

The Coming Generation in Biblical Perspective  
“Biblical Thoughts on Ministry...For the Coming Generations”

Luke 2:41–52

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I want to look at a text of Scripture in this study as we both celebrate and consecrate this children’s facility the Lord our God has granted to us to use to fulfill our mission which is, for God’s glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. Then that mission is fulfilled to a vision which is, for coming generations of new believers, missionaries, pastors, disciples, disciple makers etc., Briarwood desires to be a Christ centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled, equipping church where every member is a minister and every member is a missionary. A key phrase here is *for coming generations*.

We have just taken some steps to match with facilities what we already have in God’s kind and good gifts. God has granted us some wonderful servants on our staff who lead us in evangelizing and discipling our covenant children all the way from nursery through Sunday school classes of the 56 Club, the Pioneer Club, the Junior High Raiders Ministry, High School, BYG ministry and well over a hundred of them are currently meeting in small groups, then moving onto our college ministry and beyond. Now we have been able by the sacrificial gifts of God’s people and the kindness of God’s providence, to match that with some absolutely wonderful facilities, from the Barn, to educational space and now this Children’s Auditorium.

Why are we doing that? I think it’s important for me to address why we’re doing that in this study and I think it’s important to say what we’re not doing. First let me address what we’re not doing. We’re not providing in the church a ministry to replace the responsibility, unique giftedness, that children need from their early years all the way up until they leave and cleave to someone else, that which parents are uniquely called to do. We are only supplementing it, surrounding it, help enable it, support it and only to extend it because there is a role for the covenant community and that’s why we have members stand in the baptism vow to say that you’ll assist, not replace, these parents in the raising of these their covenant children.

I want to take the time to say that because you actually live in a society for at least 50 to 60 years that has undermined the role of parents in a family and the raising of children. This culture has established an educational system that basically has given one message to parents – give us your kids because we know better than you, we’re the experts, we’ll put up with you, you may have to sign a few permission slips but we know better than you. The result is a decimated education system. The result is a lack of maturity and it’s amazing what has become of the younger generation in spite of those efforts and it certainly hasn’t been because of it. On the contrary it has undermined much. It is really interesting to me to hear this constant message of the “education professional” that distains the parental involvement until the failure comes and then they come back and tell the parent they’re not giving enough money or engaged enough, but you just told us that you’re better than us so why did you need us to begin with.

I want to be very careful here but my heart is grieved at best, angered at worst, when I listen to silly statements such as ‘the problem we have today is that parents have

been taking too much ownership of their children and they need to turn them over to the collective society.’ This has been roundly broadcast in the last week and a half. We won’t participate in that. The leaders, elders and pastors of this church have had some experience and we know we’re not your children’s parents but we are to work together. We are not here to replace. We are here to augment, assist, enable, extend and to rejoice as God blesses what you alone as a parent can do and no one can replace you.

By the way, your children need both of you – father and mother. There is a uniqueness to the father’s faithful coaching exhortation and a mother’s nurturing compassion and teaching of kindness upon her tongue. Now having said this, what do we want to do? I want to retreat to the safest place I can be and that is my objective is that every one of your children would be like Jesus – that they would love Jesus, trust Jesus, and be like Jesus by His grace and for His glory.

So the best thing I can do is to talk about the use of these facilities whether it be the Barn, the educational space that we’ve now enhanced over the top of the children’s auditorium or whether it be the children’s auditorium itself. The best thing to do is to take a look at Jesus and His childhood. At least for me with my inquisitive mind there are not many texts about the childhood of Jesus. On the other hand it’s a blessing for there aren’t too many texts for me to mess up. There is really only one that I can show you. Let’s look at Luke 2 and see an interesting moment of the life of Jesus as a child and His family. After His birth is recorded He ends up back in Nazareth. This passage tells us some interesting things about the childhood of Jesus and His growth before the Father and in the context of His home.

There were there major feasts in the life of a member of God’s covenant community. The primary feast of all of them was probably the Feast of Passover. So every year from Nazareth Jesus and His family would make this trip to Jerusalem. In Luke 2 we are looking at one of those years. What year is this? This is the year Jesus is 12 years old.

