

**HOW TO GROW MORE LIKE JESUS – Part 1**

**1 Peter 3:8-12**

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The title of this sermon is “How to Grow More Like Jesus.”

**The Bible commands us to pursue spiritual growth.**

**2 Peter 3:18 (CSB)** says, “but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

When you first become a Christian, you are spiritually immature. You are a spiritual baby – in your character, your conduct, and your convictions.

And God wants you to grow up.

And **you should want to grow.**

**Francois Fenelon**, a French Archbishop, said, "There is nothing that is more dangerous to your own salvation, more unworthy of God and more harmful to your own happiness, than that you should be content to remain as you are."

If you are a true Christian, there should be a deep, strong desire to become more of the person that God wants you to be.

One of our church members did a video on Facebook Live describing all of her New Year’s resolutions, and at the very top of her list was spiritual growth. That should be the case with every Christian.

If you don’t want to grow as a Christian, then something’s seriously wrong.

**WHAT DOES SPIRITUAL GROWTH MEAN?**

But what does spiritual growth mean? What is the goal of spiritual growth?

Write this down. **Spiritual growth ultimately is about becoming more like Jesus in your character, conduct, and convictions.**

**1 John 2:6 (NLT)** says, “Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.”

**John Ortberg** wrote, “To pursue spiritual life means simply this: To know Jesus more intimately and to live as if he were in your place.”

I’m sure you’ve heard of the popular **WWJD** movement. It stands for “What Would Jesus Do?” The idea is to live with that question constantly on your mind in everything you say, do, and think.

But if you want to grow more like Jesus, there is a prerequisite.

Write this down. **You can’t grow more like Christ if you don’t know what Christ is like.**

Imagine if I asked you to draw a picture of my grandmother Josie.

Could you do it?

Most of you couldn’t do it because you’ve never seen her. You don’t know what she looks like.

To become like Christ, you need to know what Christ is like.

That’s how this sermon series is going to help us.

Today we’re going to read a passage essentially describes the character of Christ; not exhaustively; not comprehensively; but it gives us a good description of Christlikeness that we can work on.

Turn with me to 1 Peter 3:8-12 (CSB). Let's read the passage, and then we'll study it.

8 Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble, 9 not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing.

10 For the one who wants to love life and to see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, 11 and let him turn away from evil and do what is good. Let him seek peace and pursue it, 12 because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.

This passage paints a good picture of Christlikeness.

It gives us nine ways to grow more like Christ.

We're going to look at five today, two next week, and then two the final week. So that means that today we have to move fast.

## **9 WAYS TO GROW MORE LIKE CHRIST**

### **1. Unity.**

To grow more like Christ you need to be a person of unity.

**Verse 8** says, "Finally, all of you be like-minded."

**Strong's Greek Hebrew Dictionary** says this word means "harmonious; of one mind."

The **Amplified Bible** says "united in spirit."

The **Expanded Bible** says "be in agreement (be like-minded; live in harmony)."

The **ESV** says, "Have unity of mind."

So the idea is to be a person of unity.

What does it mean to be a person of unity? **Make every effort to get along and work together with church family.**

Let me first point out that to be a person of unity implies that you are plugged into a church.

If you want to grow more like Christ, you have to be a committed, participating member of a church. There's no way around it.

The church is called the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the family of God, the temple of God, the pillar and foundation of truth;

the Bible says Christ loves the church, and Christ died for the church, and provides and cares for the church, and Christ is building the church.

If there's anything worth committing to and participating in, it's the church.

There's something that everything Christian should understand.

God is on a mission in the world to seek and save the lost, and to teach them to obey all of Christ's teachings.

And God's plan for accomplishing this mission is not individuals, but the church – a community of believers devoted to making disciples.

But if the church can't get along, then the church can't get things done.

That's why it's so important for Christians to be people of unity.

There are **three lessons that I've learned about unity** over the years as a pastor.

**First, unity means getting along and working together.**

Think of a basketball team. What does it mean for a basketball team to be unified? First, it means that they get along; they aren't fighting with each other; they are being kind and respectful of each other. But that's not all. Unity is not merely the absence of conflict. For the team to be unified they all need to be working together on the same goal, and that is winning.

For our church to be unified, it's not enough that we get along and are kind and respectful to each other.

We also need to work together. All hands on deck. Everyone needs to get involved in accomplishing the mission of the church.

**The second lesson that I've learned about unity is that unity is very fragile.**

It is very easy to disrupt the unity of a church.

People get mad and leave the church over all sorts of petty reasons.

I'll probably never forget the story that **Mike Walker**, pastor of the Bayou Church told me years back. When they built their new building, they painted the walls to the auditorium black because it has something to do with the lighting. It gives them more flexibility with controlling the lighting in the room. Anyway, some of the members felt strongly that a church should not have black walls, because I guess they felt that black was an evil color or something. So they left the church.

Unity is very fragile.

That's why **we need to remember two things.**

For the sake of unity, **be very careful to treat each other with respect and kindness.** Try hard not to offend or hurt someone in the church.

