

RAISING A TEENAGE CHILD

Today's Text: Lk 2: 40-52

Extracts:

And when [Jesus] was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relative and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him... So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." ... Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them... and increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men [Lk 2: 42-45; 46, 51-52]

In September 2009, Roman Polanski, an Oscar winning film director, was arrested in Switzerland on a US warrant of extradition to face sentence for having sex in 1977 with a 13-year-old girl to whom he was also accused of giving drugs and alcohol.¹ Even though a Swiss court has since denied US its extradition request and set Polanski free, he remains a fugitive from US justice. That means that he can never enter the US without facing arrest "for the rape of a 13-year-old child by an adult."

That charge underlines the dilemma that we face when dealing with teenagers, that is, those children over twelve and under twenty years of age. In physical appearance, they look like adults. They can make or have babies like adults. But emotionally and spiritually, they are still mere children that need to be guided and guarded. On the average, teenagers misread their physical maturity and rebel against parental control. The outcome is a growing epidemic of teenage prostitution and unwanted pregnancies. Satan is really out to hurt Christian families by influencing public policy and moral standards to war against moral discipline or spiritual correctness. What are you doing about your own teenage children? This week's study based on Jesus' teenage years will assist you to deal with the challenge.

¹ Story based on the following sources: Emma Thomasson & Estelle Shirbon, "Polanski fights extradition as Hollywood watches," Mon. 28 Sept 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLS29720420090928> ; and Frank Jordans & Bradley S. Klapper, "Polanski free, Swiss reject US extradition request," Mon 12 July 2010, http://www.forbes.com/feeds/ap/2010/07/12/entertainment-roman-polanski_7760842.html?boxes=Homepagebusinessnews

1. Background: Jesus as a teenager

The Bible story for this week begins from when Jesus was twelve years old [Lk 2: 42]. That suggests that He was beginning His thirteenth year. So, we can safely assume that the story we are about to study covers our Lord's teenage years. We do not have enough details but we can *deduce* them. We are told "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men" [Lk 2: 52], and He was *subject to His parents* [v. 51]. The word of God teaches that people are known by their fruits [Matt. 7: 16], and adds, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" [Prov. 22: 6]. Therefore, from the fruits of Christ's upbringing, we can conclude that Joseph (His foster father) and Mary raised their own teenage Son right.

We can learn from their experience to deal with our own situation by paying attention to the following:

a) *The visit to Jerusalem*

At the age of twelve, Jesus went with His parents to Jerusalem "according to the custom of the feast" [v. 42]. Under the Law of Moses, Jews that lived outside the city of Jerusalem were required to make three annual pilgrimages there, namely, for the Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles [Ex. 23: 14-17; Deut. 16: 16]. You will recall that it was on one such pilgrimage at Pentecost that the visitors heard the disciples speak their (pilgrims') languages after the Holy Spirit had descended on them [Acts 2: 1-12]. Jesus came with His parents from Nazareth in Galilee to do according to that divine injunction.

How many of our teenage children today will go to church with their parents to worship God on their congregation's prescribed worship days? There may be genuine reasons for staying away, such as being in boarding school far from home or school schedules even as day (non-boarding) students. In most cases, the parents may be too busy at work to take them there or the teenagers are too busy with home work or electronic gadgets (phones, Internet, etc) to bother about worship. Sooner than later, nobody even remembers what Sunday means to most Christian homes. It becomes a day of rest- at- home!

b) *Jesus was missing!*

After completing the days, Joseph and Mary went back home to Nazareth but they did not know that "the Boy Jesus *lingered behind* in Jerusalem" [Lk 2: 43]. They had thought that Jesus might have gone with relatives and acquaintances but He had not. So, His anxious parents "returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him" [vv. 44-45].

