

Rebecca Manley Pippert

grow 

Your life with Christ

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Grow

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Introduction

God does not want us just to keep going as Christians. He wants us to enjoy *growing* as Christians.

But what does growing as a Christian actually mean? Is it just about improving ourselves through our own efforts, or is it more exciting than that? What are we growing into? And how does it all happen?

New believers often find getting to grips with the Christian life quite daunting. And many of us who have been Christians a while longer feel we're stuck in a rut, or that our faith has become a routine. Going to church, reading the Bible, praying to God and living Christ's way can so easily become things we do dutifully... or don't do at all.

This is why I have written GROW—and why I'm so thrilled that you're reading this! Christian growth is more wonderful and life-changing than we often really grasp. God has given us ways in which to change and be changed. We just need to understand, appreciate and enjoy them. And that's what this five-week course is designed to enable you to do, individually and as a group.

All children grow. And since all Christians are children of our heavenly Father, we must grow too. So whoever you are, and whatever stage of your journey you're at, GROW is for you. As I've written it, I've been so excited to see what it is that God wants for us and what he does for us. I'm praying that session by session, you'll find yourself filled with that same excitement.

I hope that together we'll not only be encouraged to keep going, but to keep growing.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Becky". The script is cursive and elegant, with a large, flowing 'B' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

How To Use This Handbook

Everything you'll need (apart from a Bible and a pen) is in this booklet. Each session has several different elements:



Introduction. Helps you begin to think about the main theme of the session. You can read in the booklet, or watch Becky on the DVD or download.



Historical Context. Explains what is going on in the part of the Bible you're about to look at.



Bible Study. This will take most of your time, as you look at the Bible together and share what you discover as you answer the questions in this booklet. A good Bible translation to use is the "NIV2011." There is space in the booklet to make notes, but it's not compulsory!



Live What You Learn. The Bible changes us in how we think and act. This section encourages you to think about what difference the section of the Bible you've been reading might make to you.



Life Stories. Listen to people sharing some of their story about how and why they became a Christian, or what life as a Christian has been like for them.



Following Jesus. Listen to Becky talk about the main themes of the session. There is a summary of what she says in your booklet.



Praying Together. A time to speak to God. Prayers don't have to be long or use complicated words; and feel free to pray silently in your head if you don't feel comfortable praying out loud.



Going Deeper. Something for you to take home to read and think about between sessions. This is entirely optional. If you have any questions, do ask them at the start of the next session.

Note For Leaders: You'll find a concise Leader's Guide for the course, as well as the downloadable videos, at www.thegoodbook.com/grow. You'll need the access code in your DVD case to be able to get onto the page.

I. What Is God's Plan For My Life?

Romans 8 v 14-17 and v 28-29

There are two things that are important to understand once we become Christians. First: *Who am I now that I belong to Christ? How does God see me?* And second: *What does God plan to do in my life?*

Romans chapter 8, which is widely regarded as one of the greatest chapters in all of Scripture, addresses those very questions. *How does God see me?* “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8 v 1); the chapter ends with the assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

Why can we have complete assurance that we are accepted by God and secure in his love? Because Christ took the penalty for our sin when he died on the cross. Paul wrote back in 3 v 25: “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.”

And what does God plan to do in my life? Romans 8 shows us that the glory of being a Christian does not lie merely in the fact that we are no longer estranged from God because of our rebellion. It is also recognizing who we are and who we have become through Christ that is genuinely thrilling.

To grow in our relationship to Christ doesn't mean we are signing up for some dreary self-improvement program—as we shall soon discover when we delve into Romans 8!



Historical Context

It is generally believed that the apostle Paul wrote this letter to Roman believers around AD56 from Corinth. The believers in Rome comprised of Gentile and Jewish Christians, and this book was written most likely during Paul's third missionary journey, as he was about to set out for Jerusalem (Romans 15 v 25). His plan was to visit Rome after Jerusalem, which is exactly what he did.

