



MATT BLACK, Sun, Nov 25, 2017
Living as Lights series

16 | 1 PETER 3:8

THE HARD WORK OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

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1. Welcome Visitors!
2. If you can stick around this afternoon, we would like to decorate the church for Christmas.
3. This Saturday will be our annual planning meeting from 9am to noon, Dec 2.

Isn't it amazing that God has made us his temple? He dwells in us. The Spirit has made our heart his home. Our attention will be devoted this morning to 1 Peter 3:8.

*Hear the Word of the Lord. **1 Peter 3:8**, "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." This is God's Word.*

Maybe you've experienced it. You walked into a room filled with people looking at their phones. You are not alone, but you are totally alone. MIT professor Sherry Turkle makes the following observation in her book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*.

“We are changed as technology offers substitutes for connecting with each other face to face. As we instant message, text and twitter, technology redraws the boundaries between intimacy and solitude. Teenagers would rather text than talk. Things that happen in ‘real time’ take too much time. Tethered to technology, we are shaken when that world “unplugged” ... does not satisfy. Adults too choose keyboards over the human voice. We build a following on Facebook, but wonder to what degree our followers are truly friends. We recreate ourselves as online personas, yet suddenly, in the half light of virtual community, we may feel utterly alone.”¹

Relationships take work with real face-to-face experiences. Real Christian fellowship takes a lot of face-to-face investment that cannot be achieved by social media. Don't get me wrong. There are benefits from the use of technology, but technology is no substitute for face-to-face interaction. Technology can serve in a limited way when rightly used, but it is not a replacement for the power of God's use of real people to transform broken humanity. Don't ever let technology fool you into a false substitute for fellowship.

I've known people that have listened to sermons online, but have not seen God work in a meaningful way until a real human was there to care, and listen and respond. God has created the living church of Christ, where real human beings are meant to connect with each other face to face. The keyboard was never meant to replace the human voice or the human face.

Saint Peter never heard of an iPhone, but he tells us how God brings his people together in the hard work of fellowship. These words of Peter are so relevant and needful for us as a church. He says: “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind” (**1 Pet 3:8**). These are the elements and components of true fellowship with each other. Peter is describing the **relational richness** that is to characterize the **church's fellowship** *in a world that wants to limit so much of its communication to 140 characters of text*. The Christian life requires so much more! Christian fellowship is hard work.

¹ Sherry Turkle. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 11.

We could call these the five virtues, five muscles of fellowship. Fellowship is sharing the life of God together. You share his presence, his glory, his life in you. I've started to work out. Can you tell? Not yet huh! Well, whether you work your body out, you need to work your soul out and stretch these five muscles of Christian fellowship.

These **five virtues of fellowship** distinguish the church from the culture. Peter's original readers are objects of slander and insults and hostility and persecution. Life is hard! Christians need a refuge from persecution. Their new faith is a threat to the Greco-Roman culture. The church is meant to be a relational refuge of support for these original Christians.

Living Hope, we have a **long way to go** in being that relational refuge of support for each other. We need to grow in these virtues. This list is how Christians are supposed to relate with each other in the local church. This is what we are to experience and contribute to in the church. Peter wants us to be a genuine friend, not just a Facebook friend. He shows us how to build meaningful and lasting relationships in the local church.

The problem is that the world is hostile to the church. But have you noticed that sometimes church isn't a safe place? It ought not to be that way. The church should be a refuge from the world. How can we be that refuge? In 1 Peter 3:8, we are looking at a description of a **healthy** and **mature** church. As our culture becomes increasingly hostile to the Gospel, we need a refuge. Living Hope, I want us to be that refuge. This list of virtues makes the relational healthy church more and more **relevant** and **important** in an increasingly disaffected, lonely and cynical world. So here's the first virtue of fellowship. This morning our attention will be devoted to just one verse. And it's a verse that is easy to overlook.

So Christians now display five virtues that brings them together in Christ. These marks display the **transformational power of the Gospel**. The Gospel transforms how we relate with one another.