*Luke 2:41-52 says [41] Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. [42] And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. [43] And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, [44] but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, [45] and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. [46] After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. [47] And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. [48] And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." [49] And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" [50] And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. [51] And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. [52] And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*

Prayer:

Father, I pray that You would bless us as we spend a few moments in this Holy Text of Scripture and draw out those basic principles that fix us on Christ, even as we long for

our covenant children to rise up, know Christ, serve Christ and follow Christ that they too would grow in wisdom, stature, favor with God and favor with man. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

There have been many times in my life that I have come to this text. It is a marvelous text on the overall formation of covenant children and you can see it right there in Luke 2:52 where it says [52] *And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.* Wisdom is when you get knowledge and understanding that downloads into a changed life. Wisdom is behavior not something you can "Google" on the internet. Wisdom is knowing, understanding then living and that's why the book of Proverbs unfolds those three phrases constantly – knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

So not only growing in wisdom but that then governs the physical life where He grew in stature. That then governs the spiritual disciplines in life, the relationship with God Himself – favor with God. The very word favor points to the dynamic of grace which we need and grace which He is the One who dispenses. Then He grew in favor with man, concerning social and relational skills of how we relate to others in appropriate stations and season of life. So I have gone to that passage time and time again.

I have used that in my own life. Every year I work through some objectives in my life. How can I get wiser before the Lord in prayer? Because the Lord says to ask for wisdom and He'll give it. I don't necessarily need to grow in stature anymore, I just need to keep from growing out in stature now and that's what I need to focus on these days. What about the matter of the spiritual disciplines in my relationship with the Lord, favor with God and growing in grace? What about social and relational disciplines, professionally as a pastor and relationally in my family and in connections with the family of God and people in the world? So this has been a good guide for me year after year.

I love the setting here. I have to confess that up until about five years ago I really had never looked at the setting here. I want to debrief a little on the setting of that statement. It starts with this moment that is almost comical. In fact, it's comical but today if that had happened Mary and Joseph might have been arrested and their child perhaps would have been taken away from them. They had lost Him for at least three days. They had made their trip to the Passover, observed the Passover and they start going back with the caravan, the relatives, and citizens of Nazareth that had made the trip, as they had done time and time again. As they're on their way back, after a day they look around and think "Where's Jesus?"

I can almost hear Mary and Joseph talking with each other. "I thought He was with you." "Well, I thought He was with you." Don't you just love the honesty of Scripture? Nobody whitewashes Mary and Joseph here but I do want to try and get them off the hook for you, if I can. I think I do it without over speculating. I know you're probably thinking "I can't believe they did that." Would you like to know how many times I in my ministry have waited at church with children of members who had left them and gone home and then remembered and they come back and pick them while I'm sitting there holding them? This is not that unusual. So that is what has happened but I want to tell you why I think it has happened.

In the Old Testament when the caravans of Jewish people would move they had a certain protocol. They would always put the women and children in the front and the men would come behind. Now they have gone up to the Passover and this is the year that

Jesus moves from being a child to a man. The tradition in today's Judaism is a bar mitzvah. When you move from childhood to manhood then you no longer travel with your mother. Now you travel with your father after you arrive at that age. You know men, for 12 years he's been traveling with His mother and it just doesn't compute with Joseph. He just assumes He is up there with Mary. I imagine they get to the settling down place for the night and Joseph goes to get Mary for the night and says "Where's Jesus?" Mary says "He's not with me, He's supposed to be with you." "So you don't have Him?" I can just hear how that conversation went.

At that point, they realize He is probably still in Jerusalem. So they turn around and go and look all around Jerusalem for three days. They finally go check the temple and when they get there they find Him sitting and talking with the teachers, the teaching priests of the temple. Those would have been the sons of Asaph. He was listening, talking and asking them questions. They then began to ask Him questions and they marveled at His answers. Mary and Joseph see Him and say "Jesus we have been looking everywhere for You." Jesus says "Why were you searching all around? I must be at My Father's house." Then they marveled at what happened for it goes on to say that Mary treasured these things in her heart.

This is speculation but my guess is that the Gospel of Luke was written by Luke (that's not speculation for we know that) but when did Luke write this? We think he wrote it while Paul was in prison in Jerusalem and Caesarea Philippi and we're told Luke went around and interviewed people to write the Gospel of Luke. I would suspect that he probably interviewed Mary and she is the one that told him of this event, how it had amazed them and they didn't understand immediately but later they did as she pondered this in her heart.

