

growing *basics*



1 The importance of growing

The birth of a baby brings excitement all round. But how sad its family would be if it stayed a baby! That baby was born for one thing – to **grow up**. If it didn't, the excitement would soon give way to dismay.

That's exactly how it is when we become a Christian. It is exciting to know that we have been born into God's family. But God does not want us to **stay a spiritual baby**; he wants us to **grow up**. If we do not grow up, we will miss so much of what we have been **born again** for – let alone run the risk (like that new-born infant) of finding that our life ebbs away.

Even Jesus, the Son of God, when he was here on earth, needed to grow up in every aspect of life.

According to the following verse, what four aspects of life did Jesus grow in?

Luke 2 v52

(1) _____	(2) _____
(3) _____	(4) _____

If Jesus himself needed to grow, how much more



do we!

Sometimes, new Christians can seem uncertain or even fearful of talk of **growing**. They perhaps feel it will lead to them somehow losing any special experience they have had of God so far or do not want to **spoil** it – especially with things they always thought were **boring**!

But we do not need to fear **growing** as a Christian! It will only **deepen our experience and knowledge of God**. Certainly the first Christians knew how important it was to grow in their faith.

Read the following passages. In what ways do they show that growing as a Christian is both important and good for us?

1 Peter 2 v2-3

2 Thessalonians 1 v3

Colossians 1 v9-10

Ephesians 4 v11-16



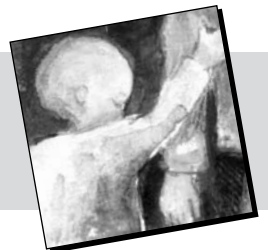
But **how did they do it?** How did those first Christians grow so much that, within just a few years, they had turned the then-known world upside down?

How did they do it?

The best place to look for our answer is in the account of how the early church grew over those first few years – the book of **Acts**. Let's see how its author, Luke, summed up what happened.

Read:

Acts 2 v42-47





What things from these verses do you think helped them to grow in their new-found faith?

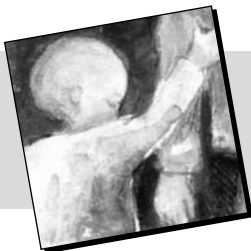
Note that the passage we have just read began with the words “they **devoted** themselves to ...” This was not some **flash in the pan** excitement. They gave themselves to doing these things day after day after day. Why? Because they were so convinced they had found new life in Jesus and were now eager for that new life to grow.

*Am I excited at the thought of growing as a Christian and discovering even more things about God? Do I recognise any fears in me at the thought of **having to grow**?*



Let’s look more closely now at some of the **keys to growing** from the passage we have just looked at. We have called these keys: teaching, fellowship, breaking bread together, prayer, and having an adventure!

The apostles’ teaching



“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...” (Acts 2 v42)

When do we normally go and get taught? When we need to **learn** how to do something. That’s how it was for these first Christians. They did not assume that, just because they had come into a relationship with Jesus, they now suddenly **knew it all**. On the contrary, they saw that there was so much that they now needed to **learn**.

What sort of things do you think they might have needed to learn about?

1. ***What was the apostles' teaching?***



The apostles' teaching was based, not on their own made-up ideas, but on three very specific things:

- what we now call **the Old Testament**: this is the first part of the Bible, with its story of how God began to build his family and to patiently prepare for the coming of Jesus. It contains history, laws, prophecy, poetry and wise sayings.
- **the life and teachings of Jesus**: eventually this would be written down into what we now call **the gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). But initially it was passed on by word of mouth. This was the most common way of passing on teaching in the ancient world, and was therefore far more reliable and accurate than passing on things by word of mouth today would be. In addition, Jesus had specifically promised that the Holy Spirit would help them to remember everything once he had left them (John 14 v25-26).
- **the Holy Spirit's guidance of them**: the Holy Spirit guided them in very specific ways as they applied the first two points (the Old Testament and the life and teachings of Jesus) in the light of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension (return to

heaven). This guidance was written down by them, largely in the form of letters to churches, which would themselves soon be seen a part of Scripture, on a level with the other two. (See 2 Peter 3 v15-16)

*These three strands – **the Old Testament** (with its preparation for Jesus' coming), **the gospels** (with their account of the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus), and **the letters** (with their application of Jesus' teaching) would come together to form what we now call **The Bible**.*

2. **Just another book?**

But if we treat the Bible as **just another book** we will miss something. This is not any old book; this is **God's book!** God himself was at work in its production, influencing the writers through the Holy Spirit so that **what he wanted written was exactly what they wrote**, so that he could reveal himself to us as he really is.