“FINALLY”

Peter says, “Finally” (3:8). This is not a reference to the impending conclusion of the letter. It's a reference to the final application of the exhortation he issued in 2:12, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” How do I get lost people ready for the final day, the Lamb's day of wrath? I can be submissive to ungodly government as long as I am not sinning. I can be submissive to unjust employers so long as I am not sinning. Ladies can be submissive in their marriage so long as they are not sinning.

Finally, church this application is for you: be a refuge for Christian fellowship. Display these virtues. This is how you can silence the slander against you because of the Gospel. Be a refuge for fellowship. How? By **flexing** these virtues. By **exercising** these virtues. “Finally, all of you...” (3:8). All Christians needs to consider this. No one is exempt. As you flex these virtues, the church will be strengthened and protected. It will build a refuge.

These exercises must take place face-to-face. They accent the importance of community not independence. We are inter-dependant as Christians. We are a body. We

are not much good on our own. We need to have a care and concern for others, not a pre-occupation with oneself. They express a love for the church that Jesus died to create.

The false prosperity gospel says: improve yourself, focus on yourself. The true Gospel says, “Deny yourself. Die to yourself. Live for others. Love others. Serve others.” These virtues are all a way to cultivate self-denial. You cannot cultivate these virtues apart from or isolated from the local church. We need each other. You can’t do this stuff by text. You can’t do this stuff by skipping real fellowship and gathering on Sunday morning. You need to be face-to-face. These virtues assume **an involvement in the local church**. You can’t do this from home. You can’t be isolated from God’s church and expect to grow. You need to be together with your **forever family** for these virtues to be expressed.

1. WORK HARD FOR UNITY

UNION WITH CHRIST

The first fellowship mark or muscle is: **unity**. Peter says: “Finally, all of you, have **unity of mind...**” (**3:8a**). We need to flex and exercise this muscle. This is a supernatural union with Christ created by the Holy Spirit. All true Christians here at Living Hope are supernaturally joined together by the Spirit. We’ve been joined because we believed when the Gospel was proclaimed to us. This is not an arbitrary mark, but an essential mark for the growth of the Church. If you are not united with Christ by the Spirit, then you are not a Christian and you have no fellowship and no refuge.

The **world’s culture divides** us by ethnicity: “black and white and Asian, Indian, Middle eastern.” In Christ there is no ethnic barrier. We are all one in Christ. This is a call to live in harmony with each other. We may have nothing else in common, but we have Christ! All Christians have a new culture, a new kingdom, a new nature in Christ! We are united in Christ. We die to self and live to Christ by laying down our lives for our forever family.

Jesus is our all-sufficient substitute for sin. I am one with all who love him. Therefore, to be a Christian is to be **in union** with Jesus. We are “in Christ.” Peter says, “**1 Peter 3:8**, “Finally, all of you, have **unity of mind...**” Jesus prayed in **John 17:21**, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

God brings us into union with himself through **regeneration**. I was dead in sins, but the Spirit brought me to life. I was in the valley of dry bones, and the Word was prophesied to me, and I became part of God’s living army! I am a new creation in Christ.

THE HARD WORK OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

Peter says: “Finally, all of you, have **unity of mind...**” (**3:8**). Peter says, it’s something you have, but it’s also something you maintain. The other apostles say the same thing. St. Paul commands: “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (**Eph 4:1, 3**). It’s something you have supernaturally, but it is something you need to **work hard** to maintain.

All Christians are brought into union with Christ by the Holy Spirit. We have unity as a miracle gift from God. It’s a gift of the Spirit in the new birth. But Paul says, be “eager”

or “work hard” to “maintain the unity of the Spirit.” Work hard to maintain your unity in Christ.

Work hard for this amazing blessing of unity! Guard it! Psalm 133 describes the joy of unity. “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! 3 It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore” (**Psa 133**). Unity in our church creates a place that is life sustaining.