Here are the two simple things I want you to see as we dedicate these facilities to the ministry of our covenant children, extending the ministry of families. The first thing is this. Jesus was raised in a family with a father Joseph and a mother Mary and they were engaged - consistently, customarily, habitually, intentionally engaged in church. It was their custom. It was what they did. Jesus said "Why wouldn't you look for Me here?" This is the habit of their life. They didn't play drive-by church. They had built it into the family habit of life and therefore Jesus had the enormous opportunity to not only be taught by both parents in His humanity as He is developing in wisdom, stature, favor with God and man, but He also had the enormous privilege of being taught by those called and gifted of God to do so. He took full advantage of that. Jesus was a learner. You see that in His humanity and that's why He grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and with man. He had a learner's heart. His mother and father had created a learning environment by their vital connection to the synagogue in Nazareth and to the temple and its ministry in Jerusalem.

There is an amazing amount of studies about the number of children that are growing up and leaving the church so all of the church growth experts are telling us what we're doing wrong. I am certain there are things we could do more effectively in ministry for our covenant children in the various seasons of life but there are others who have done their study and I will cast my lot with them. I believe the children who walk away from the faith in general and the church in particular, there are two things you'll always see. Either their family was disconnected to the church and therefore it wasn't important to their parents and so it wasn't important to them or it wasn't intentional in

their family, like “We’re not doing anything else this week that’s more important so let’s go to church.” Instead of being vitally involved in the community of believers, besides periodically showing up for the 11am worship service that we show up at 11:10am. I am absolutely sure that is one of the contributing factors.

The other is this. Those who are leaving the church are leaving the church because the parents may have been engaged but they have a critical spirit of everything in the church. The critical spirit is automatically assumed by the children. It first will be seen in the church and I encourage you not to have that critical spirit. I’m not talking about constructive engagement in the body of Christ so that it would grow but I’m talking about that critical spirit that is always grumbling and complaining. The children adopt it and then here is the next thing they do. Then they will adopt it against you. Your relationship to authority over you will become the pattern of their relationship with you.

I believe the key to the covenant children embracing Christ and being engaged in the body of Christ is a family connected by priority with a constructive relationship with the means of grace in the body of Christ. No facility can take the place of that. That was the life and family that Jesus had with Mary and Joseph. It was their custom. It was their habit to go down each year to the temple and weekly in Nazareth in the synagogue.

The second thing is this. Luke 2:51 says [51] *And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was **submissive** to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.* Jesus was submissive to them. This is amazing because this is the Son of God come in the flesh. The expectation was that He was submissive in fulfilling the fifth commandment of honoring His father and mother. What’s interesting is that Joseph and Mary expected Him to be that. Do we raise our children in the context of the covenant community, in a constructive relationship? Do we raise our children in the Lord, teaching them in an expectation that they will be submissive to us and not us submissive to them? We need to raise them to be submissive to us because that sets the pattern of their submission to the Lord. It is that nurturing dynamic.

That is why elders are supposed to be examples of those who have faithful children, managing their household and their children are under control with dignity, the Scripture says. It is not oppressiveness but with dignity. That dynamic of a family vitally connected and then the family giving instruction to their children with the expectation they will learn in the home from the parents and then yet the parents are not so arrogant as to think there is nobody out there that they need to help them raise their children. So we expose them to the teachers of the synagogue, in the covenant community that can assist us. When that is put in place then facilities like this will be productive because they’re facilitating what God has designed, not replacing, simply facilitating.

I know we’re in a culture that is redefining the relationship of children to their parents. I know we’re in a culture that is redefining parenting, the family and even now into an imbecilic journey of redefining the foundation of the family and that’s marriage. We will not disconnect from this culture. We will bring the Gospel to it and love everyone in it but we’re not going to participate in that. We want to ask God to give us a family, connected to the family of families in which our children are being raised in the nurture and admonish of the Lord, with access to those wonderful gifted people in the community of believers that can assist us, all with one design and that is that they would grow in wisdom, stature, favor with God and favor with man. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments that we could look at this text of Scripture. Thank You for the moments that we could give great praise to You for what You have done in the life of this congregation through Your people. Father thank You for these moments of celebration of gratitude, thanksgiving and consecration, in Jesus' Name, Amen.