GROWING
AS A CHRISTIAN



What does it mean to be a Christian and then to ‘grow’ as a Christian?

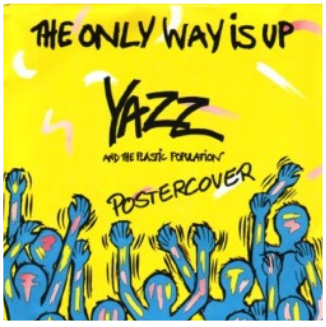
OK. So let’s imagine you are a small seed.

You are planted in the soil, get watered and the sun shines down on you.

Over time, you gradually grow up, grow leaves, grow fruit and then the wind blows and spreads seed so that more plants grow.

This is the same as how God designed us to be.

To be planted, to grow, to spread fruit and seed and bring life everywhere and colour and flavour everywhere we are.



Back in 1988 a music artist called ‘Yazz’ released a remix of an Otis Clay song called *‘The only way is up’.*

OK, so it wasn’t about being a Christian - but the title / chorus should be the anthem or the ‘theme song’ for every Christian.

God made us to grow spiritually as well as physically. What this means is that a Christian is made to become more like Jesus - the word ‘Christian’ means to follow Jesus Christ.

To know how you’re doing as a Christian, ask yourself: “am I becoming more like Jesus?”

But having said that, there are a few tips that we’ve learned along the way to help you grow as a Christian - and by grow we mean quality, healthy and nutritious spiritual ‘food’ that will do you good and help you do good!

: GROWTH TIP NUMBER 1 :

GET PLANTED.

No, we're not being insulting here. What we mean is become part of a church. The Bible talks about being 'planted in the house of God' and this means being part of a church and getting involved.

Most people think church is a building



But church is actually the people



When I became a Christian, I found it really hard to go to church as I'd found things so boring when I was a young person. But I went anyway, got involved with youth work and by about week four, we were involved in an event on a local estate, bringing in bands.

There is a true story in the Bible of David and Goliath. David was probably a young person when he killed Goliath (who was a giant, going round killing people). David killed Goliath with a powerful slingshot and a stone. The stone was taken from a river. A river washes over stones and throws then around the place, smoothing them off. This is what a church does - it mixes you with all kinds of other people and smooths off the rough edges.

Church gives you a place to belong, opportunities to grow in your gifts and encourages you. It's about what you can give and about what others can give to you. It's also about facing outwards and seeing how you can help other people around you.

Churches come in all shapes and sizes. Like people. But it's important to be part of somewhere that believes the Bible, isn't 'religious', is full of God's life and is somewhere that looks outwards towards other people, not just in on itself. It's good to be part of big groups, small groups and to have people around you who are for you and want to help.

Key takeaway point - get involved in a good, relevant, Bible-believing church

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> JESUS SAID (MARK 4.24) - "PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU HEAR. THE CLOSER YOU LISTEN, THE MORE UNDERSTANDING YOU WILL BE GIVEN - AND YOU WILL RECEIVE EVEN MORE."

: GROWTH TIP NUMBER 2 :

GET FED.



I've helped out at a few weddings. At one wedding I was given a goodie bag as a thanks for helping. In the goodie bag was a 'succulent' plant that grows as you water the plant - taking up the water into the actual plant itself.

This picture is a good example to help us think about how to live as a Christian.

As humans we need food and water - physically. We need times of rest and being relaxed to help us emotionally and mentally. And as Christians, we need to be 'fed' spiritually. So what does spiritual food and drink look (taste) like?!

You are what you eat



First up, you need a varied diet just like your body does. We shouldn't just be eating one thing or things that are bad for us because "what goes in comes out".

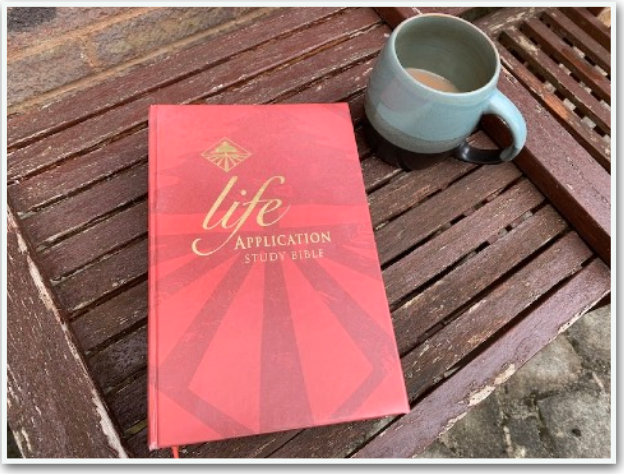
If we eat bad food or eat too much, we won't be as healthy as we could be. It's the same spiritually.

We become what we eat…

God gave us the very best menu and food, called the Bible - God's book for us.

Just like food, we need to 'eat' every day.

The Bible is 'the word of God', which is what it says it is - what God says, what God thinks, who God is and what he's doing. It's like eating the most healthy meal - it's got starter courses, main courses, desserts and drinks all in one! It is complete truth.