OUR SELFISH NATURE WILL NEVER BE SATISFIED

We must promote unity. We must also protect it. Why? If unity is given to us by God by the Spirit that dwells within us, why must I work hard to maintain it and defend it and guard against dissension and division? Because we also all have an old fleshly selfish nature. The old nature can never be satisfied. “The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit” (**Gal 5:17**). The flesh is always hungry and selfish and can never be satisfied. The flesh according to **Romans 7:23** is a slave master that brings you into slavery to sin. “In my flesh dwells nothing good” (**Rom 7:18**). **2 Peter 2:14** says the flesh’s “desire for sin is never satisfied” (Berean Study Bible Version). It’s “insatiable” (ESV). It always wants more and more. Unity, then, is hard work because we always have to die to our desire to nurse our hurts. We have to cover with love and deny ourselves constantly.

DISPUTABLE MATTERS SHOULD NOT DIVIDE US

So we are to **be alert** to anything personal, relational, or even doctrinal that would divide us. Be patient in teaching sound doctrine. Don’t be quick to give up on someone. Help them through it.

If there is a **doctrine of secondary importance**, like the timing of the Second coming or a system of theology, then love one another because of Christ. Someone speaks in tongues and someone doesn’t speak in tongues. Don’t divide over that. Love one another. Be alert to anything that would weaken your unity of mind. Work hard to serve God in harmony with one another.

Don’t let a **disputable matter** divide you. **Romans 14** says that we should love one another by giving up our rights if your freedom offends another, even if it is not sinful. Let the Spirit of God rule and reign in you. Work hard to submit in love to one another. Cover with love if you have to.

Let us deal with the **indwelling sin** in ourselves by thinking the best of our brothers and sisters. That’s not just a platitude. That’s a command. We are to think the best of one another. We are to be suspect of ourselves. “The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, who can know it?” (**Jer 17:9**). I am to “not lean to my own understanding” or perception of things (**Pro 3:5b**).

WE ARE ALL PORCUPINES!

Unity is hard work, because we are all **porcupines**. We are to bear with one another and put up with one another. We are all porcupines. We all have quirks and idiosyncrasies. We all have hangups that make us look uncaring. We can easily offend and easily be offended. We need to guard the unity of the Spirit. We are not called to nurse our hurts, but instead to bear personal injuries and hurts. We are called to return good

for evil. Do not dismiss this. There are no “buts” to Peter’s argument. Be like Christ. He did not return evil for evil, but when he was insulted he did not insult back. “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” (Isa 53:7). What do we do when we are oppressed and afflicted. We often act more like citizens of the USA than citizens of heaven.

We are to be **non-resistant**. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Mt 5:39). This is not a verse encouraging abuse, but a verse not to retaliate when you are personally injured. In other words, your **defensiveness** is the opposite of unity. **Holding a grudge** is the opposite of unity. Be quick to forgive. Try to move on quickly from personal offences.

Work hard to guard the unity in this church. Work hard to guard unity in your home.

UNITY IS NOT UNIFORMITY BUT HARMONY

Unity is not the same as uniformity. In other words we don’t all have to see things the exact same way. We are to live in harmony and unity. This does not mean the church will never have any differences of opinion. Believers should live and minister together so that the differences do not divide the church but serve to enrich its life and work.² Personally injuries should be carefully and lovingly worked out.

Unity isn’t the same as **uniformity**—where everybody looks and acts exactly the same. Nor is it the same as **unanimity**—when everybody agrees 100 percent on everything. Peter isn’t calling us to sing together in **unison**, but in **harmony**—which means we all contribute our unique notes in a beautiful chorus that far surpasses any single note.³

Most of our personal injuries occur because of misunderstandings. We all different ways of communicating and different preferences and gifts in the way we serve God. We ought to respect each others differences, and seek to live in harmony. It’s not uniformity but harmony where we each respect and think the best of each other. But of course this kind of harmony is hard work!

OUR UNITY IS A TESTIMONY TO THE GOSPEL

So how do you explain the unity of such a diverse people group here at Living Hope? It’s because our love for Jesus Christ is greater than all our differences. And what really matters is not all our preferences and personalities, but the character and culture of Christ that unites us in the Spirit of God. Let us praise God for the unity we have in Christ. It’s a miracle. The only thing most of us have in common is that the love of God has been poured out into our hearts. Hallelujah!

I love to see the diversity in this room. The diversity of ethnicity, the diversity of education, of background, of financial standing, the great diversity of culture. Whether you are from the north, south, east or west, whether you are rich or poor, whether you

² David Walls and Max Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, vol. 11, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 51.

³ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter*, Swindoll’s New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 195.

went to college or you work a trade, the only thing that matters is this: are you united to Christ? If you are united to Christ, you are my brother and my sister and my mother and my father. Jesus said, “whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother” (**Mk 3:35**). Are you united to Christ? Then we are united forever!

Let’s put our phones down. Let’s shut our computers down. Let’s get together, face-to-face and edify each other with Christian unity. Let’s get together and rejoice in the cross of Christ! Let’s rejoice that the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. Let’s get together and rejoice that the love of Christ has been poured into our hearts. Hey, brothers and sisters, we are not going to hell today or tomorrow or ever! Let’s rejoice in the power of the Cross and the work of Christ. Let’s rejoice that God’s grace and love is greater than all our sin. Because of what Christ has done there is a “unity of mind,” a harmony of heart created by the Gospel. And we need to protect it and promote it in the church.

This unity is meant to protect the church from dissention and division. Let the healing power of the cross overshadow us and protect us from division. The love of Christ in our hearts is the basis of Christian unity.

2. WORK HARD FOR SYMPATHY

Here’s a second virtue to grow in fellowship. Work hard for Christian sympathy. Peter says: “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy...” (**3:8b**). Because of Christ, we have a harmony of feeling for and with each other. The original Greek word means, literally, “to feel with” someone. Because of the work of Christ that unites us, we “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (**Rom 12:15**).⁴

WHAT SYMPATHY LOOKS LIKE

Sympathy involves an eagerness to engage with the emotions of fellow believers. We are to enter into their feelings so that their feelings become our feelings. We are to adopt and experience what our brothers and sisters in Christ are feeling as your own feeling and experience. To have sympathy with someone you must interact with them **face to face**. You need to be with them. This includes **looking** into their **eyes**, **looking** into their face, **praying** with them, **connecting** with them, **talk** with them. I must in an unhurried way draw them out. Why? So that their feelings become our feelings. This is how God has constructed the church to be a unique refuge in a hostile world.

You may think, does anyone care? If the Spirit of God is here, then yes! We care for you. We may not know you needs. Have patience with us. We want to love you. We want to know your deep-down needs. We want to know your struggles. We care! We love you. Why do we care for one another? Why do we enter into each other’s feelings and struggles? Because we are a church that has been transformed by the Gospel!

Doing this is not complicated. I’m a hugger, but you don’t have to be a hugger to do this. You do have to care to do this. Ask sincere questions that show you are interested in your brother or sister in Christ. Listen carefully. A husband are to dwells with his wife in an understanding way. The whole church should be dwelling with each other in understanding. Don’t jump to conclusions.

⁴ Ibid.

HOW SYMPATHY ACTS

Avoid **interrupting** them. Avoid **thinking you know** what their problem is. Avoid **inserting your experience** in a way that suddenly the conversation becomes about “me.” Don’t do that. Let it be about them. **Laugh** with them. **Cry** with them. **Pray** with them. Let it be about them. Take time and listen and let your hearts be knit together. Feel what they feel. Draw that person out if they are struggling. Make their feelings your feelings. This is not complicated.

I love to see circles and **huddles** of prayer after the service. That’s sympathy. I love to see **meals** brought to families that are hurting and sometimes devastated by live. That’s sympathy.

Work hard to feel what others feel. Work hard to celebrate with them without making it about you. Work hard in mourning with those who mourn. To sympathize with someone demonstrates the power of the Gospel. Sympathy is the opposite to selfishness and narcissism. The flesh is never concerned about others, but self.

So this sympathy is really a distinctive of the new birth. We celebrate that we have the power to get our eyes off our selves. Are you that person in marriage that is always sad and discontent and complaining? That’s the opposite of sympathy. Snap out of it! You are born again. Get your eyes off of self and onto your brother and sister in Christ.

This distinguishes the church from the culture. It takes place to place. Twitter doesn’t cut it.