Read:

2 Timothy 3 v16

What do you think the description of the Bible as **God-breathed** really means?

What did you think about the Bible before you became a Christian?

What does this verse tell us about the purpose of the Bible?



God has not given us this book **for the sake of it**, or to clog up our lives with irrelevant history or rules. **It is meant to help us and bless us!**

In fact, we could even see it as God's 'love letter' written to each of us, unfolding his heart and purpose for us. In the light of this, how silly not to read it!

If we are going to grow as a Christian, then, reading the Bible needs to become a regular part of our life. Like food, it is best if this happens regularly.

Learning from the Bible can happen in a number of different ways:

- during Sunday meetings, by listening to the teaching or 'sermon'
- in midweek groups, through discussion together
- with another individual, especially a more mature Christian
- in time spent with God on our own

*Which of these opportunities are **you** beginning to make use of?*

But how do I get into this book that may have been so strange to me in the past?

3. Getting into the Book

Let's look at this by asking a number of simple questions:

a. Which?

Which Bible should I use? Because the Bible was written in other ancient languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), it has to be **translated**.

- Some translations retain rather old-fashioned, but very poetic, English (like the Authorised, or King James, Version)



- Other translations are written in a very up-to-date style (such as The Message or The Contemporary English Version)
- Some translations are half way in between (such as the New International Version)

Each has its own advantages and followers and your own church will probably have a particular one that it has opted for. What matters most for now as a new Christian is that you use one that you can **understand**.

b. Where?

Where do I begin to read? After all, the Bible is a big book (actually, a collection of books: 66 of them in all, written by some 40 authors over a period of 1500 years!).

The best place to start is, unlike other books, **not at the beginning**, since some of those early books can be harder to understand at first until you know a little more about the background to them.

We recommend you begin with –
one of the Gospels
the book of Acts
a New Testament letter (e.g. Philippians)

After that, one of your Church or group leaders can help you know where to go next. There are also lots of booklets that can help.

If you have started to read the Bible recently, share with the group what you have been reading and how you have been finding it.

c. **When?**

When is the best time to read the Bible? Answer: there is no best time! No time, in itself, is more blessed than another. The key issue is: **when will you get the most out of it?** If you are a 'morning' person, then that is probably the best time. If you are not, it is probably the worst! And vice versa. For some people lunch time can be the most convenient. The key is this: it needs to be somewhere where you can **cut yourself off** for a little while from other distractions, and when you are awake enough to think!

When do you think will be the best time for you to do this? If you are studying this in a group or with another Christian, how about helping one another by seeing how you have been getting on with it the next time you meet.



d. **What?**

What should I do when I start reading the Bible?

■ **Pray, first of all**

What do you think it would be good to pray and ask for at this point?

■ **Read the passage**

Read carefully that you have chosen and take a few moments to think about what it says – about God, about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit, about us.

■ **Ask God to help you**

Ask him to show you **one important thing** for you to note that day and to try to work on.

What do you think it would be good to do once you have finished doing this?



e. **How?**

How can I get the best out of what I will be reading? You might find the **TUMMY** method helpful!

T = *Them*

U = *Us*

M = *Me*

MY = *My*



Let's unpack this a bit more to make sense of it!

■ **T = Them**

Ask yourself what you think the passage would have said to **them** – that is, to the people who were there at the time, who were part of the story or who were the receivers of the letter. Try to see yourself there, as if things had only just happened or been said. How would you have felt? What would you have seen or thought?

■ **U = Us**

Now let's bring it up to date, to our times. Ask yourself: what would be **the exact equivalent** of that for us today, in our modern world? This is not a chance to **change** the Bible, just to apply it properly. Have a go at doing this with the following:

Read:

Ephesians 6 v5-9

What would the exact equivalent of that teaching be in the modern world today?

■ M = Me

Without this step, reading the Bible remains something very general. God wants it to be personal – it is his love letter to **me**. So now we need to ask him: “God, out of all the things I have just read, what is the one thing in particular that you are saying to me today?” Often it will be just one word, one phrase, one thought, that stands out.



■ MY = My

That is, what is **my response** to all that I have read? After all, reading the Bible is meant to be a means of growing, not acquiring head knowledge. So, having read it, I now need to act on it in some appropriate way. Not to do so, the Bible says, is just plain silly, as the following passage shows.

Read:

James 1 v22-25

Once you have got the hang of the **TUMMY** principle it is so easy. It might seem a little awkward at first (rather like learning to drive a car); but once you have got the hang of it, away you will go and the Bible will come to life!

Let's have a go at putting this into practice. Try it out with the following passage:

To sum up...