And **second, give each other lots of grace.** Don't demand that the church be perfect for you to stick around. When someone offends you, forgive them.

And a **third lesson** that I've learned about unity is that **it takes hard work.**

You would think that if we all just love God then we'll be unified.

It's not that simple. Unity takes hard work. It takes intentionality. Takes wisdom and skill.

Even the way the church is organized and structured makes a big difference.

Some churches are almost pure democracies. They have monthly business meetings, and they vote on just about everything – on whether or not repaint the bathroom, and what color.

Believe it or not, this leads to all sorts of fights, and arguments, and hurt feelings; it prevents the church from growing; it makes it very hard for the church renovate, and innovate, and adapt with the times.

And all this prevents the church from effectively fulfilling its mission and reaching the community for Christ.

So even the church structure can make a huge difference in fostering unity.

That's why **Ephesians 4:3 (CSB)** says, "making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

How did Christ display unity?

Well, for one, He lived in complete submission to the Father. He did not rebel against His Father.

He also prayed for unity. In His high priestly prayer, in **John 17:20-21**. "20 I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. 21 May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you."

## **2. Sympathy.**

The second way to grow more like Christ is sympathy. Be a sympathetic Christian.

**Verse 8** says, "Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic...."

Now if you look up the worthy sympathy in the dictionary it says this: feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune (Google).

But the Biblical concept of sympathy is broader than just feeling sorry for someone when they go through a hard time. It is both positive and negative. The best definition of sympathy in the Bible is found in **Romans 12:15 (CSB)**. "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep." That's what it means to be a person of sympathy: **Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.** The idea is to feel what others are feeling. Identify with the feelings of others.

**One writer** said, "Sympathy is a feeling for or a capacity for sharing in the interests of another. The sympathetic individual manifests an affinity, association, or relationship with others such that whatever affects one similarly affects the other. Sympathy often suggests a tender concern and can also imply a power to enter into another's emotional experience of any sort (PreceptAustin.org)."

The same writer said, "People who have true sympathy generally do not say, 'I know how you feel.' Because since they know how you feel, they also know how unhelpful it is to hear someone say, "I know how you feel."

How did Jesus display sympathy?

Do you remember the story of Lazarus? Lazarus was a close friend of Jesus, and He died.

By the time Jesus arrived Lazarus had been dead for four days.

As He was entering the village of Bethany, Lazarus's sister, Mary, went out to meet Jesus, and she said, "Lord, if you had gotten here sooner, Lazarus wouldn't have died."

And then it says in John 11 that when Jesus saw Mary and the others crying, "He was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled.... And Jesus wept (Jn 11:33-35)."

Now what's interesting is that Jesus knew that Lazarus died the moment he died, four days earlier. And Jesus also knew that it wasn't permanent, that He was about to raise Lazarus back to life. So at this moment Jesus didn't have much to be crying about. But when He saw others crying, He sympathized, and He cried with them. That's sympathy.

What's the opposite of sympathy? Jealousy. Jealousy rejoices at another's misfortune, and weeps over another's prosperity.

Why does God want us to be sympathetic?

Because this is one of the manifestations of love. This is the way to love people.



Let's say that you tell somebody at work, "Good morning! How are you today?" And they say, "Horrible. My brother passed away last night and I was up all night long with family."

If you respond, "Huh," and then walk off, is that loving? No.

The loving thing to do is to sympathize. Feel sorry. Show pity. Weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice.

### **3. Love for church family.**

The third way to grow more like Jesus is to love your church family.

**Verse 8** says, "Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another..."

The Greek word is *philadelphos*, and it means brother-loving.

The **NLT** says "love each other as brothers and sisters."

The **Expanded Bible** says, "loving each other as family."

Peter is writing to Christian churches, and he is telling them not just to love each other, but to love each other in the church like family.

The Bible commands us to love everyone, even our enemies.

But the Bible commands us to show special love to special people.

In other words, the Bible doesn't tell us to love everyone equally.

For example, you need to love God more than anyone.

Then you need to love your spouse more than anyone other than God.

Then you need to love your children more than anyone other than God and your spouse.

Then you need to show a very special love to your parents – honor your parents, and take care of them in their old age.

And the Bible also calls Christians to show a very special love to your church family.

For example, **Galatians 6:10 (CSB)** says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.”

One **writer** put it like this, “Don't view each other as strangers, or as mere acquaintances, or as distant relatives. View each other as close family for after all we now all possess the same ‘Father’ (PreceptAustin.org).”

Here’s a definition of love for church family: Use your gifts and resources to help meet the needs of your church and church family.

What this means is this. We need to act like family.

We need to be more than coworkers, teammates, classmates, or neighbors.  
We need to act like family.

And that simply means we need to be ready to help each other in times of need.

Make yourself especially available and accessible when it comes to helping your church family.

Once again, this assumes that you are plugged into a church. You can’t be like Jesus if you aren’t committed to church.