It's written for the whole of time.

It's always relevant and never out of date.

The Bible contains God's thoughts and God's ways, so if we want to know God and grow to be more like God then we need to read the Bible. Read the Bible every day!

As we read the Bible and ask God to speak to us, God changes us. It just happens naturally. We 'eat'. God gives us nutrition.

You become like who you spend time with



If you've spent time with someone, you often become a bit like them - maybe saying the same words or having shared jokes or things you say. You won't be exactly like them but the closer you are to someone, the more you start to think similar things.

I know some married couples that use the same kinds of faces and even begin to look alike a bit!

The same is true in a way with God. As you spend time with him, you become more like him. (He doesn't become more like you though!)

Prayer is one way to spend time with God. What is prayer?

In its simplest form, prayer is talking to God, asking him for things and listening to him.

Prayer is asking God to do things, asking for things, asking God for help, asking for God to get involved in situations, people, places where we see need. It's for us and for others.

How do we pray?



Prayer can be silently on your own, it can be part of a group of people praying together, it can be saying things from the Bible that God has said and asking him to do them, it can be through worship and singing to God.

Prayer happens in all kinds of ways - we can pray when writing music, drawing, dancing, even things that we are feeling deep inside us that words can't express.

We have help - a helper



Back in the mists of time (1960s) there was a TV series called 'I Dream Of Jeannie'. In this series, a man called Tony finds a bottle which reveals a 'genie' called Jeannie, who helps him in various life situations.

When you become a Christian you have help to live out life as a Christian. This helper is a person called The Holy Spirit. Think of the Holy Spirit as your helper.

The Holy Spirit is God in you - to help you, guide you and give you God's power

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The Holy Spirit is like having Jesus with us all the time. He teaches us, guides us, helps us, gives us gifts to use for God, helps us pray & trains us what's right and what's wrong.

: GROWTH TIP NUMBER 2 :

FEED OTHERS.





There is a sea in Israel called the Dead Sea. It's called 'dead' because water doesn't flow out of it. Water flows in, then evaporates in the hot sun, leaving salt.

God designed you to be fed and to feed others. If you don't use what you have to give to others, you can begin to get lazy, a bit too 'full up' and feel a bit 'bloated' which means your stomach feels swollen and you may feel ill.

When you use what God gives you, it's like a river or a lake where water flows in and then flows out. You keep getting refreshed. The more you give out, the more comes back. Jesus said the Christian life is like being filled with God's kind of spiritual water - refreshing you and helping you. Stay balanced but let what God puts in you go out of you - gifts he's given you, time, money.

Back to plants… Plants are designed to give off seed so that new plants can grow.

When the wind blows on a dandelion, the seed go all over the place into the soil to grow new dandelions the next year.

In the Bible, the 'wind' is often an example given to represent the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit works in our lives, we obey God and talk about our God-stories, we can't help but release 'God-seeds' that land into people's lives and places, to see new life grow up.

: GROWTH TIP NUMBER 3 :

GET UP.

In the Bible, there are lots of tips to help us stay strong as Christians because we live in a world that can be very hostile to Christians or can distract us from living for God. We also have an enemy called the devil who is very real and very active.



God gives us spiritual weapons to help us fight ! See Ephesians 6 in the Bible for more!

STANDING IN THE TRUTH :

We live in a world that says everyone has their own truth. But that so-called ‘truth’ is not true. In fact, there is only one real truth and that is what God says. If we know the truth then that helps us be free and to be strong. Stand your ground. Don’t give in.

BEING RIGHT WITH GOD :

We sometimes mess up and do things wrong. Don’t beat yourself up or think that God has rejected you. It’s not true - God loves you, doesn’t condemn you or reject you, ever. Just say ‘sorry God, help me not do that again’ and then get back up and keep on!

GOOD NEWS :

As a Christian, you have good news and you are good news! The Bible says always be ready to answer people’s questions (as best you can) about God and always be ready to do what God says. He has some adventures that will be unique for you.

SHIELD OF FAITH :

Faith is being confident of God's goodness. It's believing and knowing that God has the power to do what he says. Knowing this is like 'lifting up your shield' to defend yourself and others against any lies or attacks that come - physical, mental, emotional, spiritual.

SWORD OF THE SPIRIT - GOD'S WORD :

Not all the weapons that God gives us are defensive. He has given us two weapons to help us attack (spiritually, not physically!) The Word of God (the Bible) is powerful. God spoke the world into being and he keeps it going by his Word. When we speak the Word of God (especially out loud), we declare truth and we pray God's will into every situation.

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT :

Our other spiritual weapon of attack is prayer. Prayer is asking God to step in, do something that we cannot do - often to help us and others. The enemy runs a kingdom of darkness and evil. God's kingdom is one of goodness and light. This world is upside down in many ways. As we pray, as we obey God and as we live out the Christian life, speaking and believing the Bible, we turn things the right-way up - God's way.



There is a ye olde song which says:

"Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

Living for God is exactly this. Trusting God. Believing God. Hearing God. Obeying God.
