

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You know how it's so hard to let go of your child, to realize he/she is all grown up, and they don't need Mommy and Daddy anymore? They think they're old enough to make their own decisions, to make their own mistakes and fall flat on their face. And when they do, they don't want you there to pick them up.

That moment comes in every parent's life, when your little princess or your baby isn't so much a baby anymore, but a young man or a young woman. And you aren't in control anymore. It's tough to let go, isn't it?

Mary and I had to learn that lesson as well, the hard way. I mean, we should have known better. Our son, Jesus, he is no ordinary child...he's the Son of God. But, call us absent-minded, but we forgot that from time to time. To us, he was always just one of the kids. That's the mold we put him in, and we paid the price, emotionally.

Now, I know Luke includes this event in his gospel, actually the only account of Jesus as an adolescent in the Bible, but I'd like to give you my recollection of the story myself...

The whole family, we were in Jerusalem, a ways away from home in Nazareth, about 60 miles, a lot longer away in those days, mind you. We didn't have cars. We weren't just taking a vacation, no, we were there for a reason. It was our annual trip to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the greatest Jewish holidays, Passover...the time to remember when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and after nine plagues against Pharaoh, God sent one more, killing the firstborn child of every Egyptian, but he passed over the houses of the Israelites because the blood of a lamb was smeared on their doorframes. A beautiful picture of what our son, Jesus, the Son of God, would do, the blood of that Lamb given so God would pass over our sins, forgive us, and not kill us.

But this year's celebration was even more exciting for our family. Jesus was twelve, so you know what that meant? In our culture, just like yours, turning 12 meant Jesus was starting to grow into a man, both physically and mentally. Jesus was at the age where he could start preparing for an active role in our religious community, something similar to your catechism training for young adults.

But anyways, that's what we were doing in Jerusalem. It was a great time, but like every trip, it had to come to an end. So, we gathered up our belongings, and we took off, back for Nazareth, Mary, myself, and Jesus, or so we thought.

You see, we had traveled with extended family down to Jerusalem, with cousins, aunts, uncles, parents, nieces, nephews, close family friends, neighbors. A huge caravan. We've been doing that for years. It makes that trip that much more enjoyable.

Now, I know what you're thinking. How could Mary and I not be sure Jesus was traveling back with us? Well, over the past couple of years, we were starting to give Jesus more responsibilities, be a little more trusting of him. He knew the time of departure, so we figured he'd be ready to go, along with the rest of his cousins and friends. Just like any other 12-year-old, the last thing Jesus would have wanted was

Mom and Dad breathing down his neck, watching his every move. So we let him hang around his friends.

And for the whole day, that's where we thought he was. It was when he didn't come back for dinner that we finally began to realize what had happened. No big deal at first. We just went from tent to tent, asking if someone had seen Jesus. But then panic began to set in more and more with each negative response. And by the time we had finished the rounds, that panic turned to pure terror. It was a code red. We had left Jesus in Jerusalem, all by himself.

I'm sure you parents know what I was feeling, especially if you've misplaced your children before as well. Who knows where he was, who he was with, what had been done to him. "Mary," I said, "I don't care that it's already dark out. We're going back to Jerusalem right now." So we did.

Three days. Two days of traveling away from Jerusalem and then back; one day of tearing Jerusalem apart looking for our son. Three days we were without Jesus. Three days Jesus was without us. We could only imagine how frightened he must have been, that his parents basically deserted him, kind of like one of those Home Alone moments.

And you'd never believe where we found him. It should have been the obvious place, and yet it took us the better part of the day to search there. He was at the temple.

Mary and I rushed into the temple, freaking out like chickens with their heads cut off, catching stern looks from the temple officials and priests, but what did we care. We were missing our boy!

And then we saw him. Mary just lost it, started sobbing uncontrollably. I let out a huge sigh of relief, as if a ton of bricks had just been lifted off my shoulders.

But there Jesus was, just sitting on the steps of the temple court, surrounded by a group of teachers and rabbis. Just talking, having a discussion on Scripture with these religious experts, asking questions, making incredible insights. All who were witnessing this were just in awe, amazed at the intelligence and the Scriptural aptitude of this boy, our son, God's Son.

Mary and I, of course, dashed over him. Mary grabbed Jesus, hugged him with a lock-tight grip. I stood there, my panic and apprehension turning to joy and exultation in finding our son turning astonishment and wonderment at what I was seeing turning to frustration and disappointment.

Thankfully, Mary was the first to speak. "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." A little more toned down than what I would have said. But it showed how angry, how scared, how disappointed we were both feeling right then.

But it was Jesus who had the gentle rebuke for us. "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house (more literally, be about my Father's business)?" He wasn't talking about me.

In that moment, we had forgotten who Jesus truly was. We were thinking of him only as our little boy, like an ordinary child, when he was anything but. But Jesus knew who he was. Jesus knew who his true, heavenly Father was.

We thought we were the ones who had ultimate control over his life, over what he did. But Jesus had a higher calling to answer to. Whether we wanted it or not, Jesus had more important business to attend to...God's business. And you know what business that is, don't you? The business of saving souls. Very clearly, Jesus understood his purpose was to carry out his Father's plan of salvation, even from the time of his birth.

How ashamed I felt by his remarks. Jesus wasn't the one needing a rebuke...we were. Trying to keep him from carrying out his true Father's work. Trying to stand in the way of the very reason Jesus was born in this world. Shame on us.

And yet Jesus, the complete opposite, not letting anything stand in the way. Being willing to obey his Father's will, which even at that time, he had to know would include him suffering at the hands of his enemies and dying on a cross. That puts me to shame, too, because it's my unwillingness to do what God commands of me that made Jesus have to come to earth to suffer. It's my sins of greed, lust, anger, hatred, jealousy, the list too long to read, that's what nailed Jesus to the tree. It's my daily disobedience of God's will which God, in turn, throws onto Jesus for him to shoulder my blame, my shame, my punishment.

But that young boy, Jesus, he understood that's what would happen, and yet he willingly obeyed, willingly went about his Father's work.

His Father's work included perfection. Jesus obeyed all of God's commands, obeyed every law without sinning. That even included listening to everything Mary and I told him to do. Staying in Jerusalem, that wasn't a sin. He was doing God's work, which included going home with us when we asked him to. And throughout the rest of his life here on earth, that's the same way Jesus lived, always obeying, never sinner, being perfect.

His Father's work also included dying for everyone else's sins, yours and mine included. That was the only way for Jesus to be able to forgive every sin, was by dying on the cross. It was sad for us to see him go, but at the same time, we rejoiced, because his death brought about our salvation, God wiping every sin off our slate, clean, God's Son's perfection given to us instead.

And finally, his Father's work finished with Jesus coming back to life, rising from the dead to show the ultimate victory over sin, death, and the devil. All that, concluding with Jesus ascending to heaven, to his true home, sitting besides his Father, ruling over all creation, us being his beloved children.

That young boy who was standing in front of us, astonishing these religious leaders, he had his work cut out for him. But willing obedience. That's what Jesus showed. It started with him going home with us, as Mary and I treasured this precious lesson in our hearts, a reminder of what our Son would do.

And Jesus, he continued to grow in God's favor as his heavenly Father continued to groom him for the work lying ahead of him, to be our Redeemer, to save us from sin, so we could all be children of God. And he did. Amen.