separated – conversations between men and women going how they do – and Mary probably presumed Jesus was with Joseph and Joseph thought He was with Mary.

Probably it was only when they stopped for the night that they realized their son was not anywhere in their caravan, so they spend the next day traveling *back* to Jerusalem, and then on the third day they find Jesus still in the Temple.

Now, children *can, certainly*, be *very* spiritually engaged, but, in my experience anyway, most 12-year-olds do not intentionally hang out at church for days at a time.

But here was Jesus doing just that.

Now, *like most* 12-year-olds, Jesus was *full of questions*.

But...*unlike* most 12-year-olds, Jesus was *also* full of *accurate and insightful answers* that amazed the temple leaders with whom He spoke.

But what amazed Mary and Joseph was that, to them, Jesus was not overly concerned about His behavior in this situation. Their sinless boy...their model child...had done something to them that, in their minds, was thoroughly thoughtless.

But when confronted, Jesus actually seemed surprised that they might be upset at what He'd done.

This is such a fascinating moment in the way it reveals Jesus' identity as fully God and fully human.

You see, Jesus did hurt his parents here, but to do that was the farthest thing from Jesus' intention, which is why this was not counted as sin.

Now, if one of our kids tried this, we'd be pretty upset and we'd probably be quick to call it a sin.

But let me say, this is an important window into the Scriptural basis for a Wesleyan definition of sin over against a reformed view. Where the reformed view does not take intentionality into account, the Wesleyan / Arminian view does, which is exactly what preserves Jesus' sinlessness here, you see?

Jesus harmed His parents – He caused them not a little grief and anxiety, but He did not *mean* to harm His parents, and though, Jesus being who He is, would have felt compassion for their grief, He does not appear to apologize for doing what He did.

In fact, He expresses some level of surprise that His parents were surprised to find Him still at the temple, and in this interaction, we see here, for the first time in Scripture, that Jesus is aware, to some degree, of His uniqueness.

His response in verse 49 there is the centerpiece of this event, and I think this is probably why Luke included this account...when Jesus answers, *“Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?”*

You see, this was no studied answer. This was not Jesus' crafty, manipulative way of trying to get out of trouble with mom and dad.

No, this was the spontaneous expression of Jesus' deep, inner consciousness that He had a unique relationship with God.

Yes, the Temple was the spiritual “home” of every Jew, but not like it was home to Him. There was an intimacy about the Temple to Jesus. In fact, it felt as much like home to Him as did the house in Nazareth in which Joseph and Mary raised Him.

And you see, at twelve years old, who would ever have to apologize for being at home with their parents? I mean, that's where twelve-year-olds are supposed to be.

So this served as notice to Joseph and Mary, and it lets us see, too, that the work...the purpose of Jesus' Heavenly Father was going to take both priority and precedence in Jesus' life over everything else...over every other work and every other relationship.

Being with and doing the will of His Heavenly Father was Jesus' focus...period. Anything that competed with that in any way would absolutely have to fall way in Jesus' life.

So even at this early age, Jesus' focus was fixed: He would do what His Heavenly Father asked of Him, no matter what...and that, friends, is the firm "yes" that God is looking for from every one of us who say we follow Jesus. That is the perfect heart of love toward God.

No matter what His Heavenly Father asked of Him, Jesus' answer was always, "yes;" even as the days and the years unfolded and the things the Father asked of Him grew harder and harder...Jesus' answer was still, "yes."

That's the perfect heart of love toward God...to, as the Apostle Paul wrote, ***"make it our goal to please Him."***<sup>1</sup>

And this is what God's Spirit makes possible for all who will follow Jesus. It's the very heart of what it means to be like Jesus: to have our focus fixed on pleasing God the Father. This is the goal...this is the end of all of God's Spirit's work of grace in our lives – that we would say a quick and sure, "yes" to God, no matter what He asks.

At it's core, this is what it means to be like Jesus.

Now of course, Jesus' parents didn't understand this, but somehow it must have been evident to them that they should not try to control His destiny.

Now this is just good parenting that, frankly, some parents need to come to grips with today. Some parents want to hold on too tightly for too long...to try to control and even manipulate their kids...even adult kids – maybe for selfish reasons...maybe because they don't trust them.

Now, some of those parents might say, "Well, my kid isn't anything like Jesus."

But you know, the reason Jesus did the things He did was not always clear to Joseph and Mary either. They had to struggle with this stuff.

Here, Mary was struggling with the reality that, in Jesus, she had a son, and yet she did not really have Him in any complete way. She shared Him with a Parent (capital P) who also had purposes for His life.

Of course, that's true for every Christian parent and child, but more strikingly so here.

And as Mary wrestled with this ... with that prophecy Simeon spoke to her about Jesus' birth bringing a soul-piercing reality in her life ... as Mary contemplated all this, she did the wise thing: she did not ignore it, she did not fall into despair over it, but instead she hid it in her heart and waited for fuller light.

Now of course, anyone who fixes their focus on doing the will of God will face opposition, and sometimes it will come from those closest to us.

But just the same, if we're to fulfill God's best purpose for our lives, we have to do as Jesus has done here, fix our focus on doing as God says, and then let Him sort out the details...which He will do beautifully and faithfully...if we'll trust Him to do it.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:9

To follow Jesus is to fix our focus, and the earlier the better. Just like Jesus, the younger we are when we say to God, “Father, I choose you. I choose you to mark out my path in life. I choose you to set my priorities. I choose your ways, your thoughts, your values, your principles, your standards. I want my life’s focus to be fixed upon you, because in you alone will I find purpose and joy and contentment and value and peace, both for now and forever,” the younger we are when we make that commitment, the more fruitful, the more pure, the more regret-free our life will be.

No other person, no other purpose can even come close to offering us what God offers those who fix their focus on Him.

That doesn’t mean the days will be easy, but they will be the very best they can be, and they will lead us to an eternity with Him.

When our focus is fuzzy, we go this way and that, we go here and there, we try this and the other and we usually wind up going in circles, and we get dizzy and fall down in some way or another.

But when our focus is fixed, we see where we’re going and we move in that direction.

Sure, there are unexpected things that come and maybe they even shake us and move us here and there, but we quickly return to the path because our eye is on where we’re headed.

We are focused on God’s ways and purposes.

We are, in the fullest sense of the word, *following* Jesus.

Is your focus truly fixed? And is it fixed on the Lord?

Doing that is, for reasons both now and eternal, one of the healthiest things anyone can ever do.

### **Closing Prayer:**

Jesus, your word says that you set your face to go to Jerusalem...to do what God the Father called you to do. Even though You knew the pain that would come to You there, You decided long before that Your love for Your father and Your commitment to His perfect will would prevail.

Jesus, help us follow You in this...even as we come to Your table – the table that You set for us. If there is a place in us where we’re wandering...where we’ve lost focus...lost sight of Your way and what God the Father wants for us, Holy Spirit point that out to us, so that we might turn back to the way ahead that you’ve set...the way in which You want us to walk. Let us leave this place with focuses fixed on following with all we are.

### **Communion:**

### **Closing Song:**

### **Benediction:**

### **Closing Word**

One of the biggest problems with our world is that very few people know where they’re headed. Very few people’s focus’ are fixed at all. They go here and there, this way and that – they try this and then that and then the other to find meaning and purpose and settledness of Spirit.

Jesus figured out early on that real life begins when we realize **who** we are, **whose** we are, and **where** we're going.

We won't know all the details; the fact is, we may know hardly any details at all, but we know the One who does, and we know the ultimate destination.

Today, would you follow Jesus and fix your focus on the will of the Heavenly Father. Settle the issue, and you'll never regret it.

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