

LENT 1

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Read Luke 2:41-52

This unique story, found only in Luke's gospel, gives us a window into the capabilities of Jesus as a 12-year-old youth. His mother still addresses him as "child", but he is already clear on his vocation and mission in life! Still, when found in the Temple, Jesus returns obediently with his parents. "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor" (verse 52). Jesus still had more to learn and was blessed with a godly mother and father to help guide and instruct him in life skills, human experiences and relationships, vocational training, and spiritual wisdom.

Zoe Empowers participants often lack an adult role model or care giver to teach and nurture them, having lost one or both parents and sometimes all relatives. Zoe staff reach out to local leaders for help in seeking the most alone, desperate and impoverished children and youth. Sometimes these child-headed families are on their own, and some live with an elderly or disabled grandparent who cannot provide for them.

Let's go now to an urban area in Vizag, India and meet Shanmukh, his brother and grandmother, and hear about his dreams.

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These young people, lacking parents to support and guide them, still have capabilities and dreams. They dream of vocations like carpentry, hairdressing, tailoring, or business ownership. They desire to raise animals and learn how to farm their family land, and are willing to work hard to achieve their dreams! They lack only funds to begin and the skills to succeed. Through trainings, group support, and local mentors, Zoe helps them "grow in wisdom and years". Through small financial inputs, Zoe sets them on a path that allows them to build upon their labors, save, and grow their businesses.

Zoe's approach is unique in that it entrusts the youth themselves to lead in their journey out of poverty as they follow their own dreams!

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Let's visit Christophe in Rwanda to see how he and his family have progressed in their dreams so far in the Zoe program.

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Now let's travel to a different setting in remote rural Zimbabwe to see how Tadiwanashe and her siblings are pursuing their dreams of farming.

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Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. What struck you in the stories of Christophe and Tadiwanashe?
2. How do you think these stories would impact your children/grandchildren or the youth in your church?
3. Think about the gifts and abilities of teens. How have you seen them being empowered in your family, church, or community?
4. How does a child-led approach build confidence and character in the Zoe young people? How do you see them support one another in their group?

Prayer

Jesus, you were once a vulnerable child in a poor family, and you grew into manhood in a small village. Open our eyes to the beautiful gifts of our youth. Help us to see and support the young people in our own communities and in the Zoe program in ways that respect and empower them. May we listen and support their dreams. In your name we pray, Amen.

Action

Be intentional this week to talk with a young person and listen to their dreams, whether your own child/grandchild, or one in your neighborhood or church. What support or encouragement do they need?

If your church youth are not involved in this study, encourage their leaders to join in, or plan a Zoe night at youth group to share some videos and talk about their dreams. Encourage youth to plan a unique Zoe fundraiser!

Zoe Empowers is offering a new VBS mission curriculum for Summer 2022 called "International Dream Hunters" so plan to make use of it in your VBS!