

A Pastoral Challenge for 2009
Luke 2:52

Dr. Steve Horn

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The Gospels tell us about the birth of Jesus. We have one brief vignette of Jesus' boyhood. The story of Jesus getting separated from his earthly parents immediately precedes the text I want to read this morning. These two verses summarize the life of Jesus from 12 until about 30 when his public ministry begins.

Text: ⁵¹ *Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart.* ⁵² *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

I want to issue a challenge for 2009. You have grown accustomed to such in my ministry here at First Baptist Church. Let me give you the background to this particular challenge. Some 10 weeks or so ago, I picked up my son's "Pre-Teen" Bible we had given him as a gift for completing the third grad a few years ago. In the middle of this Bible I saw a diagram that suggested that as a young pre-teen boy, we should grow as Jesus did. "Be a Luke 2:52 Disciple" the inserted page suggested. I confess that I wasn't sure what Luke 2:52 said, so I looked it up. The verse gripped my heart and became a verse of meditation for me for some weeks. After all, we are commanded in Scripture to "be like Christ." As disciples of Jesus, we are to follow Him.

I want to follow Him in 2009. I want to call you to follow Him more closely in 2009. I began to be impressed that there are four distinct areas of maturity if we are to be like Christ. And so, I issue this challenge to grow like Christ in 2009. What are the four areas?

Grow in Wisdom

What does this mean?

When we think of wisdom, probably a lot comes to mind. Some people think of intellectual capability. Biblically speaking, when we hear the word "wisdom" we must think of the wisdom of God. Biblically speaking, when we hear the word "wisdom" we probably have the greatest example in Solomon. Wisdom is the key word in the book of Proverbs. In Proverbs, wisdom means, "the ability to live life skillfully." Wisdom is the combination of intellect alongside the application of that information that intellect brings.

What is my goal?

So, what are you going to do to grow in wisdom this year? This morning, your sermon notes are interactive. We are not all going to write down the same things. I will offer some suggestions, but you need to decide your own goals as guided by God. What can you do to gain in wisdom? Scripture reading, study, and meditation might be something that you make a specific commitment to. Participating in a class is another example. Hopefully, it will be that as a church we progress together. We are going to devote a quarter of each year to each of these growth areas. For example, next Sunday, I am going to begin preaching through the Sermon on the

Mount, because Jesus said at the end, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.” Jesus said, “Here is wisdom.” On Sunday evenings, for the next several weeks, I will be preaching from the Book of Proverbs. Various other things have been and will continue to be created to help you grow in wisdom.

Grow in Stature

What does this mean? I can hear the moans now. First, you moan, because for the majority of us, we have absolutely no interest in growing in stature. Most of us don’t want to have any part of growing in size. The word here again has to do with Jesus maturing in his physical body at an appropriate rate. The application is that our physical bodies are an appropriate place for us to show spiritual maturity. Hearing this application, most of the rest of us moan. For far too many of us, we don’t want to talk about our physical bodies in relation to being a disciple of Jesus. However, it’s right here in Scripture.

I hate to have to share this little bit of research with you, because I have already shared it with you once before, but here goes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity is now the number one health threat facing Americans. Have you heard of the study performed by Kenneth Ferraro, a sociology professor at Purdue University? Ferraro concluded that Southern Baptists are the heaviest people in America. He studied the relationship between religion and body mass index. He discovered that people involved in church are more overweight than non-church goers. Highlighting his report was the embarrassing discovery that Southern Baptists are the most overweight of all. At the 2005 Southern Baptist Convention, of the over 1400 who participated in a health screening, 75% were overweight.¹ I have been to those things before—this is accurate research.

Some of us will need to adopt 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 as our verse of the year. “19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

What is my goal?

So, what will be your goal?

Grow in Favor with God

What does this mean?

To grow in favor with God means to grow in obedience. The word here is the same word for grace. About Noah, in Genesis 6:8-9, the Bible records, “But Noah found grace (or favor) in the eyes of the LORD. This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.” You will not grow in favor with God without growing in obedience.

¹ Wendy Ashley, January 2007 issue of SBC Life.

What is my goal?

What is that area of my life that the LORD has been asking for obedience and I have refused.

Grow in Favor with man

What does this mean?