The Bible is one of God's key gifts to us to help us to grow. It helps us –

- touch God's heart*
- know God's will*
- hear God's voice*
- choose God's ways*
- sense God's leading*
- defeat God's enemies*





	Mark 2 v1-12
T <i>Them</i>	
U <i>Us</i>	
M <i>Me</i>	

Fellowship

“They devoted themselves ... to the fellowship ...”
(Acts 2 v42)

The word translated **fellowship** was a word in Greek that meant **sharing in something together** or **partnership**. It could be used of any mutual sharing, from a business partnership to marriage – anything where lives were bound up together in some common thing or purpose.

Christians have fellowship because their lives are bound up in one another in the purposes and fam-

ily of God, and they recognise God wants them to grow in that.

From this we can see that –



*It is impossible to have fellowship on our own.
It can only happen with other people who are committed to the same thing.*

There can therefore be no such thing as a solitary Christian. My faith **must be personal**; but it **cannot be private**. I need to share it with others, and let others share ('fellowship') with me, if I am to grow in the way that God wants me to. If I try to keep it to myself, I will be stunted in spiritual growth and somehow incomplete.

Here are just some of the ways we can have **fellowship** with one another:

- worshipping our Father together in meetings
- telling others of my prayer needs so that they can join with praying for me
- encouraging others through sharing things I have seen God do for me recently or telling of answered prayers
- studying the Bible and sharing your insights together, or praying together
- having a meal and fun together
- helping one another practically in some way

Which aspects of the above can you see in Acts 2 v42-47?

Of course, there can be obstacles to fellowship, such as embarrassment, fear, selfishness, thinking my need is trivial or my news is unimportant, and so on. But God's family is a place where we can, and should, **be ourselves**, knowing we will always be accepted.

Remember this:

*The most crucial aspect to having real fellowship together is **honesty**. It involves removing our masks and being who we really are.*



Having fellowship with other Christians obviously takes time, and we need to make it a key part of our lives if we are going to grow in our faith. We obviously do not want you to lose contact with your non-Christian family or friends (or how will they hear about Jesus?); but it is important we keep a right balance in our lives of how we spend our time and on what.

How much time do I spend at the moment –

- sleeping*
- eating*
- watching TV*
- going out/relaxing*
- being at work*
- looking after family*
- with non-Christian family or friends*
- in fellowship with my new Christian friends*
- reading the Bible or praying*

Is there any imbalance here that I feel God may be speaking to me about? What could I begin to do about this?

Breaking of bread

"They devoted themselves ... to the breaking of bread ..." (Acts 2 v42)

Sharing bread and wine together (often called simply **breaking bread**) is a special way of focusing on Jesus' death on the cross for us. You can read more about this in the companion booklet **Church Basics** (p13-15) where breaking bread is seen as a time to –

- **look back** and remember what Jesus did for us on the cross
- **look in** to our own lives and see if there is sin to be confessed or things that need to change
- **look around** and remember that I am part of Christ's Body, the church
- **look forward** to the certainty of Jesus' coming again

What we want to do here is, not to cover the same ground again, but to focus on the issue of **forgiveness**, as breaking bread is a great opportunity to consider this.

When we put our trust in Jesus, Father God forgave us all our sins. In fact, Jesus' death on the cross was so powerful that it could forgive, not only **the sins we had already done**, but also **those that we have not yet done!** All we need to do is to **keep coming back to him** whenever we sin, knowing that we will never be turned away and will always be quickly restored to fellowship with him because of our trust in Jesus' death on the cross.



*Understanding the issue of forgiveness is a **key** to growing as a Christian.*

There are two very important aspects to forgiveness that we need to grasp:

1. Receiving God's forgiveness

Read:

1 John 1 v8-9

What does this passage say we must do to receive God's forgiveness?

What does it say will be God's response?

Why is understanding that we can always receive God's forgiveness such a key to growing? Because **we are not yet perfect and will still get things wrong!** What is more, the Bible tells us that we have a spiritual enemy – whom it calls Satan or the devil – who is always trying to undermine us, accuse us and tell us how bad we are.

How do the following verses describe the devil?

John 8 v44

1 Thessalonians 3 v5

2 Thessalonians 3 v3

1 Peter 5 v8

Revelation 12 v10



By the time the devil has finished his work of tempting, deceiving and accusing us, we can soon feel discouraged. But that is when it is so important to go to God quickly, confess our sin to him (knowing the price has already been paid for it) and remind the devil – and ourselves – that **we are forgiven.**

Walking in uncertainty about forgiveness will always hinder our Christian growth. Claiming quickly the forgiveness that Jesus has won for us will always release us to move on.

