



FOUNDATION

THE JESUS JOURNEY

Foundations matter. 1945 Sam Walton launched a small discount retail store in Bentonville, Arkansas. Seven years later, he built a second one. Walton built incrementally, brick by brick, store by store. Finally, after a quarter century of laying a foundation from a single store to a chain of 38 Midwest rural discount retail stores, the concept of large discount stores was established. “Somehow over the years,” Sam expresses, “people have gotten the impression that Walmart was just this great idea that turned into an overnight success, but it was an outgrowth of everything we had been doing since 1945, and like most overnight successes it was (many) years in the making.”¹ With the foundation laid, the world has witnessed growth to over 11,000 stores in 28 countries with over \$559 billion in annual revenue.

Jesus laid a foundation as well and it required thirty years to do so! The Biblical accounts are quite clear that Jesus intentionally “set aside” his rights and privileges to deity to take on all the challenges of being a leader who was fully human.² His life and leadership are relevant to us because of that choice, otherwise every decision he faced, every temptation he endured, and every challenge he confronted could be dismissed as being admirable but certainly not attainable. If he were not fully human then he would be a model to be showcased, not a leader to be emulated. Jesus took on our nature so that we could take on his.

The Biblical accounts of Jesus’ life focus briefly on the stories surrounding his birth and then mainly on the final three years of his life. Given the scarcity of material on the subject, leaders today might conclude that Jesus’ first thirty years were insignificant. However, foundations take

time to lay, and are often imperceptible as a mustard seed’s sprouting. What were the cultivating factors that guided this long, quiet period of growth in Jesus’ life? Luke’s account provides some insights.³

The story opens with Jesus as a young man. At age twelve, Jewish adolescents take their first journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover week. For Jesus, it marked a “rite of passage” into adulthood. One can only imagine Jesus’ excitement during the three-day family trip as he walked toward the Jewish capital during this period of Roman occupation. Within six miles of Jerusalem he may have spotted the Temple brooding over the Kidron Valley skyline as his family approached Jerusalem. If Wall Street, Pennsylvania Avenue and the Vatican all moved to one location, it might approach the cultural significance that the Temple carried for first-century Israel.

At this age, all Jewish young men were expected to study and seek after God. Most adolescents integrated their scriptural knowledge and principles into their various vocations (carpentry, fishing, etc.) to build a strong business and family. A few proved exceptional enough in their calling and capacity to know and teach Scripture and were given the revered title of Rabbi near the age of thirty. Jesus was one of those men. In Luke 2, we see Jesus responding to God’s calling to follow him and to develop the skills, the capacity if you will, necessary to fulfill his teaching vocation. Capacity is the ability and resolve to carry out the good work that God entrusts to us. In this story we notice that Jesus “grew” in wisdom and stature (vs. 40, 52). Building capacity to fulfill God’s calling was critical to Jesus’ preparation. On our own, we can do



◀ nothing (John 5:19), but through Christ, we can do all things (Phil 4:13, cf. Rom 8:31). This is the foundation for all Christians who are given leadership roles in their vocation – clarify your calling and build your capacity.

After the week-long celebration Jesus stayed at the Temple, failing to join his parents and their party as they began the trip home. He wanted more time to engage the Scriptures and take full advantage of the temple mentors. He knew that he could not get this kind of “learning feast” in his hometown of Nazareth, which was too small for a temple or synagogue. His trip to Jerusalem was a celebration of Passover and his passions. It was obvious to this twelve-year-old that God was calling him to build the intellectual capacity needed to be a master teacher of Scripture. A Rabbi. Both his calling and his need to build capacity were becoming clear to him. Yet it wasn’t so clear to his father and mother.

When Jesus’ parents discovered their son was missing it took them nearly three days before finding him in the Temple. Their emotions were intense, ranging from the thrill of finding their missing first-born, to the personal hurt of his deliberate absence, to the astonishment of him influencing a Q&A session and teaching the Temple teachers. Mary admonished him: “Son why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” Jesus’ response demonstrates the clarity of his calling, “... I am doing my Father’s business.” As a Christian leader, can this be your honest answer to the question of why you do what you do?

Jesus, however, had not fully prepared for a leadership role. There was more foundation to be laid. He was still a young man who needed maturity that comes with experience. Leaders in training need to respond properly to authorities, and he did. The Bible underscores that Jesus obeyed his parents even though they misunderstood the situation. Jesus continued to

“practice” obedience. Rather than rebel, he submitted to the governing authorities, and ultimately to the will of his Father.⁴ Like Jesus, great Christian leaders must build their foundation on a bedrock of submission.

The story concludes with a transition of focus from Jesus to Mary. Mary would never forget this moment. Although she did not understand all that had transpired, she treasured this defining moment in her son’s life. While Jesus quietly prepared for his vocation, she remembered his calling and his capacity to communicate with master teachers. Many leaders understand the silence of preparation. It can be a period of time when being understood or appreciated is nearly impossible. You feel like a cipher. In Jesus’ case only his mother and his Heavenly Father seemed to notice his diligent preparation.

Is it possible that building a foundation for a future assignment is so critical that Scripture focuses on merely one story to funnel our attention to its primary points? Eighteen years passed. No one records a word about Jesus. No one seems to notice – until he comes to a river to be baptized by a prophet who everyone notices. Then forty days later, after enduring agonizing temptations in a lonely wilderness, he is well prepared for his assignment – “To Preach the Good News!”

Jesus patiently built a foundation for thirty years for a promotion that lasted only three years. Ninety percent of his leadership was preparation. Are you in a preparation phase that seems too long? How long are you willing to invest in building a foundation? Thirty years, thirty months, thirty days? Place your primary focus, as a Christian leader, on knowing and trusting God who desires to give you a clear calling and the capacity which will sovereignly shape you for His purposes. Foundations matter to God. ●

/ 1) *Good to Great*, by Jim Collins, p. 191 / 2) Philippians 2:6,7
/ 3) Luke 2:41-52 / 4) Hebrews 5:8