Since Paul had never been to Rome, he outlines the gospel so that his teaching will not be confused by what he calls "false teachers." Paul makes it clear that the apostles did not invent the gospel; it was revealed and entrusted to them by God. Before we come to chapter 8, Paul explains why the whole human race desperately needs the gospel, both Gentiles and Jews alike: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3 v 23). Beginning in chapter 3, Paul shows how the grace of God has been revealed through Christ and his gospel.

In this study we'll see Paul talking about the work of the Spirit. In 8 v 2-11 we learn that the Spirit gives us new hearts and makes us spiritually alive; he shows us our sin but also gives us assurance that it is forgiven and the power to defeat it. The Spirit will raise us to life just as he raised Jesus to new life.



Bible Study

Read Romans 8 v 14-17

In pre-modern times people's identities and careers were fashioned by who their parents were and what level of society they were born into. Ironically, in our modern western age of individualism and rights, where we are free to choose our careers and even our identities, people seem to feel more insecure and alone than ever. We struggle to know who we are—or if we even belong.

1. Verse 14 describes people who are now trusting Jesus. What two things are true of them?

In the Greco-Roman culture of Paul's day, the term "adoption" had great significance. It meant that a child was deliberately chosen to continue the father's name and to inherit his estate. The adopted child was never considered inferior or less loved than his own children, conceived by him and his wife.

2. What is the difference between how a slave feels and how a son feels (v 15)?
How might their actions and motivations be different?

o How has the Spirit replaced fear with freedom in your own walk with God?

3. Having received the "Spirit [which brings about our] adoption," how are we helped by the Spirit to know we are God's reconciled children (v 15b-16)?

The Aramaic term for father, "*Abba*," was the more intimate way that children addressed their earthly father. Jews would have never addressed God in this informal manner, yet Jesus did it and encouraged his followers to do so. Paul says that the Spirit prompts us in our prayers to call God "*Abba*," which means we address God as a small child speaking to their father.

The highest privilege of the Christian life is our adoption as children into God's eternal family through God's one and only Son, Jesus Christ. Verses 15b and 16 are a beautiful picture of the believer's joy and security that come from realizing that God has truly adopted us! We have been made full members of his family, and we receive all the privileges of belonging to God's family. We are loved and we belong. These are not only objective facts but the Spirit makes us inwardly *aware* that we are now God's own children.

o Think about what God is like. Why is it amazing that we can relate to God as our loving Father?

o How is this truth especially helpful for those who come from less than ideal families?

4. If we are God's children, then how else are we to think of ourselves (v 17a)? What do we inherit (v 17b)?

5. As our Father, God gives us everything that belongs to his Son, Jesus—both the shape of his earthly life and the wonder of his eternal life. We gain both the sufferings and the glory (v 17b). How does this set our expectations for what the Christian life is like, and why is it always worth it?

o What are some ways that Christians today suffer for Christ? Have you suffered for Christ in any way?

Paul proceeds to reflect (v 18-27) on how our present suffering is not worth comparing with the glory that will one day be revealed in us. Paul reminds us that in our trials and suffering God is at work through the Spirit, who helps us in our weakness (v 26), and who intercedes for us when we don't know how to pray (v 26-27).

Read Romans 8 v 28-29

6. What does verse 28 promise, and to whom? Why is this remarkable given that our lives include suffering, difficulty and disappointment?

7. In what ways will God work towards our ultimate good—even in seemingly bad situations?

8. The word “predestined” means “decided beforehand.” What has God decided to do in the life of every adopted child of his (v 29)? What does this mean?

o How does it help us to know what God thinks is “good” in verse 28?

o Think about what you know of Jesus. Why can we be confident that God's plan for our lives is wonderful? (Why is it wonderful that God will work to make us more and more like him?)

