



*Each year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, **but his parents did not know it.** Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers.*

*When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "**Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.**" And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" **But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.** And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man. —Luke 2:41-52*

7 Tips on Parenting I Learned When Mary and Joseph Lost Jesus

1. Every parent worries.

The word anxiety screamed at me during this reading. Mary and Joseph felt "great anxiety" as parents to Jesus? The thought is comforting. Not only is it normal to worry about our children, the most wonderful set of parents in all of history, the earthly parents of the Living God, experienced this type of emotion. There is a healthy amount of anxiety that we can have about parenting. This worrying keeps us diligent and on task. When we feel anxious, we turn to God and pray for wisdom, guidance and protection. *What causes you to be most anxious as a parent?* Take a moment to give it over to the Lord in trust.

2. Mistakes happen.

Mary was without sin, but she still made an innocent mistake as a parent. Though the times were different then, Mary and Joseph probably should have checked in with Jesus (or whoever they thought was responsible for him) before leaving Jerusalem. It wasn't a sin, it was rather an accident or a miscommunication of some kind, but still it happened. **We make mistakes as parents all the time.** In the chaos and busyness of life, we forget appointments, misplace important papers, or even leave a child behind. Learn from Mary and Joseph. Don't beat yourself up over mistakes. Apologize and do whatever is necessary to make things right again, but don't dwell on it. Show yourself mercy by not expecting perfection at all times. *When have you failed to show yourself mercy?* Ask for God's help and healing in those areas of parenting.

3. It's more important to honor God than to worry about your reputation as a parent.

If this event had happened in today's world, can you imagine what the news and social media would have been saying? Neglectful parents leave a child behind for three days. I'm sure that people were talking about what happened with Jesus even back then. They may have even thought Jesus was a troublemaker or problem child or that Mary and Joseph should have been a bit more diligent. **For Mary to share this story or allow it to be shared with the Gospel writers must have taken some courage and humility.** I know that I would not want my parenting mishaps to be written down in the most widely read book of all time for generations upon generations to reflect upon, but Mary knew that there was more at stake than her title of "Super Mom." She understood that the importance of this event in the life of Jesus was more important than what people might think of her as a mother. *Are we willing to do the same? Are we willing to do what God asks of us even though others might gossip about our parenting decisions?*

4. Listen to your children.

Another aspect of this Gospel that struck me was how Mary and Joseph responded when they finally found Jesus in the temple. Trust me, if my son wandered from where he was supposed to be and I was searching for him for 3 long days, I would not have responded in such a gentle and loving way. The whole town would have been able to hear my response! But Mary and Joseph ask Jesus to explain before they start yelling at him. I want to remember to do this in my own life. **Before responding in anger, take a moment to let your children speak and really listen to them.** Sometimes, as in the case of Jesus, there is good reason for the behaviour that might first appear to be disobedient. Listening to our children shows them we respect them. *How can we better listen to our children?*

5. Give your children the freedom to be the person God created them to be (even when you might not understand).

The scripture says that Mary and Joseph listened to what Jesus said, but didn't fully understand. There are many times we don't understand the choices our children make. Our job is not to make these choices for them, but to give them all the tools they need to make decisions that honor God. We can't make artists into athletes or force our love of music on our children. **We need to allow kids to develop the gifts and talents given by God, not the ones that we want them to possess.** As long as our children glorify God in what they do, we should help them in the path they have chosen.

"Many times it is difficult to let your children grow and become independent. The practice and application of the meaning of virtue, empathy, dignity and values happen in the home, but it can be difficult letting go of the child as they begin to explore the outside world. From the perspective of the parent, there can be many risks and opportunities for harm that their natural parental instinct is to protect the child. As the child grows, so does the parent in learning just how to interact with the world. As parents, we must encourage our children to become the architects of their own character building by giving them the healthy home environment to practice virtue and opening the home to experience the world around them." – [Jessie Tappel of Divine Mercy University \(a Catholic graduate school of psychology and counseling\)](#)

What are some of the gifts God has given your children? How do they differ from your own? How can you encourage your children to use and grow their talents?

6. Require obedience from your children.

Though we listen to our children and lead them to make good choices, we also require obedience. *"He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them."* **Jesus might have enjoyed staying in Jerusalem in the temple, but he was obedient to his parents.** We expect and require our children to be obedient. Teaching them to obey us helps them learn to obey God. *Do your children lack obedience? How can you help your children to obey?*

7. God is sovereign.

When Mary and Joseph could not find Jesus, God knew exactly where he was and what he was doing. God cares for, watches over, and protects our children when we can't be near to them. We must remember and trust that our God sees all and loves all at all times. Nothing and no one is hidden from Him. There is no place too far for our children to run from Him and no sin too deep for Him to show His mercy to them. **When we entrust our children to God in the same way that Mary and Joseph did, we will not fail.** Find comfort in the knowledge that God loves our children even more than we do and He wants to provide the best for them. *Do you trust in God's loving care for your children? Do you pray for your children daily?*

There is no manual that covers all aspects of parenting, but we can look to the Word of God for help and guidance. Amazing that God's word speaks so loudly and clearly thousands of years after it was written on a page. The salvation of our children is our most important goal as parents. We must strive to teach our kids to love and honor God with their lives. We must show them the love and heart of God with our actions and by our example. There is no better way to learn this than to contemplate the love of the Holy Family. Many more lessons than those we have listed above can be learned from their great and holy example of love. *Jesus, Mary and Joseph pray for us.*