FOLLOWING JESUS

BOOK 3

Grow

Becoming Like Jesus



Pastor Richmond Kobe

FOLLOWING JESUS

Book 3: Grow

Becoming Like Jesus

Chapters 19–30

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The stories in this book are composites. Names and details have been changed, and they do not describe any one real person.

This book is not a substitute for emergency, medical, legal or professional help. If you or someone else is in danger, see "Safety and Support: Start Here" at the back of this book.

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Starting Book 3: Grow

Welcome to the third stage of the pathway. Book 1 helped you begin: the gospel, new life in Christ, and first steps in Scripture, prayer and church. Book 2 helped you understand what Christians believe and how that truth shapes life. Book 3 asks a more personal question:

> **How does Jesus reshape my character, relationships, decisions and ordinary life?**

Over the next twelve chapters, we will look at grace and growth, renewing the mind, the character of Christ, emotions and wounds, forgiveness and reconciliation, loving others, the body and relationships, work and money, words and conflict, guidance and decisions, suffering and doubt, and a sustainable rhythm of life with God.

This book is about becoming like Jesus over time. It is not a self-improvement programme, and it is not a ladder to climb to earn God's love. It begins where all Christian growth begins: with grace.

If you are starting with Book 3, you are very welcome. Please read Book 1, Chapter 1 first; it explains the gospel, which everything else builds on. Each chapter works the same way as before: one real question, four central truths, one main passage, a short story, simple practices and a seven-day reading plan. Every practice is an invitation, not a test, and no one will ask you to read aloud, pray aloud or share your personal story. Support Pages for urgent help are at the back of this book; Life Guides, which go deeper into particular situations, are in a separate Life Guides booklet.

CHAPTER 19

Grace-Fuelled Growth

> *I know I am saved by grace. So why should I try hard to change? And what do I do when I keep failing?*

Many believers feel caught between two fears. If they try hard to change, they worry they are trying to earn God's love. If they relax, they worry that nothing will change. And when they fail again, especially in the same area, they wonder whether their faith was ever real.

In Book 1, Chapter 4, you learned to "Obey From Grace". In Book 2, Chapter 13, you saw that believers are "Being Made Holy". This chapter shows how that growth actually happens: by God's grace, with our real effort, through the Holy Spirit, and with the freedom to begin again.

The short answer

The grace that saves us also trains us. God works in us, so we work out what he has given. The Spirit changes us over time. And when we fail, grace meets us again.

> **Grace does not only forgive us; it trains us. We work because God is already at work in us. The Spirit changes us as we keep looking to Christ. And when we fall, we confess, receive forgiveness and begin again.**

The four parts	In a few words
1. Trained by Grace	The grace that saves us also teaches and changes us
2. Work It Out	Our effort is real, and God's work beneath it is greater
3. Walk by the Spirit	Change comes through the Spirit, not willpower alone
4. Begin Again	Failure is a place where grace meets us again

Read it for yourself: Titus 2:11–14

Read or listen to Titus 2:11–14, preferably twice.

> "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." (Titus 2:11–14)

Notice the three times in this passage. Grace has appeared in the past, in Jesus' first coming (verse 11). Grace trains us in the present age (verse 12). And we wait for "our blessed hope", Christ's return, in the future (verse 13). Growth is part of God's whole saving plan, not an extra for keen believers.

Read it for yourself: Philippians 2:12–13

Now read or listen to Philippians 2:12–13.

> "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12–13)

Paul is writing to a church he loves ("my beloved") about living out the humble mind of Christ, which he has just described (Philippians 2:1–11). "Your own salvation" concerns the whole church's life together as well as each person. And verse 13 is the foundation of verse 12: we work because God is already at work. Paul is not teaching that salvation depends on our performance. Assured believers are called to take growth seriously.

1. Trained by Grace

We often think of grace only as forgiveness. It is that, gloriously. But Titus 2 says grace is also "training us". Grace does not only cancel our guilt; it teaches and changes us.

Paul puts both together in Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:8–10).

We are saved "not a result of works", and we are created "for good works". The order matters. **Growth is a response to God's love, never a way to earn it.** As you saw in Book 2, good works are the fruit of salvation, not its price.

2. Work It Out

Paul does not say "work *for* your salvation", but "work *out*" what God has already given. Think of a gift of land. You do not work to buy it; it is already yours. But you work the land, so that it bears fruit.

"Fear and trembling" describes humble, reverent seriousness before God as believers live out what he is working in them. It does not mean anxious fear that God is waiting to reject them.

