

Luke 2:41-52
What If You Lost God?
December 27, 2015

Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast 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. After three days 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."

"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.

Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (NIV84)

No parent thinks that they'll ever lose their child. They would never be so clueless, so careless. And then the husband is walking into the grocery store with their daughter, and see his wife near the checkout line. His wife sees him, and he's sure that his daughter also sees his wife, and that that's the reason their daughter heads in that direction. Convinced that the handoff has been successfully made, he heads in the other direction to pick up one more grocery item, and then goes to the checkout line where his wife is. When he gets there, he and his wife exchange looks that move very quickly from puzzlement to panic. One of them rushes through the grocery store while the other mans the exits, while at the same time both are entertaining horrible scenarios in their heads. It is the longest three minutes of their life, until she is found safe and sound, standing in the frozen food aisle looking only half as frightened as her parents.

If you've ever lost your child, you know the feeling of terror that Mary and Joseph must have felt. Of course, they had not merely lost their child. They had lost God's child! God had entrusted his Son to them—and they had lost him! They had lost God!

They had been in Jerusalem for the Passover feast, and they had taken Jesus along. Since he was 12 years old, when it was time to go, they likely didn't bother looking for him, assuming that he was doing as many 12-year olds do, and getting away from his parents and spending time with his friends. Surely he was in one of the groups of children that they saw in the group that was heading back north to Nazareth. Or else with a favorite aunt or uncle.

It seems likely that as the day drew to a close and as families reunited to spend the night somewhere, Mary and Joseph first realized their problem. They probably weren't real worried at first—maybe more aggravated than anything else. All the other kids had had the good sense to come and find their parents, but Jesus had not. But it was probably just going to be a matter of just asking around a bit, eventually finding Jesus, and then giving him whatfor as they dragged him off to bed for the night.

But the asking got them nowhere. No one could even recall having seen Jesus in any of their groups that day. Darkness fell, and both likely entertained horrible scenarios about what evils could have befallen a 12-year old boy in the big city of Jerusalem, or on the roads out of the city—which seemed to be safe enough, given the high volume of traffic on them...but you just never know, do you?

The next day, they headed to Jerusalem with what we'd imagine was considerable haste, and yet also considerable vigilance, scanning every inch of road and roadside for any evidence of their son.

I suppose they went to some place where they figured he have gone once he realized that he had missed the bus back to Nazareth. Maybe they went to the house of a relative in Jerusalem—maybe the relative at whose house they had stayed the night before leaving Jerusalem. Surely he would be there.

But no.

After trying a few more logical places, I wonder if their search became illogical—the sort of frenzied, random search that panic might cause.

After three days they finally ended up at the temple, looking for Jesus. And there he was! While they must have been so relieved to find him safe and sound, they might also have been frustrated that Jesus didn't seem to be looking for them with the same fervor with which they had been looking for him. In fact, Jesus didn't seem to be looking for them at all! He was happily *"sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions."* (!!!)

I believe we hear their frustration in Mary's words, *"Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."*

Jesus sounds genuinely puzzled in his response. Of course he was in the temple, he says. If they wanted to look for him, they should have checked his Father's house. If you want to find a child, the best place to start looking is in their parents' house—for that is their home.

Mary and Joseph don't really get it. I'd guess that they'd kind of forgotten who he was. They'd forgotten that he was God's Son.

It's hard to blame them too much for forgetting this. We don't have any indication from either this story or the rest of the Bible that Jesus stood out much from any other child. In fact, our text indicates that in many ways he seemed like any human child belonging to two human parents. After the events in Jerusalem, he *"went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them,"* realizing his place as their child and respecting their place as his parents. It was surely what he had been doing in the days leading up to his trip to Jerusalem.

After the events in Jerusalem, he *"grew in wisdom and stature"*—just like any other child.

And yet he wasn't just like any other child. He was God come down in human flesh. They had lost God!

