



Lindsey Carlson

GROWING IN GODLINESS

*A Teen Girl's Guide to
Maturing in Christ*

“In a world where teens are too often viewed as incapable of earnest discipleship practices, Lindsey Carlson’s book communicates a refreshing and much-needed message: maturity starts now. *Growing in Godliness* offers basic concepts, accessible tools, and practical steps for teens to understand themselves as devoted followers of Christ. And it offers parents a rare gift as well: the golden opportunity of faith-infused dialogue with their young-adult child.”

Jen Wilkin, Director of Classes and Curriculum, The Village Church; author, *Women of the Word*; *None Like Him*; and *In His Image*

“So much of the person we turn out to be hinges on decisions made in our teenage years. Those years can be filled with wonder, but also with fears and dangers. In this book, Lindsey Carlson gives a practical guide for how young women can use their teenage years to grow in Christ. This advice could be life-changing for you, or for someone you love.”

Russell D. Moore, President, The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

“*Growing in Godliness* is hands down my favorite book for teen girls. Its fresh writing, theological grit, accessible advice, grace-driven counsel, and practical application of the means of grace make me want to put it in the hands of all of the girls I know. No Pollyanna fluff or theological bricks here. I started to read this in the hospital, watching my own teenage girl recover from major surgery, and the sections that I read filled me with hope in the dark hours of my daughter’s pain.”

Rosaria Butterfield, Former Professor of English, Syracuse University; author, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*

“As children grow into teenagers, there is also a growing sense of urgency in their parents. There’s so much to say, so much to teach, and still so much to learn. It’s hard to know where to start. Parents can trust that *Growing in Godliness* will give their teen girls a great place to start in their discipleship. This practical resource is grounded in the gospel and candidly conversational to reach teen girls where they are.”

Gloria Furman, author, *Missional Motherhood*

"It's not easy to be a teen girl. The world tells you to follow your heart, your peers encourage you to conform to their image, and even your own emotions threaten to overwhelm you. Which of us didn't long for a trustworthy friend to guide us through those messy middle school years? Thankfully Lindsey Carlson is that friend—warm, wise, funny, and direct—pointing teens to the only source of certainty and hope in a confusing world. Again and again, she brings girls back to God and his word, encouraging teens to shake off the worldliness that stunts their spiritual growth and to reach instead for Christ alone. As a pastor's wife and mother, I couldn't be more pleased to have this book on my shelf. Give it to the teens in your church or, better yet, gather a group and read it together. *Growing in Godliness* is an invaluable resource for young teen girls and the adults who care about their souls."

Megan Hill, author, *Praying Together* and *Contentment*; Editor, The Gospel Coalition

"While I have no experience in being a teenage girl, I've got a fair bit of experience in raising them. And from the perspective of a father, I can say this book represents exactly the kind of knowledge and wisdom that will serve them well for the few years they are teenagers and for the lifetime beyond."

Tim Challies, blogger, Challies.com

"*Growing in Godliness* is one of the best resources I've read on the topic of discipleship in the teen years. Lindsey Carlson is relatable, engaging, understanding, wise, and laugh-out-loud funny as she helps teen girls grasp their need for God and learn how to grow in faith. I plan to read this book with my daughter and will be recommending it for all her friends!"

Melissa Kruger, Director of Women's Content, The Gospel Coalition; author, *In All Things: A Nine-Week Devotional Bible Study on Unshakeable Joy*

"As a fellow victim of the glamour shots trend of the 1990s, I can relate to Lindsey Carlson's described desire for quick fixes and microwaved maturity. But she has given teenage girls a gift in these pages—not only a description of what it means to be spiritually mature but also a relatable guide for pursuing that growth. I'm thankful my own daughter will have these words to encourage her as she grows in grace."

Catherine Parks, author, *Real and Empowered: How God Shaped 11 Women's Lives (and Can Shape Yours Too)*

"This book was a heart-changing read. It altered my perspective on many things. The author had lots of stories, which made reading it fun. Now I can't wait to grow in godliness!"

Emily H., age 11

GROWING IN GODLINESS

Lindsey Carlson

GROWING IN GODLINESS

*A Teen Girl's Guide to
Maturing in Christ*

 CROSSWAY®

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Growing in Godliness: A Teen Girl's Guide to Maturing in Christ

Copyright © 2019 by Lindsey Carlson

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law. Crossway® is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover design: Crystal Courtney

First printing 2019

Printed in the United States of America

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-6384-3

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-6387-4

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-6385-0

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-6386-7

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Carlson, Lindsey, 1982– author.