Our effort is real. Peter says, "make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue" (2 Peter 1:5), and Hebrews calls us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus" (Hebrews 12:1–2). But God's work underneath our effort is greater. Paul could say:

> "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Paul worked hard, and he knew that grace was doing the work. Both are true.

3. Walk by the Spirit

Change does not come by willpower alone. "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). As we keep looking to Christ, the Spirit changes us: "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The Spirit often forms us through ordinary, repeated means:

- **Scripture**, read and obeyed (Book 2, Chapter 9);
- **prayer and worship** (Book 2, Chapter 16);
- **the church**, where believers encourage and correct one another (Book 2, Chapter 17);
- **obedience in small things**, day after day;
- **and sometimes hardship.** God "disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10).

This does not mean that every hardship is a punishment from God, or that suffering should simply be accepted when safety and help are needed. It means that God can use even hard seasons to shape us.

Growth is often slow and uneven, like a plant rather than a light switch. You may not notice it day by day. But over months and years, the Spirit produces "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23).

4. Begin Again

Every believer still sins. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8). But John continues:

> "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

And "if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

God's mercies "are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22–23).

Think of Peter. He denied Jesus three times. But Jesus had already prayed for him: "when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). After the resurrection, Jesus restored Peter and gave him work to do: "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15–19).

Failure is not the end of the Christian life; it is a place where grace meets us again. Beginning again means:

- confessing honestly to God;
- receiving his forgiveness;
- making things right where we can;
- taking the next small step, often with help.

Beginning again does not erase debts, repair trust immediately or remove legal and relational consequences. Grace enables us to face those responsibilities honestly.

Christians differ

- **How effort and surrender work together.** Some Christians emphasise surrender and trust: we stop striving in our own strength and yield to Christ, who lives his life through us (they often point to Galatians 2:20 and John 15:4–5). Others emphasise disciplined effort empowered by grace: we actively put sin to death and train ourselves for godliness (they often point to Romans 8:13, 1 Timothy 4:7–8 and 2 Peter 1:5–7). Many hold both together, as Philippians 2:12–13 does. All agree that growth depends on God's grace and that believers are called to respond actively.
- **How to read Romans 7.** In Romans 7:14–25, Paul describes doing what he hates. Some Christians read this as the ongoing struggle of a believer who still lives with sin (they often point to 7:22, "I delight in the law of God," and 7:25). Others read it as Paul describing life under the law without the Spirit's power, which Romans 8 answers (they often point to 7:14, "sold under sin," and 8:2–4). All agree that Romans 8 is the believer's hope: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1), and the Spirit gives real power to change.

Ask a trustworthy church leader how the church approaches these matters, and compare what you hear with Scripture.

See it in real life: Andrei's story

Andrei's story is a composite drawn from the experiences of many people. It is not a documented testimony.

Andrei is a software developer in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Before he came to Christ, he gambled online most nights and built up serious debt. After he became a Christian, he deleted the apps, told his wife, and went six months without gambling. Then, after a stressful week, he

placed one bet, then several. The next morning he felt sick with shame. "I am a fake," he thought. "Real Christians do not do this." He stopped going to his home group.

His mentor, an older man named Mihai, invited him for coffee and read 1 John 1:8–2:2 with him. "You are not the first believer to fall," Mihai said. "Peter fell, and Jesus restored him. Confess it to God and receive his forgiveness. Then let us take sensible steps together."

Andrei confessed to God and gave his wife a truthful account of the gambling and its effect on their finances. She was free to take time, seek her own support and set financial boundaries. Mihai made clear that she was not responsible for monitoring Andrei or keeping him from gambling. Andrei contacted a gambling support service, met a debt adviser, installed blocking tools and joined a recovery group. "Grace does not mean you will never struggle again," Mihai said. "Grace means you do not have to struggle alone."

There was no dramatic victory. Andrei has gone several months without gambling, though the temptation still comes on hard days. He has returned to his home group, and he prays Titus 2:11–12 each morning, asking God's grace to train him. Many believers fear that one fall proves their faith was never real. Often a fall is where they learn to depend on grace and wise help.

Pause and seek help

Some struggles do not change through more effort or more prayer alone. Addiction to alcohol, drugs or gambling, compulsive patterns involving pornography or sexual behaviour, or other habits that keep returning despite sincere repentance often need specialist support as well as spiritual care. Seeking help from a doctor, counsellor or recovery group is not a lack of faith. See the Life Guide "Addiction and Controlling Habits" (Life Guides booklet).

