

“Everyone wants to grow. The problem is we often get stuck because we don’t know how. In *You Can Really Grow*, John Hindley shows us, by helping us look at the obvious in refreshing new ways. John doesn’t offer us a quick fix—he points us to real, lasting, exciting growth.”

TIM LANE, author of *How People Change*; President of the Institute for Pastoral Care

“This is a gem of a book—wonderfully readable, deeply heart-warming, and beautifully Jesus-centred. Growing as a Christian is no longer a burden, but a joy. You won’t find techniques and strategies here, but a thrilling and inspiring picture of what it is to live as a child of a loving heavenly Father. Grounded in the reality of everyday life, this book will help you love Jesus more and delight in becoming more like him.”

ANNABELLE COOMBS, St Paul’s, Banbury, Oxfordshire

“Honest and oh-so-encouraging, this book is pure fertiliser for every Christian to grow. It should be on every church bookstall and in every Christian’s hands.”

MIKE REEVES, Director of Union; author of *Enjoy your Prayer Life*

“I loved this book. It’s a really practical look at growing as a Christian—but it may surprise you. It’s not a list of things to do, but an invitation to a relationship. I encourage you to read it. But even more, I encourage you to read it with someone else—for, as John Hindley reminds us, we grow together as a community.”

TIM CHESTER, Director of the Porterbrook Seminary; author of *You Can Change*

“This is pure gold—few books have driven me back to the Bible and to the Jesus of the Bible more than this one. It humbles and exalts, and makes sense of the life we live and the battles we face. It will help to take a shrinking heart and fill it again with a renewed desire for Jesus.”

SIMON AUSTEN, Rector of St Leonard’s, Exeter, Devon

“With biblical insight, honest self-appraisal and wise counsel that comes from years of faithfully following Jesus Christ, John Hindley helps us navigate the challenging and sometimes frustrating pursuit of spiritual growth. *You Can Really Grow* is packed with gospel-motivated, practical, real-life instruction that really will help you to grow.”

JASON ROBERTS, Pastor of Crosscurrent Church, Virginia Beach, Virginia

“I couldn’t put this book down. If you’ve ever been urged to grow as a Christian but haven’t known how, or if you have a nagging feeling that your relationship with God has gone stale, then you are going to love this.”

MARCUS HONEYSETT, Director of Living Leadership

JOHN HINDLEY

**YOU CAN
REALLY
GROW**

How to thrive in your
Christian life



*To my three curly girls
and their amazing mother*

You can really grow. *How to thrive in the Christian life*
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1. I know I ought to grow...

I'm amazed they come each week.

Every Tuesday, the older boys from our church meet up with me to look at the Bible together. To be honest, meeting with me is not a huge draw. I am very uncool (so uncool I don't even know if "cool" is still used!); I know little about sports, and even less about music. My grasp on films is at primary-school level.

I am amazed they turn up week by week; and I am even more amazed that they want to get to grips with the Bible. They answer questions, not caring if they have got it right—they just want to learn. They feel awkward reading out loud, but they all volunteer. They feel awkward praying out loud, but they have a go at it. They speak honestly about their sins and struggles, and they smile when they talk about the ways they have shared Jesus with their friends.

I love "Boys Bible Study" (I haven't even managed to come up with a cool name for it). I love it because the boys show me what I want to be. They want to follow Jesus more closely. They are eager to share the gospel with their friends. They love to tease each other, but they also love to show patience, gentleness and love. They want to overcome their struggles in the Christian life. They are so keen to grow as Christians.

And I am not.

I am eager to get my work done well. I am eager to spend enough time (with enough emotional energy) with my girls. I am eager to keep space to have an evening or two with my wife. I am eager to go on holiday. I am hoping to just cope without going under.

I am not that eager to grow as a Christian.

What about you? If a friend asked you how you had grown as a Christian over the last year, what would you say? Would the answer come easily, or would you have to think up something to say that was just about honest enough not to be a lie and just about impressive enough not to be humiliating?

Ought to, used to, told to...

If you are a Christian, you will know deep down that you ought to be growing. Sometimes you get an unwelcome reminder of this. Maybe a sermon tweaks your conscience. Or you hear of a friend from youth group who has gone to be a missionary and you wonder why you are glad it is her who is going, not you. Perhaps you hear of another friend who was baptised with you who has fallen away, having stagnated in faith—and you wonder if you will be next.

You know you ought to be growing, and you know that you used to grow. For many of us, when we first started following Jesus, there were so many moments when we realised that life needed to be different, and changing things seemed so easy. Perhaps it wasn't even easy, it was actually effortless. Perhaps your family said they had noticed a change in you—you had become more generous, or more cheerful. They simply remarked on a positive change, and you took the opportunity to remind them that the change had come about since you started following Jesus. Maybe you even saw a relative begin to investigate the gospel seriously because of what they saw in your life.

That used to happen. But it's a long time since anyone in your family noticed any change in you at all.

I started following Jesus wholeheartedly at university, and I can remember growing as a Christian. I remember reading the Bible earnestly, praying for change, learning that Jesus had power to stop my habitual cursing and swearing. But that feels like a long time ago now.

We ought to grow. We used to grow. And we are told to grow. Peter was Jesus' closest friend and a leader of the church, and his parting command to the church in his final letter is:

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen. (2 Peter 3 v 18)

We are told to grow. We are commanded to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus—to grow in our trust of his love and our knowledge of him.

Maybe you are even someone who calls others to grow. Perhaps you teach a group in your church, a Sunday-school class, maybe even the whole church. Perhaps you have an uncomfortable nagging worry that you are calling others to grow in Christ when you're not really sure you know what you mean. If so, then you're not alone. The idea for this book came from me realising that I was calling the church I serve to grow, when I didn't really know what I meant for myself or them.

And that's a large part of the problem. Though we know we ought to grow, we don't know what we mean by "grow". When we think about it, it often seems like a list of do's, which we should do more, and don'ts, which we should do less. So growing as a Christian becomes a case of carrying out a to-do list. And most of us have enough to-do lists at work and

home. We don't want another one, and so Christian growth isn't something that we really want to do. I ought to clear my bedroom cupboard out, but I never get round to it. I ought to read that report on my desk at work, but I never get round to it. And I ought to do something about growing as a Christian...

Why standing still is not standing still

The truth is that most of us are quite content with how things are. That God has saved us, that he loves us, and that he'll come back and live with us—and that's great. We're happy with that. That's enough for us. We're standing still, and that works for us.

But God wants more for us than this. He wants us not just to keep going, but to keep growing—not merely to survive as a Christian, but to thrive as a Christian. He wants more for us than we do!

And God warns us that, in fact, standing still is not an option. Peter's full conclusion to his letter reads like this:

Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen. (2 Peter 3 v 17-18)

The alternative to growth is not simply staying at the same height—it is shrinking. Peter here says that you can “fall” or you can “grow”. The options are falling or growing. A lack of growth in a Christian is serious. If a child fails to grow, their parents don't simply ignore it; they take their child to the doctor. It is a cause for concern and a spur to action.

You cannot stand still in the Christian life. The challenging truth is that if you are not growing, you are shrinking. So growth is not just something we ought to do and are told to do... it is something we need to do.

So how can we grow? How can we want to grow? How can we become more like the boys in my group on Tuesdays—and how can they make sure they're still like that in 2,000 Tuesdays' time?

The first step is to see what Christian growth actually is. And, as we do that, we'll begin to realise why Christian growth is wonderful.