Joseph and Mary had gone a whole day's journey before they realized that their Son was missing [v. 44]. That suggests that they had to spend another day to return to Jerusalem to look for Him. Do you know what they had to sacrifice to do that? His younger brothers and sisters [Matt. 13: 55-56] back home in Nazareth were anxiously awaiting the return of their parents and older half-brother. Joseph's carpentry business was put on hold with disappointed customers leaving anger-filled messages with James and others for their father! Remember, Jesus was their first teenage Son,² and Mary herself was still under 30 years old since she had had Him as a virgin teenager. However, for Mary and her husband, getting back their missing Son was their top priority.

Do you know where your stray teenage children are right now? Even those who live with you that look well-behaved; do you know what they are doing in their rooms right now? Do you know the web sites they are visiting or the pedophiles (including some class teachers) that are communicating with or seducing them online? When last did you look at their school work? Do you know their friends? Do you value your work or other things more than your family? Perhaps you may need to do "a day's journey" to look for your missing teenage children.

c) *But He was about His Father's business!*

Joseph and Mary returned to Jerusalem and found their Son in the temple *after three days' search*. He was sitting among the Rabbis, "both listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers" [Lk 2: 45-47]. Amazed, His mother asked, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." Jesus replied, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about *My Father's business*?" [vv. 48-49].

What a strange response! To His parents who had been out there searching for Him for three days, did their Son's response, "Why did you seek Me?" suggest that they did not need to since He was "grown up"? That would be a typical teenager's response! Or did Jesus know something that His earthly parents had not yet understood? To compound their wonderment, Jesus told them that He was about His Father's business, that is, His Father in heaven. For Joseph, His foster-father, what role was he then supposed to play from that point on? What an "embarrassing" moment for those young parents!

² This claim is plausible for the following reasons: Jesus was called Mary's "firstborn Son" [Matt. 1: 25], suggesting there followed a secondborn son and more [Matt. 13: 55-56]. If Joseph had had older children (by a previous marriage), then Jesus could not have been his firstborn Son and, therefore, not entitled to the throne of His father, David [Ps. 89: 27; Lk 1: 32-33]

How often have you heard your teenage children tell you that they are old enough to take care of certain of their needs, that you should not enter their rooms without their permission, etc? Imagine you as step-parents being told by your teenage step-son or daughter, “I am about my real parents’ business.” How would you feel?

d) *They took Him home and raised Him in the fear of the Lord*

Mary and her husband did not understand what their Son had just said but she “kept all [those] things in her heart” [vv. 50, 51]. So, they took their Son home and He “was subject to them” [v. 51]. That means that *He obeyed everything that His parents said and learned whatever they taught Him as long as they did not contradict or undermine His Father’s business.*

That is the important lesson for us from this story. ***Without God at the centre of it all, we shall run into major problems in trying to successfully raise our teenage children to attain earthly and divine heights that God has for them.***

2. The challenges of raising teenage children

Jesus was subject to His parents and He increased in wisdom and stature. Consequently, He found favour with God and men [Lk 2: 51-52]. There are hardly any parents who would not want their teenage children to turn out the same way. In reality, however, things may not always be so. Let us examine some of a number of scenarios that we may come across in real life:

a) *The responsibility lies solely with the parents*

The word of God makes it clear, as we had earlier noted, that it is the responsibility of parents to train up their children in the way that they should go and that when they are old, they will not depart from it [Prov. 22: 6]. So, most parents invest a great deal of their time, money and energies to ensure that their teenage children receive the right guidance. Their success is measured by how such children turn out in due course. For example, speaking of the genuine faith in Timothy, Paul acknowledged the roles played by his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois [2 Tim. 1: 5].

However, according to an African proverb, when you ask a thief to stop stealing, he will direct you to ask opportunity to stop tempting him! Many parents today are like children raising children. They were themselves not raised in the fear of God and tend to encourage their children along similar wayward ways. For example, sex tourism is booming in Brazil.³ In a moving

³ Chris Rogers, “Brazil’s booming sex tourism,” 31 July 2010
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-10764371>

story, a 14-year-old prostitute and her 12-year-old cousin that are both actively engaged in the business, said:

We need to earn money to buy rice and staple foods for our families. Our parents don't worry about us too much. We tell them when we are leaving and when we're coming back. And then we give the money to them to buy food. They know how we get the money, we just don't discuss it.

