
THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS | *For Children*

By George MacDonald¹

One evening [at our Sunday evening family assembly] I read to them the story of the Boy Jesus in the temple.² I sought to make the story more real to them by dwelling a little on the growing fears of His parents as they went from group to group of their friends, tracing back the road toward Jerusalem, and asking every fresh company they knew if they had seen their Boy, till at length they were in great trouble when they could not find Him even in Jerusalem. Then came the delight of His mother when she did find Him at last, and His answer to what she said.

At that point Wynniesaid, “That has always troubled me, Papa. I feel as if Jesus spoke unkindly to His mother when He said that to her.”

I read again for them the words, “How is it that ye sought Me? Wist³ ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?” And I sat silent for a while.

“Why don’t you speak, Papa?” said Harry.

“I am sitting wondering at myself, Harry,” I said. “I remember quite well that those words troubled me once as they now trouble you. But when I read them over now, they seemed to me so lovely that I could hardly read them aloud. I can hardly see now the hurt or offense the words gave me. I understand them now, and I did not understand them then. I once took them as uttered with a tone of reproof; now I hear them as uttered with a tone of loving surprise.”

“But how could He be surprised at anything?” said Connie. “If He was God, He must have known everything.”

“He tells us Himself that He did not know everything. He said once that even He did not know one particular thing—only the Father knew it.”⁴

“But how could that be if He is God?”

“Since Jesus was a real man, and no mere appearance of a man, is it any wonder that, with a heart full to the brim of the love of God, He should be for a moment surprised—surprised that His mother should not have taken it as a matter of course that if He was not with her, He must be doing something His Father wanted Him to do? For His answer means just this: ‘Why did you look for Me? Didn’t you know that I must of course be doing something My Father had given Me to do?’ A good many things had passed before then, which ought to have been sufficient to make Mary conclude that her missing Boy must be about God’s business somewhere. If her heart had

¹ George MacDonald, 1824-1905, Scottish pastor, poet and novelist. “The Example of the Child Jesus For Children” taken from Chapter 5 of *The Seaboard Parish* (England, 1868); collected in *The Parish Papers*, edited for today’s reader by Dan Hamilton (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1997), pp. 235-237.

² Luke 2:41-52.

³ Definition: past tense of “wit,” *to know or learn*; in other words, “know ye not. . . .”

⁴ Mat. 24:36.

been as full of God and God's business as His was, she would not have been in the least uneasy about Him. And here is the lesson of His whole life: it was all His Father's business."

"But we have so many things to do that are not His business," said Wynn timer, with a sigh of oppression.

"Not one, my darling. If anything is not His business, you not only do not have to do it, but you ought not to do it."

"I wish He would tell me something to do," said Charlie. "Wouldn't I do it!"

I made no reply, but waited for an opportunity which I was pretty sure was at hand, while I carried the matter a little further.

"But listen to this, Wynn timer," I said. "And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.' Was that not His Father's business too? Was it not also doing the business of His Father in heaven to honor His father and His mother, though He knew that His days would not be long in that land? But I am afraid I have wearied you children, and so, Charlie, my boy, perhaps you should go to bed."

But Charlie was very comfortable on the rug before the fire, and did not want to go. First one shoulder went up, and then the other, and the corners of his mouth went down, as if to keep the balance true, and he did not move to go. I gave him a few moments to recover himself, but, as the black frost still endured, I thought it was time to hold up a mirror to him. (When he was a very little boy he was much in the habit of getting out of temper, and then as now, he made a face that was hideous to behold. To cure him of this, I used to make him carry a little mirror about his neck that it might be always at hand for showing him to himself—a sort of artificial conscience.)

"Charlie," I said, "a little while ago you were wishing that God would give you something to do. And now when He does, you refuse at once, without even thinking about it."

"How do you know that God wants me to go to bed?" said Charlie, with something of surly impertinence.

"I know that God wants you to do what I tell you, and to do it pleasantly.⁵ Do you think the Boy Jesus would have put on such a face as that—I wish I had the little mirror to show it to you—when His mother told Him it was time to go to bed?"

And now Charlie began to look ashamed. I left the truth to work in him, because I saw it was working. Had I not seen that, I should have compelled him to go at once, that he might learn the majesty of law. I went on talking to the others. In the space of not more than one minute, he rose and came to me, looking both good and ashamed, and held up his face to kiss me, saying, "Good night, Papa." I bade him good night, and kissed him more tenderly than usual, that he might know all was right between us. I required no formal apology, no begging of my pardon, as some parents think right. It seemed enough to me that his heart was turned. For it is a terrible thing to risk changing humility into humiliation.

⁵ Eph. 6:1-3; Ps. 100:2; Prov. 15:13.