I remember one time someone mentioned to Tracy that I was sick or that my back was hurt; I can't remember; but I was in bad shape at the time. So that Sunday Tracy showed up at 6:30 in the morning to help with setup. I didn't ask her to do that. She was simply loving her church family.

How did Jesus display love for the church? He died on the cross for it.

**Ephesians 5:25 (CSB)** says, "Christ loved the church and gave himself for her."

#### **4. Compassion.**

The fourth way to grow more like Jesus is compassion.

**Verse 8** says, "Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate...."

We find the same virtue mentioned in **Ephesians 4:32 (CSB)**. "And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ."

When you look up the word compassion in the dictionary, it says this: sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others (Google).

Notice the close similarity between the words sympathy and compassion.

As it relates to people who are suffering, sympathy is feeling sorry for them, but compassion takes that pity and moves into action.

This Greek word (eusplanchnos/yoo'-splanekh-nos) is sometimes translated tenderhearted, kindhearted and generous.

Here's the way I define compassion: Feel sorrow and concern for the sufferings and misfortunes of others.

It's pity that moves into action.

It's when you feel sorry for someone, you sympathize with them, and then you move in to help them.

It's the idea of suffering alongside someone; or getting involved in the suffering of others.

When Mrs. Rita passed away last October we experienced compassion first hand.

I could give you example after example of family and friends who showed our family compassion, but let me just brag on **Destiny McCart** for a moment.

The afternoon that Rita died, I called many of the leaders in the church, including Destiny, to share the bad news.

When I called Destiny, she came right over.

She hugged our necks and cried with us.

And then, she sprung into action.

She organized meals for us and our extended family for the entire week, including the day of the funeral.

She was like a constant presence that week.

She felt sorry for our suffering, but then she got involved with our suffering and she suffered alongside us.

She ministered to us in our suffering.

## **5. Humility.**

The fifth way to grow like Christ is humility.

Humility is a virtue that is emphasized throughout Scripture.

**Proverbs 15:33 (CSB)** says, “The fear of the Lord is what wisdom teaches, and humility comes before honor.”

**Proverbs 22:4 (CSB)** says, “Humility, the fear of the Lord, results in wealth, honor, and life.”

**Ephesians 4:1-2 (CSB)** says, “Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to live worthy of the calling you have received, 2 with all humility...”

What is humility? **Humility is seeing yourself the way God sees you.**

The opposite of humility is pride, which is a distorted view of yourself; it’s when you think too highly of yourself. It’s when you see yourself as better, more important, more valuable, more talented, more entitled, more intelligent, more spiritual, more worthy than others.

Humility is seeing yourself the way God sees you.

### **How does God see you?**

- You are priceless, but without God you are hopeless.
- You are important, but no more important than anyone else.
- You are very talented, but your talents are a gift from God, and He gave them to you for serving Him and others.
- You have many strengths, but you are very weak without a devoted relationship with God, and without a close connection to church family.
- You have an amazing mind, but you are foolish without the wisdom of God’s word.
- You may be in charge at home or at work, but God wants you to submit to His authority.
- You may be a leader, but God put you in charge to serve those you lead.
- You can accomplish much, but apart from Christ you can do nothing.

- You may be very beautiful, or very strong, but true beauty and strength are measured by a person's character.
- You may be very rich, but God wants you to be rich in good deeds.
- You may be rich in good deeds, but apart from God's grace through the cross of Christ, you deserve eternal hell.

The Christian life is all about humility.

Becoming a Christian is admitting you are a sinner, in need of a Savior.

Prayer is admitting that you need help.

Reading your Bible is admitting that you don't know everything.

Going to church is admitting that you can't make it alone.

Repentance is admitting you were wrong.

Volunteering in church is admitting that the world doesn't exist to serve you.

How did Jesus display humility?

Perhaps the best example took place on the night before His death.

He and His twelve disciples were in the upper room for the Last Supper, and Jesus began to wash their feet.

The disciples were shocked. Jesus was their highly esteemed leader, the Messiah, and He was doing the job of a lowly servant.

Jesus taught them that the meaning of leadership is to use your power to serve others.

He also taught what humility is all about. It's about treating others as more important than yourself.

The disciples were not more important than Jesus, but He treated them as such.

And nobody is more important than you, other than God, but humility is all about treating others as more important than yourself.

That's what it says in **Philippians 2:3 (CSB)**. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves."

## **CONCLUSION**

So the Christian life is all about growing more and more like Jesus.

But you can't become like Christ unless you know what Jesus is like.

Today we looked at five ways to grow more like Christ, and next week we'll look at two more.

I want you to remember that the goal of this sermon is not to merely learn about Christ's character; the goal is to learn what Jesus is like so that we can imitate Him.

**D.L. Moody** said, "The Bible was not given for our information. It was given to change our lives."

How can you tell which one of these virtues you need to work on the most?

I like what **Pastor Perry Noble** said. "How do you know which areas of your life you have not given up to God? It's the areas that tick you off when the preacher talks about it."

There's a lot of truth to that.

As I was talking today, which of these virtues made you the most uncomfortable?

That's probably where you need to start.