Where would you look if you lost God? Many people wouldn't even bother to look at all. While Mary and Joseph were surely terrified at the realization that they had lost [the Son of] God, many people today who have lost God aren't terrified at all. If they do realize that they've lost him, they view it as somewhat freeing, as though a responsibility, a burden, has been lifted from them. Now they can finally do all the things they've wanted to do, without God always being there, looking at them reproachfully, judging them. No, they're plenty happy to have lost God.

The fact that you're here today would seem to at least suggest that that last paragraph doesn't apply to you. If you had lost God and were happy to lose him, you probably wouldn't be here in his house this morning.

But continue to be watchful that it doesn't happen to you. There are a lot of people out there who lost God because they decided to take their eyes off him for just a few seconds. They decided to leave him for a brief time in their life so they could give in to the temptations that were so appealing to them. Some of them decided that college was kind of a time to live the college lifestyle, so they'd just take their eyes off God for a few years, and then they'd come back to him. But they just never did. "A few years" became "just a few more years until I get settled in to my new home and career", and then "just a few more years until..."

Some of those people would be surprised to be told that they've lost God. They would figure that since they're still a pretty good person, since they generally "try to do what is right", therefore they're basically doing the things that God wants them to do, and they couldn't have lost him.

That's how the Devil gets you to lose God—by equating a certain level of morality with "having God." Satan does not care if you are a moral individual. Oh, if he had to choose, he'd generally choose that you weren't. But if living in abject immorality would awaken your conscience and lead you to go on a search for God, he'll much prefer to keep you living at a higher level of morality—one which would lead you to believe that you already have God while at the same time subconsciously believing that you don't have much need for a Savior.

If that is ever the case for you, that you lose God for a time in your life, I pray that God would lead you to the type of terror that Mary and Joseph had those days in Jerusalem. May our terror not just be about losing God, but what happens if we find him. Or, maybe more precisely, if he finds us! And he most assuredly will find us one day when he returns to judge the living and the dead. What will he do to us sinners?

Thankfully, you and I don't need to fear what will happen when Christ finds us. Remember, when Mary and Joseph found Jesus, the NIV says that he told them that he had to be in his Father's house. And as we've already said, the temple of God was a very natural place for the Son of God to be. But the King James Version has a translation that is also linguistically defensible—and perhaps even preferable: "I must be about my Father's business."

In other words, Jesus had to be doing the work that God had given him to do—always. When Jesus was 12 years old studying God's Word in the temple, he was "about his Father's business" by obeying the Third Commandment in our place. When Jesus healed the sick, preached the gospel, died on a cross, he was "about his Father's business." And when, at the end of our text, he "went down to Nazareth and was obedient to them," he was also "about his Father's business"—because the Father had sent him to obey all the commandments in our place—including the 4th Commandment about honoring our fathers and mothers.

Because we had so often been “about our own business” rather than our Father’s business, Jesus lived a life that was entirely focused on his Father’s business—obeying his commandments perfectly and then fulfilling the mission from his Father by paying for our sins by offering up his perfect life as a sacrifice on the cross and rising from the dead so that even that last enemy of ours would be defeated.

So if you feel like you’ve lost God because of our your sins, if you feel that those sins have created a chasm between you and God that makes him unreachable, don’t go frantically “running around Jerusalem” looking to find God. Don’t look for him in the heavens, in some sign from above that you still have God. Don’t go looking for him by looking at your deeds to convince yourself that you’re a good enough person for God. Don’t go looking for him within your own feelings, trying to find a feeling that convinces you that have found God.

If you feel lost and if you want to find God, go to the same place that Mary and Joseph went. Go to the place where he is present. They found [the Son of] God in God’s temple. We find God in his Word.

There in his Word you will find a God who so loved you that he sent his one and only Son so that when you believe in him, you need not panic because you will not perish. May it be your resolution in the coming year to be “in your Father’s house” and “about your Father’s business”—and then will never lose God. Amen.