Here's what I think this means. People liked Jesus. People wanted to be around Jesus. Now, there came a time when His preaching caused quite a bit of turmoil and that continues today. But, people liked Jesus. That's what made the opponents of Jesus, the religious leaders of the day, so fearful of Jesus. He attracted a following. Peter summarized well Jesus' favor with man when he said, as recorded in Acts 10:38, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with Holy Spirit and with power, who **went about doing good** and healing all who were oppressed by the devil..." If we go about doing good, the chances are good that we will have favor with man.

What is my goal?

What can you do to grow in favor with those around you? The idea is to grow in your relationships. We intend to help you this year in your relationships.

So, there it is: I challenge you to grow in wisdom, in stature, in favor with God, and in favor with men. Roy Robertson was one of the first missionaries of the Navigators Ministry. Roy Robertson was a soldier at Pearl Harbor in 1941: "My ship, the West Virginia, docked at Pearl Harbor on the evening of December 6, 1941. A couple of the fellows and I left the ship that night and attended a Bible study. About fifteen sailors sat in a circle on the floor. The leader asked us to each recite our favorite Scripture verse. In turn each sailor shared a verse and briefly commented on it.

I sat there in terror. I couldn't recall a single verse. I grew up in a Christian home, went to church three times a week, but I sat there terrified. I couldn't recall a single verse. Finally, I remembered one verse - John 3:16. I silently rehearsed it in my mind. The spotlight of attention grew closer as each sailor took his turn. It was up to the fellow next to me. He recited John 3:16. He took my verse! As he commented on it I sat there in stunned humiliation. In a few moments everyone would know that I could not recall from memory even a single verse. Later that night I went to bed thinking, 'Robertson, you're a fake.'

At 7:55 the next morning I was awakened by the ship alarm ordering us to battle stations. 360 planes of the Japanese Imperial Fleet were attacking our ship and the other military installations. My crew and I raced to our machine gun emplacement, but all we had was practice ammunition. So for the first fifteen minutes of the two-hour battle, we only fired blanks hoping to scare the Japanese airplanes.

As I stood there firing fake ammunition I thought, 'Robertson, this is how your whole life has been - firing blanks for Christ.' I made up my mind as Japanese bullets slammed into our ship, "If I escape with my life, I will get serious about following Jesus."²

How many of us are really growing mature in our walk with Christ or just firing blanks?

² Sermonillustrator.org. "Maturity."

Getting Started

Let me pinpoint four truths to get us started that come right from this text.

1. Maturity is the expectation of every Christian. We are to be imitators of Christ. We are to always be maturing. A group of tourists were visiting a village. One asked the guide, "Were any great men born in this village?" Very wisely, the guide said, "Nope, only babies have been born in this village." We are to grow up as Christians.
2. Maturity happens as the result of subjection to others. Did you catch verse 51? Jesus lived in subjection to his earthly parents. Maturity cannot happen to the person who refuses to live in subjection to someone else. For all of us that is God. In addition, we most likely will have to place ourselves in subjection to someone else.
3. Maturity is evident by progression. Jesus increased. We are to continue to mature. You cannot be completely wise, completely physically fit, completely obedient, completely living in favor with everyone. May this be a year when you experience progression. Have you ever marked your child's progress in height on the wall? Let me ask you a difficult question? What if someone did that kind of marking of progress as related to our spiritual lives?
4. Maturity requires dedication. To increase is difficult. Some suggest that the connotation of this word is "to beat one's way forward."

One of the preachers that I listen to from time to time is a preacher by the name of John Sartelle. He preached in Memphis when I was a student in college. John tells a story about his now adult son, also named John. Sartelle said that one day while bringing his son, then a third grader, to school, he asked, "John, what do you want to do when you grow up?" Without hesitation, young John answered, "I want to finish playing football for my school. After that, I want to play football for Memphis University High School. After that, I want to play football for the University of Tennessee. (By the way, he did all of that.) His Dad said, "Well, John, what do you want to do after college?" As if he had thought a lot about it, the third grade son said, "I don't have that worked out yet."

The Preacher Sartelle says that he realized that his son did not tell him what he wanted to do when he grew up, but what he wanted to do before he grew up.

What do you want to be before you grow up? I hope that all of us can say, "I want to grow in wisdom, in stature, in favor with God, and in favor with man."