2. Extending God's forgiveness to others

Just as important as learning **how to be forgiven** is learning **how to forgive others**.

Again, if we do not learn how to do this, it will be a serious hindrance to our growth as a Christian.

Jesus taught that, **once forgiven**, we must be a people who are **quick to forgive**. No matter how disappointed, how angry, how hurt, how justified we might feel, **we must forgive the other person**. If we do not, it locks us up in a prison of unforgiveness, stifling our growth and hindering the free flow of God's forgiveness to us.

Read:

Matthew 6 v12

Matthew 18 v21-35

Why do you think we can find it so hard to forgive people at times? What do the two passages you have just read say that a lack of forgiveness does?

Those times when we break bread together can be wonderful opportunities for stopping and considering whether there is anyone that I need to forgive, as well as receiving God's forgiveness for myself. In fact, if we are not prepared to forgive, we simply have no right to take part in this meal that is all about forgiveness. (See 1 Corinthians 11 v27-29) But as we forgive, it releases God's blessing on us and furthers our Christian growth.

Is there anyone at the moment that I need to for-



give – no matter what the issue was or how long ago it happened? Take a few moments to reflect quietly on this, and then tell God all about it. Ask him to help you to forgive them, just like he has forgiven you. And then leave it with him!

*Sometimes we just need to keep forgiving until it finally **clicks into place** in our heart. So forgive them again if you have to! If you are finding this hard to do, share it with another more mature Christian and ask them to help you.*



Prayer

“They devoted themselves ... to prayer.” (Acts 2v42)

For many of us, prayer can seem a **big turn-off**. We perhaps think of the picture, commonly reproduced on TV, of some clergyman droning on in a rather unusual voice using very unusual words. It’s almost as if it were a foreign language that we have never learnt.



But that is not at all what the Bible means by prayer! **Prayer is simply talking to God**. It is sharing your heart with him – and listening for him to do the same. The early church knew that they needed to pray if they were going to grow as Christians, for this was their **hot-line** to Jesus. Without prayer they would, quite simply, be cut off from him!

1. **When?**

When should we pray? Is there one time that is better than another? The short answer is '**No!**' The early Christians prayed whenever they needed to and whenever they could.



- **Regularly:** setting a regular time for praying can be helpful, as all of us can be lazy at times. In the same way that fairly regular meal times help us physically, fairly regular prayer times help us spiritually.
- **Morning or evening?** As with reading the Bible, whenever is best for you. Actually, to both start the day and end the day by talking to God is sensible; but your main prayer time can be at any time of the day or night – God will always be there!
- **Routine as well as crisis:** don't leave praying for just the crisis times (although do pray in the crises of life!). Make praying a part of everyday life and about everyday matters – family, work, home, plans, money, etc. God is interested in it all.

2. **Where?**

Where should we pray? Anywhere! God does not need you to be in any special **holy** place to hear your prayers (what a poor and limited God he would be if he did!). You can pray in church meetings and home group meetings, but also in your bedroom, on the bus, while taking a walk. In fact, the more variety you put into it, the less chance there is of your getting bored or stuck in a rut.

Look at the following verses from the book of Acts and note the various different places where people prayed.

Acts 1 v12-14

Acts 9 v40

Acts 10 v9

Acts 12 v12

Acts 16 v25-26

Acts 21 v5

Acts 22 v17

Prayer really can take place anywhere!

3. How?

How should we pray? Prayer needs **no special words and no special format**, as well as no special time or place. Our ordinary language and our ordinary words will do just fine. This was how they prayed in the Bible. In fact, there do not appear to have been any **set** prayers in the early church; they simply told God what was on their heart in whatever words seemed appropriate at the time.

Even what has become the most well-known **set** prayer – what is called **The Lord's Prayer** – was originally given as a pattern to be followed rather than a prayer to be prayed.

Read:

Matthew 6 v9-13

What is the significant word in the first part of v9?

We grow best when God becomes part of our ordinary everyday lives – and that means using our ordinary everyday language when talking to him.

God wants a very natural relationship with us when we pray. Talk to him as you would to any



friend.

One other thing we can note here about **how** to pray is that we can do it both **alone** and **with others**. Both aspects are needed if we are to grow.

- We need to **pray alone** so that we can be as honest and personal with God as we like, without distractions or wondering what others might be thinking.
- We need to **pray together** so that we can learn from others how to grow in prayer, as well as having them add their **Amen** (which means **I agree!** or **Let it be so!**) to what we are praying for. God has promised that there is a special power in prayer when his people do it together.