3. WORK HARD FOR FAMILY

Peter says: “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, **brotherly love...**” (3:8c). We are to have brotherly love – a love for each other as members of God’s forever family. You are part of the family of God. This love is possible because of the redemptive love of Jesus and the adoptive love of God the Father. The original readers had lost their families. They had lost their jobs. You couldn’t be a Christian and be a member of the trade guilds throughout Asia Minor. Some had lost their marriages. Some had been ostracized by their families. Our true family is God’s family. This is not just a **theological** reality, but a **practical** reality. For the Asia Minor Christians, the church was their forever family.

A FOREVER FAMILY

These churches in Asia Minor was not just a new church, but a new family. The new love they have for each other transcends the love that they had in their lost families. We now have a new family!

I’m so glad I have a new family. I’ve been adopted into the family of God.

- There is a family **Language**: Prayer!
- There is a family **Likeness**: Conformed to Christ’s image.
- There is the family **Location**: I’m seated in the heavenly realm with Christ.
- There is a family **Love**: God’s love is poured into my heart by the Spirit.
- There is a family **Lineage**: I’m bought by the blood of Jesus! That’s my bloodline. Born by the Spirit, washed in the blood!

Because of the new birth, I have a new family and a new love for my brothers and sisters in Christ. Real agape love means I put your needs above my own needs. I serve you. I think the best of you. You are my forever family.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE FAMILY

How do we get into God's forever family? Membership in "the family of God," does not depend on any earthly relationship. It does not come by your physical, or natural birth, but by a supernatural birth—a new birth. Preachers cannot impart it to their hearers. Parents cannot give it to their children. You may be born in the godliest family in America, and grow up under the strongest preaching any church can supply, and yet never belong to the family of God. You see, Jesus said, "Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (**Jn 3:3**). No one but the Holy Spirit can make you a living member of this family. It is His special function and prerogative to bring into the true Church all those who will be saved. Those who are born again are born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (**Jn 1:13**).

A CLOSE KNIT TOWN

When Jill and I lived in a small Basque town in Spain on the border of France, we noticed everyone was kind to each other. In the big city people would honk. People were rude. Not in the small town. They had to live with each other, so there was a great deal of patience. There was one main road through town, and people would stop in their cars and talk. They would block traffic just talking to each other as if the world was standing still. The Chicago boy in me wanted to honk my horn and remind them that other people are living their lives, but I dared not do that. Why? Because we were such a small town we were like family. I'd see those men who were talking later in the evening when we were pushing our kids around main street or playing with our kids in the park. We were like a family.

A HUNDRED FATHERS AND MOTHERS

Listen, you are my family. I can't treat you rudely. You are my forever brother and my forever sister. I was raised without a father and my mother died when I was 15. But in the church I have a hundred mothers and a hundred fathers. You are my family.

You and I need to work hard to remember we are family. You husbands and wives need to remember you are forever family. The church is my new family. It's like no other family.

God's family is an infinitely large family. Do not measure the God's family by what you see with your eyes. You see only a small body of believers this morning. But we all need to remember that a great host of believers has already made it safely to heaven, and when we are all together on the last day, there will be "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (**Rev 7:9**).

THE DEAREST PLACE ON EARTH

The church should be (as Charles Spurgeon put it) "the dearest place on earth." Spurgeon said there is no perfect church. All churches have their flaws. He said if he had found a perfect church he could not have joined it, because once he joined it, the church would be spoiled by his own imperfection. "Still," he said, "imperfect as it is, it is the

dearest place on earth to us.”⁵ We are to work hard at expressing a brotherly affection for one another.

4. WORK HARD FOR EMPATHY

Peter says: “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart...” (3:8d). We are to have “a tender heart.” It means to have empathy. Empathy is a very interesting word. The word is different from sympathy, to feel with. The Greek word is closely related to **forgiveness**.⁶ This is a heart that is deeply moved by the condition of another. The old Authorized Version translates the “bowels of compassion” or literally “intestines” (e.g., Acts 1:18). This word is used of Jesus to describe him being in agony over the broken and lost condition of those around him. He was “deeply moved” because they were like “sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36 cf Eph 4:32; 2 Cor 7:15; 1 Thess 2:8).