Accountability with a trusted believer can help, but it can also become control. Warning signs include someone demanding all your passwords, monitoring your movements, requiring detailed confessions, sharing what you confessed with others, or threatening you with exclusion. Healthy accountability is voluntary, respectful and confidential within safeguarding limits. This is different from the reasonable boundaries a person who has been harmed may ask for. A spouse, for example, may need independent advice, financial protection and evidence of lasting change before trust can be rebuilt. If accountability has become control, see the Support Page "I am being controlled through prophecy, spiritual language, money or church authority" (at the back of this book).

Some failures have harmed other people, and some may be crimes. God's forgiveness is real, but it does not remove the responsibility to make things right, to protect others, or to cooperate with lawful authorities. If someone is at risk, safeguarding and legal reporting come first.

What this chapter is not saying

- **"Growing earns God's love, and failing loses it."** Growth is a response to God's love, never its price.
- **"Grace means effort does not matter."** Grace trains us, and we work it out.
- **"I can change by willpower alone."** We walk by the Spirit, through ordinary means of grace.
- **"Real Christians do not fall."** Every believer still sins; confession and forgiveness are for believers.
- **"Forgiveness removes every consequence."** Grace helps us face debts, broken trust and responsibilities honestly.
- **"There is one secret technique for victory over all sin."** God uses many ordinary means over time.
- **"Needing a doctor, counsellor or recovery group shows weak faith."** Seeking help is wise, not faithless.

If you are still exploring

You may wonder whether Christians are simply people trying hard to be good. This chapter says something different: Christian change begins with a gift, not an effort, and failure does not end it. You are welcome to weigh that for yourself. No one will ask you to confess anything or to say publicly whether you have become a Christian.

Remember

The grace that saves us also trains us; we work out what God works in; the Spirit changes us over time; and when we fall, grace meets us again.

1. **Trained by Grace:** grace forgives and teaches; growth responds to God's love and never earns it.
2. **Work It Out:** our effort is real, and God's work beneath it is greater.
3. **Walk by the Spirit:** the Spirit changes us through Scripture, prayer, the church, small obedience and sometimes hardship; growth is slow and uneven.
4. **Begin Again:** confess, receive forgiveness, make things right where you can, and take the next small step.

Practices

Practise it now. Read or listen to Titus 2:11–14 and Philippians 2:12–13. Then write one short line for each part, in your own words. You can use the book to help.

Part	My words
Trained by Grace	
Work It Out	
Walk by the Spirit	
Begin Again	

Private reflection (optional). Think of one area where you would like to grow, and one small, realistic step you could take with God's help this week. Do not make a long list of failures. If you tend towards anxious guilt, choose one step only, and talk with a trusted person. If you want to write it down, use a separate sheet that you can destroy.

Live it this week. Read or listen using the seven-day plan below. Each day, use one or two of the four questions from Book 2, Chapter 9, and pray Titus 2:11–12 for yourself. If you miss a day, simply begin again the next day.

Talk about it (with your group, a mentor or a friend, if you wish)

1. What do people often believe about how Christians change?
2. In Philippians 2:12–13, what does God do, and what do believers do?

3. What do you think most helps people begin again after failure? Why? Share your own experience only if you wish.

Look outward. If it is appropriate and safe, encourage one person this week who is struggling or starting again, with a message, a visit or a prayer. Ask what would help, rather than assuming. Encouraging someone does not mean becoming their counsellor, sponsor or only source of support; where the struggle is serious, encourage them to seek proper help. If this is not possible or safe, pray for them by name.

Looking back. In Chapters 21, 23 and 30, you will look back at Trained by Grace · Work It Out · Walk by the Spirit · Begin Again. Use the book if you wish. This is a learning exercise, not a test.

After each practice, choose one response: I completed this · I will return to it · This is not appropriate or safe for me · I need support.

If you are still exploring: you are welcome to take part in every practice. When you share, you may begin, "This is what Christians believe about growth and grace." No one will ask you to confess anything or to say publicly whether you have become a Christian.

Seven-day reading plan (read or listen)

Day	Passage	One thing about grace and growth
☐ 1	Titus 2:11–3:8	
☐ 2	Philippians 2:1–18	
☐ 3	Romans 7:14–8:4	
☐ 4	Galatians 5:16–26	
☐ 5	2 Peter 1:3–11	
☐ 6	1 John 1:5–2:2	
☐ 7	Luke 22:31–34, 54–62 and John 21:15–19, then look back over the week	