Read:

Matthew 18 v19-20

Acts 4 v31

4. **What?**

What should we be praying about? The short answer is, **Anything and everything!** The Apostle Paul summed it up like this: "Pray in the Spirit on **all occasions** with **all kinds of prayers and requests.**" (Ephesians 6 v18)

Here are some of the things that our prayers, alone and together, should include at different times:

a. *Worship*

This is about praising God **for who he is** and how wonderful he is, expressing our love and our trust. We can do this in our own words, or by reading

one of the Psalms (**songs of praise**) from the Old Testament, or by singing some of the songs from our meetings. When we run out of our own words, we can pray in tongues, the prayer language that is the gift of the Holy Spirit.



b. Thanks

This is about saying thank you to God **for what he has done** for us. It can include things like –

- thanks for his blessings (food, clothes, home, job, family and friends, church etc)
- thanks for his answers to prayer
- thanks for his protection or guidance

Are there things that you are particularly thankful for to God at the moment? If there are, tell him!

c. Asking

God **wants us to ask!** That comes as a shock to many of us who thought that God was far too big and busy to be bothered with people like us. But Jesus encouraged his followers to **ask** their Heavenly Father about the things that were on their hearts.

Read:

Matthew 7 v8-11

John 14 v12-14

John 15 v7-8

Did you notice in these passages that there are some important conditions for our requests being answered? Look back and note what those conditions are.

The gift of tongues (see **Church Basics**, p12-13)

can also be a great help in our asking, especially when we do not know exactly what to ask for. At such times, we need to trust the Holy Spirit, who knows all things and who knows the heart of God, to pray through us as we use this gift.

d. Fighting

Sometimes we will find ourselves facing great pressures in life or perhaps being particularly aware of the devil's attacks against us in some way. At such times we need to **fight** in prayer. We call this **spiritual warfare**.

Spiritual warfare involves reminding the devil that Jesus overcame him completely at the cross and that he is now a defeated enemy. Because of this, we can tell the devil to **pack his bags** and get out of the situation that we are praying about. He simply has no right to be there any more!

*Look at the **equipment for warfare** that Paul describes in Ephesians 6 v10-18. He was clearly thinking of a Roman soldier when he wrote these words. Note down the six different items of equipment that he mentions and what each one represents:*

Without this equipment in place, we will not grow or survive the battle. But with it, carried in the name of Jesus, we need never fear the Enemy!

5. An example

While we have already seen that there is **no one way to pray**, the Lord's Prayer is a good **model** for us of how to pray. Let's read it again.

Read:

Matthew 6 v9-13

Try to identify the different aspects that are in-



cluded in this prayer. Think what sort of things you might include under each of those headings if you were **filling out** the prayer.

Can you identify any sort of **progression** in the prayer?

Awe and Adventure!



“They devoted themselves ... Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles ...” (Acts 2 v42-43)

You don’t have to read too far in the book of Acts

Equipment...	Represents...
1	
2	
3	

to discover that being a Christian in the early church was **exciting!** There was a great sense of **God being around** – in worship, in prayer meetings, in sharing the good news. **This sense of awe, excitement and adventure contributed to their growing into mature Christians.**

There is nothing like **seeing God do things or answer prayer** to make us want to grow and

know more of him! Sadly, many churches over the years have lost this. But you are becoming part of a church that believes God is still the same and that he still wants us to know that same sense of excitement and awe at his presence and his works – not for our glory, but for his.



Read the following passages and note the sense of awe, excitement or adventure in them. Note too any lessons that we can learn from them.

Luke 10 v17-20

Acts 2 v42-47

Acts 4 v29-31

Acts 5 v12-14

Acts 12 v6-16

1 Corinthians 2 v4

If you want to grow, resolve you will step out in trusting God and that you will look to him to do exciting things (for his glory, not yours!) through you too.



Conclusion

God is so happy that you have been born into his family. But now he wants you to grow. He not only **has a heart for you to grow**; he has also **made provision for you to grow**. As we end this booklet, let's pause to review the things we have looked at that he has given to help us grow, and to reflect on how well we are making use of them.

On a scale of 1-5 mark yourself on how well you



feel you are doing at the moment in each of the areas we have looked at. Use the following grades:

1 = not a very good start

2 = made a start!

3 = making some progress

4 = pleased with my progress

5 = doing really well

Do not be discouraged if the scores are not as high as you would like them to be! That's what growing is for!

Our heart's desire is to help you grow in all these areas. But best of all, it is God's desire too!



	1 Not very good start	2	3 Mak- ing some	4	5 Do- ing re- ally well
The Bible					