How can such parents expect their teenage children to excel when they are the ones encouraging them to derail and fail?

Many parents have been overwhelmed by the complexities of modern living. Even if some of them want to help their teenage children with their school work or moral instruction, they have to compete with the Internet and other electronic gadgets that are increasingly dominated by pedophiles and other sexual perverts. Parents that studied mathematics with the slide rule and communicated with land lines, telex and fax as teenagers are at a disadvantage with their teenage children who are now whizz kids with cell phones, iPods, e-mail, texting, Facebook and YouTube. How can the ignorant teach the confused? It is getting harder!

b) *Teenagers themselves can as well take responsibility for their lives*

It was not His earthly parents that taught Jesus about His heavenly Father's business, otherwise they would not have been surprised to hear Him say so. In like manner, the accident of birth into drugs, poverty or prostitution should not be teenagers' excuse for accepting or remaining in their confused or depraved state.

For example, Samuel was raised by Eli the priest whose two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, "lay with the women who assembled at the entrance of the tabernacle of meeting" [1 Sam. 2: 22]. In spite of the moral decadence all around his spiritual mentor, Eli, "Samuel grew and the Lord was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground; and all Israel ... knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord" [1 Sam. 3: 19-20]. In another example, the father of Hezekiah, Ahaz "had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the Lord" [2 Chron. 28: 19]. Yet, his son, Hezekiah, "did what was good and right and true before the Lord his God...he did it with all his heart. So he prospered" [2 Chron. 31: 20-21]. In both cases, the younger ones respectively overcame their mentor and father's spiritual limitations to excel.

The converse is also possible. The parents may be God-fearing and their children will turn out otherwise. For example, the two sons of Samuel the prophet, Joel and Abijah, were rejected by the people of Israel as their judges

in succession to their highly respected father because they “did not walk in [their father’s] ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice” [1 Sam. 8: 1-3]. Where did that come from?

The world is today full of abandoned teenagers - physically, emotionally or spiritually. Some of them are orphans and children of poor or single mothers. Some of them are the prodigal sons and daughters of famous parents, living upstairs in their parents’ mansions in an exclusive neighbourhood. They all share one thing in common: they may be wallowing in the bewildering wilderness of peer pressure to give up their virginity or abstinence or to try drugs or alcohol or simply get rebellious “for a change.” Left to themselves, many of them may not be able to get out of sexual perversion or destitution or gangs or drugs because of negative reinforcements from around-the-clock cable television and cyber space communication networks. However, with the help of the extended family, the church or Christian radio and television organizations, many teenagers may find themselves rescued from the dump of despair into the majestic presence of Christ’s love. That is the main challenge faced by the *average* Christian parent right now.

3. Conclusion: Bring your teenage children to the feet of Jesus!

Most teenagers will make mistakes but some of them will learn from them, return to God and take their rightful place before the throne of grace that Jesus the Christ has provided us all with His precious blood. You can help your own teenage children by trying out the following:

- ***Show them good examples in your words and deeds [Phil. 4: 9].*** Share the word and pray together as a family. Let them see Mummy and Daddy as good role models of a true Christian marriage.
- ***Learn from them new knowledge that will enable you to communicate better with them.*** For example, let them teach you how to e-mail, text, twitter, etc. As you master those techniques, use them to draw your children’s attention to religious sites online that you can share every now and then with them. That way, you can build trust and communication with them.
- ***Love but don’t spoil them.*** Correct or chastise if necessary [Prov. 13: 24] and reward or praise where applicable.

Be patient with your teenage children or wards. In due course, Jesus will touch their hearts and steady them on the course of making them good Christian parents of the future. May God guide your steps in the right direction.