This is especially used of people who are in a state of disaster in their lives, who oppose themselves and oppose others. We have a saying among us – “Sheep bite.” It’s true. God has saved you, but sometimes you are under such darkness and satanic attack, that you are like a soldier under attack and you flail and fight even those who love you.

THICK SKIN AND A BIG HEART

To be empathetic means to have “thick skin and a big heart.” This heartfelt compassion is displayed when we reach out to the hurting ⁷ or those who have hurt you. Jesus said, it’s easy to love those who love you, but real God-sized love allows you to love those who have hurt you. “Love your enemies” so you may show you are children of the heavenly Father (Mt 5:44-45). Jesus says, lost people love those who are good to them (Mt 5:46-47).

The love of the church of Jesus Christ goes beyond that earthly love. We love those who hurt us. We keep loving true believers even when they disappoint us. To be **empathetic** in this way means to love those who are **hurting or who have hurt you**.

Someone hurts you, and you keep loving them. That’s a God-size love! You’ve got to work hard at that kind of forgiving love, that empathy. When someone hurts you, in our flesh we want to hate them. We want to say, “I’m never coming to church again. It’s supposed to be a safe place, but I don’t feel safe.” But we can’t go there. We are to show that God-size love and empathy to those who are hurting and even to those who hurt us.

Don’t grow bitter. Instead we as born-again people are to have a “tender heart.” Keep your heart tender. We may hurt each other, but don’t allow the root of bitterness to creep in.

THE DESTRUCTIVE NATURE OF THE KEYBOARD

Now listen, in this text filled world where people’s hearts can be so disconnected and cruel, we can often fall into the temptation of jotting out a furious email or text to really tell somebody what we feel. This is why I despise email and texting for any kind of

⁵ Charles Spurgeon, “The Best Donation,” (No. 2234) an exposition of 2 Corinthians 8:5 delivered on April 5, 1891 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, England.

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 188.

⁷ Swindoll, *1 & 2 Peter*, 195.

meaningful conflict resolution. I refuse to use text or email for that. That in my opinion is lazy and not a very courageous thing to do. Sometimes sitting behind a keyboard we have such brazen self-confidence, and sometimes self-righteousness that does not demonstrate a tender heart, but a **proud, cold heart**. But what about growing in the hard work of empathy by speaking any grievances face to face with brothers and sisters. It's hard I know, but it preserves our dignity and integrity. Don't lower yourself to having a loud keyboard. Don't roar with your texts. Any fool can be brazen behind a keyboard. If you have a grievance with a precious member of Christ's body, show the respect to our Lord to go to that person face to face.

I've seen Christian post things online on a Facebook or Twitter rant that they would never have the courage to say face to face. It becomes a platform for pride and a display of fleshly selfishness. I say, have the courage to have a tender heart. If someone is hurting or wayward, have the love and empathy to meet them where they are, face to face.

Are you in agony that the body of Christ is sometimes in shambles? Reach out in empathy. Reach out in tender compassions and mercy not simply to "set them straight" but to shepherd that person and to love them with a "tender heart."

We are to be gentle and not harsh. We are to be tender and kind in our attitude and in our disposition. In this rough and relentless world, we are to live in tenderness. There is to be an absence of harshness and self-righteousness. This makes us distinct from the culture.

5. WORK HARD FOR HUMILITY

Peter says: "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind" (3:8e). Humility means "to be lowly and bowed down in mind."⁸

HUMILITY A WEAKNESS TO FIRST CENTURY CULTURE

It might surprise you that humility was not viewed favorably in the Greco-Roman culture. In ancient Greek culture of Peter's time, in the Hellenistic culture of Plato and Aristotle, **pride** was a virtue. Humility was despised and considered a weakness. You were to put yourself first in the ancient world. This is the culture that Peter's Asia Minor hearers were living in.

One scholar "In the highly competitive and stratified Greco-Roman antiquity only those of degraded social status were 'humble,' and humility was regarded as a sign of weakness and shame, an inability to defend one's honor... The high value placed on humility by... Christians is remarkable."⁹

We read this and it's predictable to us. This is so common to us. It's the Bible. The Bible is going to tell us to be humble. But in the original assembly where this was read, this was radical! What? Be humble? This is not viewed as a weakness in the culture. But that which was viewed badly in the culture was to be a distinguishing characteristic of love and fellowship in the church.

