

“Raising Amazing Kids”

Luke 2:41-52

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The title of this message may give you the impression that I will reveal in twenty minutes a secret formula on how to raise perfect children in three easy steps that begin with letters A, B and C. Raising any kind of kids, let alone amazing kids, is complicated and only getting more so. I identify with the Rev. Charlie Shedd who found out the hard way how tough parenting is. When he was a young pastor he wrote a sermon called, “How to Raise Your Children.”

This was the title of one of my finest efforts. It grabbed them quick and held them fast with humor, pathos, drama! All over the Midwest I gave it. They paid me a handsome fee and they were glad to get me. "This guy will wow you!" That's what they said, and the people came. With high hopes, they came for "How to Raise Your Children."

Then we had a child!

That sound you just heard was the great preacher falling flat on his face. My majestic speech had been totaled. Those brilliant ideas had such a droll sound at 2:00 a.m. with the baby in full cry!

In my defense—I kept on trying. I changed my title to "Some Suggestions to Parents," and charged bravely on. Then we had two more children and I altered it again. This time it came out "Feeble Hints to Fellow Strugglers."

From there it was all downhill. The appeal was out of it. I couldn't stand to hear me.

So today I seldom speak on parenthood. And whenever I do, (the title I use is) "Anyone got a few words of wisdom?"¹

Words of wisdom. When it comes to parenting we can all use some. Now, after thirty-three years of being a parent, after celebrating my baby's thirtieth birthday, I can say that I do have amazing kids. I am so grateful for the adults they are, the wonderful spouses they married, the amazing grandchildren and granddog they are raising. Yet I will be the first to say I made a lot of mistakes. I give most of the credit to their wise, compassionate Mom, to this incredible church and to our loving and gracious God. I must also point out that while we had our share of coming-of-age challenges, we did not have what I know many of you face: drug abuse, physical and mental handicaps, divided and blended families, psychological diagnoses, wild rebellious behavior, and rejection of the faith. I've sat with you, listened to you, prayed with you through your harrowing days and nights. You taught me there is no plug and play plan to raising children that is easy as A, B, C.

¹ Charlie Shedd, *Promises to Peter* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1970), p. 7.

Yet as we begin a new school year and the start of Discovery Kingdom, Adventure Club, Youth Groups and Growth Groups, I can say there are some general principles that will assist you in raising amazing kids. Recently I noticed the grass literally is greener on the other side of the fence. Turns out all my neighbors are cheating. They receive treatments from the same lawn care guy named Bill. So I decided to talk with Bill and he, surprisingly, gave me some wisdom not only about raising grass but raising kids. When I asked him to look at my lawn he said, “I think you should kill off your grass and start over.” (I’m not recommending you do that with your kids...although some of you would like to.) What he said next struck a chord. In growing grass – and kids – there are a lot of factors that are beyond our control and each lawn is unique. “Your yard can be vastly different from the others next door. Yet you can apply certain principles that will work with your conditions to grow an amazing lawn.”

And the same is true for raising amazing kids, teens and adults. We find these principles throughout Scripture but today we see them in a story from the life of Jesus when he was twelve years old. Can you imagine what it was like to raise the Son of God? You probably think: Easy! Piece of Cake! No need for a grocery store. He can feed fish and loaves to the whole village with yesterday’s leftovers and provide a perfect wine pairing from well water.

Yet think for a minute: what it would be like for a child going through the terrible twos to have the almighty power of God? One or two centuries after Jesus, some people made up stories which portray little Jesus as a holy terror. They appear in *The Lost Books of the Bible*. In one story Jesus and his playmates take clay and mold them into donkeys, oxen and birds. When the other kids boast about their creation, Jesus one ups them and makes His creatures walk and fly. Immediately the kids go home and tattle on Jesus and their parents say, “Don’t play with that kid anymore.” One of my favorite stories is when Jesus helps Joseph in the carpenter shop. Apparently Joseph never learned the rule “Measure twice, cut once.” He is commissioned to make a throne for the king of Jerusalem but he cuts the boards too short. When the king is furious, Jesus saves the day. He tells Joseph to pull on one side of the throne while Jesus pulls on the other until they stretch it to its proper size.

Later Jesus goes to school and, being a smart aleck, shows up the teacher. When the teacher tries to whip the boy, his hand withers and he dies. After this Joseph says to Mary

Henceforth we will not allow him to go out of the house; for everyone who displeases him is killed.²

That’s how Christian home schooling started.

Now please don’t go home and say these stories are in the Bible. These are fairy tales made up by people hundreds of years after Jesus who tried to imagine raising an Almighty baby. The truth is we only have one story about Jesus between the age of two and thirty. Surprisingly it contains no miracles.

Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. After the

² Infancy, Chapter XX, verse 16 from *The Lost Books of the Bible* (Bell Publishing, New York, 1979) p. 57.

festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. (Luke 2:41-45)

Many parents can identify with the terrifying feeling of losing a child in the mall, the city, at Disney world. In the movie *Home Alone*, a Mom is riding in a van back to Chicago where she left her son Kevin by himself. Her traveling companion tries to comfort her by reminding her kids are resilient and he'll get over it. After all, he and his wife left their son in a funeral parlor all day and he was fine. It was six or seven weeks before he started talking again but he was fine.

You might think Mary and Joseph were less than perfect parents if they misplaced Jesus for three days but remember that childrearing in those days literally did take a village and so it was not uncommon for kids to be with their cousins or buddies on the journey back to Nazareth. What's more Jesus is not a toddler. He's a pre-teen Junior High and you know how much they like to hang out with their parents. At the end of the first day, however, he doesn't show up at their tent for the night. Parents, you can probably taste the terror. When no one remembers seeing Him, they instantly reverse course and make the day's journey back to Jerusalem. After searching the streets of the Holy City for a day they finally ascend the steps to the Temple.

