



# GROWTH EXPECTED

“How to Experience Authentic Community.”

Romans 12:9-13

***We all grow old but we don't all grow up***

**OPENING DISCUSSION:** People were made for community. As the internet becomes a growing source of information and business, some of the fastest growing sites are social media networks (Facebook, e-Harmony, etc.). While relationships are more accessible than ever, that doesn't mean that we're getting better at them! This week we're going to look at how growth in our relationship with God must include an ever-deepening relationship with God's people. It's easy to *say* we love God, but the Bible is clear that one of the clearest evidences of how well we are loving God is the health of our relationships.

**Describe the closest friendship you ever had. What were some of the characteristics of that relationship that made that relationship so meaningful?**

**READ: ROMANS 12:9-13 (NLT)**

<sup>9</sup> *Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.*  
<sup>10</sup> *Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.* <sup>11</sup> *Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.* <sup>12</sup> *Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.* <sup>13</sup> *When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.*

## *What YOU bring to a relationship*

### **AUTHENTICITY**

**Romans 12:9a** *Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them.*

*Don't pretend* is the translation for the Greek word “hypocrite.” The implication is that we are not to pretend, or hide behind a mask. The word comes from the Greek theater where the actors were called “hypocrites.” That was not a negative term, in that context, but carried over into relationships when a person hid their real failures or feelings behind a character that they pretended to be. Deep relationships cannot happen when we refuse to disclose what is going on inside. So Paul says to us, “take off your masks with one another.”

Vern talked about a last 10% friend, who is the person that you reveal your true feelings without fear of being ridiculed or thought less of.

**Who is a last 10% friend to you and what circumstances or characteristics got you to that point?**

### **PURITY**

**Romans 12:9b** *Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.*

It is possible that Paul is defining what it means to love others by these two phrases. In other words, you can't loving others authentically unless you pull away from the wrong and hold tightly to the good.

**READ: Luke 10:30-37**

Jericho, in Jesus' day, was an oasis city with hot springs. Herod the Great built a palace here where he would go during the winter. The Levites would do their annual service in the Temple and then head to Jericho for vacation and rest before returning home or to their service in the Temple. So it is possible that

the priest and the Levite were on their way from their Temple service to take a much-needed vacation in Jericho.

**How might a religious person justify ignoring the obvious need of the traveler lying on the road?**

**READ: 1<sup>ST</sup> John 3:14-17**

Remember that Paul told us in Romans 12:9 to hate evil, John tells us here that we hate a brother or sister when we ignore a need when we have the resources to meet it.

**How do you discover needs in people around you?**

**How have you responded to a need with some act of service?**

**Is there someone who has a need that the group could meet?**

Leader's Note: This could be prayer, or financial, or a service opportunity. If nothing comes up during this conversation, when the group takes prayer needs from one another, listen for opportunities to go beyond prayer to guiding the group to be part of God's answer to their prayer.

**READ Romans 12:10** *Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.*

**What does it mean to *honor each other*?**

Honor comes from the Greek word *timei* (the name "Timothy" comes from this word – Tim is a great name that I am surprised more parents haven't used more often!) and means "to give rank, dignity, confer a reward, favor or value." It is a choice to confer value to another person, often used of our worship to God, but here it is our service to others.

Replace the "and" in the verse with "by" and read it again.

**How does this change help you understand what God is asking us to do?**

**READ: Romans 12:11** *Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.*

Here Paul continues the idea of serving the needs of others with diligence and equates our service to others with serving or worshiping Christ.

**READ: Romans 12:12** *Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.*

Paul is referring to our service to people in their needs and calls Christ followers to three resources for encouraging people in their trouble. **What are the three characteristics of the Christian servant Paul gives us here?** *Rejoice (or joy), patience and prayer.*

Vern defined biblical "hope" as more than wishful thinking, in the Bible "hope" is a "focus on an object of trust, namely Christ's love, forgiveness, and promise of eternity that gives an end to any trouble we are facing today."

**READ: Revelation 21:1-5 (NLT)**

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone.<sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.<sup>3</sup> I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.<sup>4</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”<sup>5</sup> And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” And then he said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.”*

**How does the knowledge of God’s promise for our eternal future help us in the dark times of this life?**

**READ: Romans 12:13** *When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.*

Notice that the focus here is on God’s people, because love begins within the Church, and then moves out. Hospitality is meeting needs to those outside one’s normal circle of friends (the word means literally: “love of strangers”).

**How can we as a group expand our hospitality as a group? What is a practical service we could do for someone in need either within our group, or outside of our group? Are we ready to extend an invitation for inviting someone into our group?**