⁸ Swindoll, *1 & 2 Peter*, 195.

⁹ Karen H. Jobes. *1 Peter: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 215.

THE CHURCH HAS BEEN HUMBLING BY THE GOSPEL

The church is made up as those who have been humbled by the Gospel. We are people who have met the King of kings, and all manner of boasting will be directed toward him. I have nothing to boast in but the Cross of Jesus. I boast, Paul says, "I will boast in my weakness!" "When I am weak then I am strong." This is a remarkable and radical light to the fallen culture.

In an age of the humble boast of Twitter and Facebook where selfies are posted ad nauseum, Christians are forget themselves and lift up the King and Lord of our lives!

Paul tells Christians to stand in contrast to the world's narcissistic culture. He says in **Philippians 2:3**, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves."

Years earlier Jesus demonstrated the importance of his own example of humility when he as King of kings washed the disciples' feet (**Jn 13:1-17**).

EPILOGUE

A PICTURE OF JESUS

When Peter was painting this picture of fellowship, you know what he was thinking about, don't you? You can see it, can't you? He was describing Jesus. 1 Peter 3:8 is a portrait of Jesus. In John 17:11, Jesus prayed for **unity** for us: "that they may be one, even as we are one."

He displayed such **sympathy** with Mary and Martha. When their brother Lazarus died, even though he knew he would raise him, "Jesus wept" (**Jn 11:35**). He demonstrated such care for their souls by entering into their feelings.

He also demonstrated great sympathy by entering into people's **joy**. When **tax collectors** got saved, he would celebrate with them so much so that the self-righteous people pointed their long bony fingers at him and accused him of being a "drunk" and said, "Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (**Lk 7:34**).

What deep **empathy** he had! "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (**Rom 5:8**). Oh how he loved us, even while we opposed him! He said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (**Lk 23:34**). And how could we forget **Peter** himself? The Lord knew Peter was going to deny him and warned him, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (**Lk 22:31-32**). Peter denied his Lord three times! And what did Jesus do? "Your finished Peter; you will never preach again. You are washed up!" Was Jesus bitter at Peter? No! He was filled with **empathy** and rescued Peter. Peter said, "I go a fishing" (**Jn 21:3**). In other words: "I'm done with preaching." Jesus rescues Peter and says, "Peter do you love me?" Three times he asks. Three times he says, "Feed my lambs" or "Feed my sheep." (**Jn 21:15-17**). "Peter you're not done. I want you to preach Pentecost." Jesus wasn't bitter at him. He had thick skin and a big heart!

What about our forever **family**? Jesus was told his mother and his brothers were here to see him. He said, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" 49 And stretching

out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Mt 12:48-50).

And oh, what about the **humility** of Christ. Jesus, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8). Jesus says, if you want to be great, you’ve got to become the least. He who dies with the dirtiest towel wins. Put others above yourself.

This kind of healing balm, that we love each other and esteem each other and think the best of each other cannot be done on Facebook and Twitter. Social media can’t do it. We need to be together, face to face.

Conclusion

It’s been a hard season at Living Hope. Nick almost died. There’s been great tragedy in people’s lives. It’s been a season of suffering. But when I look at this text, I only need to look out at our congregation and see this place is a refuge for broken and bleeding sinners. Thank you for caring for the souls of people! Thank you for caring for one another and never giving up on one another. We are so far from being anything like a perfect church, but we are a church that reflects the character of Jesus. We weep with those who weep! I’ve seen you care for one another like try family!

There’s no place I’d rather be when I am suffering than in this church! And there’s no place I’d rather be when I am rejoicing than in Christ’s church, and here at Living Hope.

I’ve seen you also rejoice with those who rejoice. Last week was an amazing testimony to that. Barry and Mamie were married, and Mamie testified so many times how her new sisters in Christ took care of her and treated her like family.

We are not a perfect church, but Jesus is here! Glory be to him!

SOLI DEO GLORIA