They found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. 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." (Luke 2:46-48)

For Mary and Joseph anxiety turns to relief, irritation and astonishment. You can almost imagine them saying, "Who do you think you are - God's gift to the world?" And then the boy says,

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them. (Luke 2:49-50)

Jesus is unquestionably an amazing child. Yet there are no miracles, no halos, no hints of glory shining through in this scene - just a Middle schooler who gives some astonishing answers. This event reveals some basic principles for raising amazing kids, teens and adults.

Build Firmly on Faith. The story tells us Joseph and Mary made the three day journey to the Temple every year for the seven day feast of Passover as the Law required (Deuteronomy 16:16). We know Jesus' family faithfully observed their Jewish faith. Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2:21) and dedicated in the Temple (Luke 2:22-24) and, as we see in this passage, made one and possibly three pilgrimages to Jerusalem every year. This family was built on the foundation of faith in God.

It is popular today for people to say they don't need organized religion. They can get by in life without someone telling them what to do. I agree. I don't like someone telling me what to do. But one truth no one can avoid is you have to build a foundation for your family. The trouble is a lot of families are built on foundations that don't last - money, media, full schedules, sports,

the latest fads. These foundations let us down when the storms of life come. The devastation of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma remind me of the flooding which engulfed Yardley some years back and the Jersey Shore during Sandy. After those floods what did people do? Build bigger, stronger, higher foundations. When Jesus became an adult He taught that storms do come. It's not if but when. Survival depends on a sure foundation. He learned that from His family.

Is your family built on the foundation of faith? Your foundation is not just what you say you believe. You build a foundation by what you do. What did Mary and Joseph do?

Worship Weekly. Worship was the heart of Jesus' family. They worshiped in Jerusalem. They worshiped in the Nazareth synagogue every Sabbath (Luke 4:16). Our family makes it a priority to worship God even when we are away on vacation. Do we occasionally miss? Yes. But we try to avoid that because if we don't worship weekly we wind up worshipping weakly – we lose our connection with God's power, start to live on our own steam, start to worship idols. As someone has said, "Seven days without worship makes one weak." Worship reminds me God is God and I am not, God is in charge and I am not, and God is more powerful than all the problems which overwhelm me. Make it a priority to worship God at Woodside every week you are in town and if you are away, find a place to worship Him where you are – and bring me back a signed bulletin.

Read the Word Daily. The teachers in the Temple were amazed at Jesus' knowledge of God's Word. Now you probably think: of course He knows the Word of God. He *is* the Word of God. Yet I think His Heavenly Father made Jesus grow up the way we all do. And if you are around any kids you find they constantly say amazing things. I remember the Sunday School teachers were alternately afraid and grateful to have my children in class because they knew all the Bible answers. The teachers assumed we were quizzing them with Bible flash cards at home. The truth is we simply read God's Word every day. We started with the children's Bible and then moved on to the full Bible. They absorbed it like sponges. I think Jesus' parents did the same.

In your bulletin you will find a bookmark containing all the passages we will read for our upcoming series called *Deeper*. Instead of reading several chapters, let's read these passages deeply. Read the same passage once a day for seven days. On the backside of this bookmark are various ways you can study the passage to unlock new discoveries. Starting on September 18, make it your practice to read God's Word daily. You will be amazed what you learn and what you hear from your children.

Discuss Deeply Jesus had three days to discuss God's Word with the teachers. Notice: He didn't just give answers. He asked questions. He thirsted to know God's Word. He hungered to have a deeper relationship with God. The world's first Growth Group happened in the Temple in Jerusalem. God made us to live in community. We need each other. We are better together. We learn from one another. This is why we are launching Discovery Kingdom so children can make the greatest discovery of all: a life-long, loving relationship with Jesus. This is why we offer Adventure Club – to invite kids on the adventure of following Jesus. This is why we have Junior and Senior High Youth Groups so teens can build a strong foundation on the Rock of Jesus as they prepare to go out in the world.

Some scholars point out that since Jesus is twelve in this story it's the equivalent of His Bar Mitzvah. He is preparing to become a man in the Jewish faith. In the same way we offer Confirmation this fall to ninth graders to prepare them to be adult followers of Jesus.

And we have 50 to 60 Growth Groups for adults where you can discuss deeply the Word of God and build a strong foundation for you and your family. Questions are always welcome. If Jesus asked questions, so should we. That's how we learn and grow. Make it a point to sign up your children and youth this fall and to join a Growth Group. You'll go deeper in your relationship with God and it will be amazing.

Finally, this story teaches us to **Rest Securely in Your Father's Arms**. I don't believe there was even a hint of sarcasm when Jesus said, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" To Him it was obvious. He felt safe, secure, at home here. He wanted to be as close to God as possible. And notice that this twelve year old says something extremely radical: He calls God His Father. When He is older, one of the most unique and amazing teachings of Jesus is this: we can approach Almighty God and call Him – Abba – Dad. He is not the forbidding, frightening, distant God of Mount Sinai. He is the Father who runs to us, welcomes us home, clothes us in righteousness and throws a party in our honor.

Do you want to raise amazing kids? Teach them that they are the beloved children of their Heavenly Father. Teach them their true identity is a child of God. Help them to feel the love, joy, peace and grace of God. The best way you can help them go deeper in their relationship with God is if you go deeper in your relationship with God. So join us as we set sail in two weeks to go Deeper.

Today, it is my pleasure and joy to introduce to you someone who is a living example of all I have been teaching: Eric Watts our new Director of Youth Discipleship.