

He Must Increase: Four Practices for Elevating Jesus in Your Life

There is a confession tucked inside the Gospel of John that is short enough to memorize in seconds but demanding enough to occupy a lifetime of practice. John the Baptist, standing at the peak of his popularity and influence, looks at the growing movement of Jesus and says it plainly: he must increase, and I must decrease.

Simple words. Radical implications.

If you have ever genuinely tried to live by that statement, you know it does not happen automatically. It requires intention, honesty, and a willingness to examine the parts of your life where Jesus has not yet been given full authority. It requires, in other words, that you stop skipping leg day.

That last phrase needs some context. Owls are remarkable hunters. Silent in flight, precise in hearing, lethal in grip, they rival eagles and falcons as aerial predators. But lift their feathers and you will find something surprising: spindly, underdeveloped legs that look completely out of place on such a capable creature. All that power, and yet there are underdeveloped parts hidden underneath.

The question worth sitting with today is this: if someone lifted your feathers, what part of your spiritual life would look underdeveloped? Where does Jesus need to increase, and where do you need to decrease?

Understanding What Increasing and Decreasing Actually Means

Before diving into practical steps, it is worth clearing up a common misunderstanding. Decreasing does not mean diminishing yourself. It does not mean becoming less capable, less ambitious, less confident, or less visible. Decreasing simply means making your life less about you.

Likewise, increasing is not about adding more religious language to your conversations, putting a fish sticker on your car, or flooding your social media with Christian content. Increasing is about Jesus having greater priority and influence over your actual life. When his priorities gain greater influence over your decisions, he is increasing. When your life becomes less about your own agenda and more about his, that is the shift John was describing.

It is a significant shift. And it will not happen by accident.

Practice One: Purposeful Humility

John the Baptist had every reason to protect his platform. Crowds were coming to him from across the region. People in positions of power were paying attention. His disciples were loyal and growing in number. And then Jesus began baptizing nearby, and people started going to him instead.

John's response is worth studying carefully. He did not scramble to protect his audience. He did not reframe his brand or find ways to compete. He stepped back. He stepped aside. He said plainly that he was not the Messiah, that he was not even worthy to tie the Messiah's sandals, and that his joy was made complete by Jesus' success.

Humility, properly understood, is not thinking less of yourself. It is resisting the constant need for others to think about you more. It is knowing who you are without requiring everyone around you to confirm it. John practiced this purposefully, and it freed him to genuinely celebrate what God was doing through someone else.

Elevating Jesus begins here. It begins with the deliberate choice to stop making everything about yourself.

Practice Two: Leverage Your Increase for His Increase

Here is where the message gets genuinely counterintuitive. Decreasing does not mean God wants you to have less. He may actually intend to increase your resources, your influence, your connections, and your opportunities. The question is what you do with that increase.

John leveraged everything God gave him for Jesus' gain. He shared his crowds. He pointed his own disciples toward Jesus. In John chapter 1, he is standing with two of his disciples when Jesus walks by, and he simply says, look, there is the Lamb of God. Those two disciples immediately follow Jesus. Scholars widely believe one of them was Andrew and the other was the apostle John himself. Three of Jesus' closest disciples had originally followed John the Baptist.

Jesus later makes an extraordinary statement in Matthew chapter 11, verse 11, declaring that among all who have ever lived, no one is greater than John. Greater than Abraham, Moses, and Solomon? The answer lies in how Jesus defines greatness. Greatness is not measured by possessions or power. It is measured by generosity, by the willingness to take whatever God has given you and give it back to him.

Whatever God increases in your life, the question is whether you are willing to leverage it for his purposes.

Practice Three: Close the Gap Between Your Talk and Your Walk

It is easy to say Jesus is Lord. The harder question is whether he actually has increasing authority over the specific areas of your life. Your relationships. Your finances. Your schedule. Your ambitions. Your family. Your sexuality.

Jesus is not elevated simply because you think highly of him or speak highly of him. He is elevated when you increasingly live under his authority. And the inverse is also true: Jesus can actually be reduced in your life when there is a consistent gap between what you say and how you live.

This is not a call to perfection. It is a call to honesty and to the ongoing, daily work of bringing your actual life into alignment with what you claim to believe.

Practice Four: Target the Specific Places Where Jesus Needs to Increase

General intentions rarely produce specific change. The final practice is the most personal: identify the exact areas of your life where Jesus needs more room.

Is it your marriage? Your parenting? Your finances? The way you treat people at work? The habits you maintain when no one is watching? Do not walk away from this reflection without naming something specific.

The word of God is not meant to be heard only. It is meant to be acted on.

John the Baptist's confession was not a moment of defeat. It was a declaration of freedom. When Jesus increases and we decrease, we are not losing something. We are finally living the way we were made to live, oriented around someone far greater than ourselves, and discovering that his increase is the truest kind of joy.

He must become greater and greater. We must become less and less. That is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of an uncharted life of faith.

Here are all the scripture references mentioned or alluded to in the sermon:

- John 3:22-30 — The primary passage; John the Baptist's disciples report that Jesus is baptizing nearby, and John responds with his confession about increasing and decreasing
- John 1:35-37 — John the Baptist stands with two disciples, points to Jesus as the Lamb of God, and the disciples follow Jesus
- John 1:40 — The connection to Andrew as one of the two disciples who followed Jesus
- Matthew 11:11 — Jesus declares that no one born of women is greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he

****Alluded to or Paraphrased****

- Matthew 3:11 / John 1:27 — John's statement that he is not worthy to untie or carry Jesus' sandals
- Matthew 4:1-11 / Luke 4:1-13 — Jesus' 40 days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness following his baptism
- Matthew 3:13-15 — Jesus coming to John to be baptized and John's initial resistance
- James 1:22 — Being a doer of the word and not a hearer only
- Romans 3:23 / Romans 6:23 — The universal reality of sin and its debt before God