Live What You Learn

We have learned that all believers are filled with and led by the Spirit, have received the Spirit of adoption, and cry “*Abba, Father*” as the Spirit bears witness to them that they are children of God, and therefore his heirs. Indeed, Paul tells us “the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (v 16).

- *Reflect on a hard time in your Christian life. How might God have been making you more like Jesus through this difficulty?*
- *Are there areas in your life right now where you need to hang on to the promise in verse 28?*

Following Jesus

- *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? (v 31)*—to God’s love for us and plan for us?
- *If God is for us, who can be against us? (v 31)* No matter what happens, God has the last word—we need not fear.
- *He who did not spare his own Son ... how will he not also ... give us all things? (v 32)* The cross is our guarantee of the faithful, loving generosity of God.
- *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? (v 33)* Our case has already been decided. We are declared as accepted by God.
- *Who then is the one who condemns? (v 34)* No one—because Jesus has died for our sins, taking all the condemnation that we deserve.
- *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (v 35)* Just as Christ proved his love for us through his sufferings, so our sufferings cannot separate us from the love of Christ.
- Nothing can thwart God’s purpose for us or his commitment to us, because we are his beloved children.

Life Stories

Praying Together

This would be a good time to share with each other where you would most appreciate prayer—maybe concerning things that have struck you in this passage.

- Ask God to help you more deeply internalize the truths you have read—like experiencing the fact that you are a son or daughter of God.
- Perhaps you could share what is blocking you from experiencing God's love and assurance, and ask God to remove or heal whatever is giving you difficulty.
- Thank God for his promise that you are his child. Ask God for the faith to believe that what he says is true.

Remember, our prayers don't need to be long or complex; a single heartfelt sentence will do! God looks at the heart, not at a picture-perfect prayer.

You'll find some more books about the themes of this session on page 61.

Going Deeper: The Primacy Of Love

If you wish to explore the topic we are studying in greater depth, then read this section at home. If you have any questions about it, feel free to pursue your questions with your group's leader.

It is an amazing thought that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead comes and lives in us from the moment we first believe in Jesus! “That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead” (Ephesians 1 v 19-20). We now have the outworking of Jesus’ own life and power through his Spirit dwelling within us.

When we become Christians, God's Spirit gives us a new power, new relationships, new obligations and new gifts. But none of these are what matter most. It is not gifts or power or experiences that we should most seek.

The twentieth-century pastor Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote: “We should always be seeking the Lord Jesus Christ himself, to know him, and know his love and be witnesses for him and to minister to his glory.” In other words: *We must put 1 Corinthians 13 at the centre.* In that chapter, Paul promises to “show you the most excellent way” to live (1 Corinthians 12 v 31).

Read 1 Corinthians 13 v 1-13

1. What are the spiritual gifts that Paul mentions in verses 1-3?

o What are they worth if they're not accompanied by love?

2. What seems to be God's purpose in how we exercise the gifts he gives us?

3. As we think about the gifts God has given us, how might it be tempting to use them in wrong ways or with wrong motivations?

Having described the importance of love, Paul now goes on in verses 4-8 to define love. It quickly becomes obvious that the love being described in these verses has its source in God and his gift of Christ. Just as Christ lived and died for others—supremely in the cross—the way of love is most truly seen in having a Christ-like concern, respect and regard for the welfare of others above our own interests or needs.

4. Paul gives 15 separate pictures of what love looks like! List some of them.

o What characteristics of love are present in your life? What characteristics do you find hardest to display?

5. Jesus said that all the world will know that we are his disciples by the love that we have for one another (see John 13 v 34-35). What do you think is the end result of a life lived without the love of God? And of a life with the love of God?

6. What are the things that will cease once we are in heaven (1 Corinthians 13 v 8)?

o Why is this the case (v 9-12)?

7. What will last eternally (v 13)?

8. How does verse 12 excite you about what a Christian's eternity will be like?

9. Paul writes: "Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (v 13). How has this passage shown why this is so?