Title: Growing in Godliness : a teen girl's guide to maturing in Christ / Lindsey Carlson.

Description: Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, [2019] | Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Audience: Ages 12–19.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018046531 (print) | LCCN 2018054103 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433563850 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433563867 (mobi) | ISBN 9781433563874 (epub) | ISBN 9781433563843 (tp) | ISBN 9781433563874 (ePub)

Subjects: LCSH: Teenage girls—Religious life. | Christian teenagers—Religious life.

Classification: LCC BV4551.3 (ebook) | LCC BV4551.3 .C374 2019 (print) | DDC 248.8/33—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018046531>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

BP	29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22	21	20	19			
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

For my daughter,
Madeline Claire Carlson—
may you grow in the grace and knowledge
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
all of your days.

With hope and love,
Mama

Contents

Introduction	11
--------------------	----

PART 1: PARTNER WITH GOD

1 Live to Grow	17
2 Get to Work	27
3 Relax and Trust Him	35

PART 2: DEPEND ON HIS WAYS

4 Learn from Your Limits	47
5 Search for Riches	57
6 Love His Church	67
7 Pray Continually	77

PART 3: MONITOR YOUR GROWTH

8 Use Your Words	89
9 Steward Your Feelings	97
10 Examine Your Fruit	107

Acknowledgments	117
-----------------------	-----

Notes	119
-------------	-----

Scripture Index	121
-----------------------	-----

Introduction

Congratulations.

If you are reading this book, you've finally hit the teen years, or you're about to. Gone are the days of parent-planned playdates; you're firing off texts to your friends faster than your mom can find her phone. You're negotiating privileges like wearing makeup, staying home alone, and babysitting the neighbor's kids for a little extra cash. You're growing up.

You can expect your teen years to be filled with all kinds of growth. First, you're growing physically. Just ask your poor parents, whose pantry shelves are always empty. I'm sure they've noticed the way your jeans always seem too short and your shoes too small. It's like one night you went to bed as a kid and the next morning your body decided to wake up as a grown-up.

Of course, also present are the less-than-enjoyable growing and often raging hormone levels. Cue the unwelcome unpredictability of acne and surging emotions. So long, steadiness; hello, stereotypical mood swings. Growing up means learning to woman-handle your body's hormonal rises and falls and learning to deal with the happy-one-minute-and-weeping-the-next feelings that come along with them.

You're growing socially, too. Don't worry, so are all of your friends. You're each learning to evaluate the kind of friends you want around and the kind of friend you want to be. Sometimes this means outgrowing certain friendships and gaining new ones. Combine this social switcheroo with your influx of growing hormones and emotions, and it makes the teenage years a tad bit challenging.

Unfortunately, there's no rest for the weary teen. You're still growing as a student, and schoolwork doesn't ease up as you try to make sense of all your new physical, emotional, and social growth spurts!

As a teenager, you are surrounded by growth potential. At school, in your relationships, when dealing with your emotions, and in your changing physical body, growth is a good thing. Ask the doctor checking your height and weight each year. Ask the teacher recording your homework and test grades to ensure your successful progress. Ask your parents who love and guide you and pray you'll grow into a mature adult. Growth is a sign of life, and the resulting fruit that blossoms is a sign of maturity.

Now I'd like to ask you something. Are you also *growing in godliness*? Because this area of growth and maturity is more important than all the rest. Beloved, as a Christian you are called to grow in godliness until you are conformed to the image of Jesus (Rom. 8:29). You do this by growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). Christian growth should take top priority in your life not only as a teenager, but as long as you're alive. In the following chapters, we will examine what the Christian's growth in godliness looks like and learn to strive for maturity in Christ.

As a teenager longing to follow Jesus, you are on the front end of what should be a lifelong pursuit of spiritual growth! I pray your desire to read this book is an indication of your desire to look more like Jesus. Even though you're young and busy growing in so many ways, in Christ you have all it takes to grow in godliness.

So, strive for growth:

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature [wo]manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to *grow up in every way* into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph. 4:13–16)

Your maturity in Christ is meaningful and necessary both for you personally and for the building up of the body of Christ. Your growth is imperative. God wants to use every area of your life—each experience, challenge, and privilege—as spiritual fertilizer, feeding your growth in godliness.

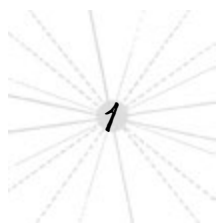
How does God intend for you to grow in godliness? That’s what this book is all about. In the following chapters I’ll challenge you to live to grow in Christ, to find purpose in all you do, and to trust God’s sovereign goodness. We’ll talk about your limitations, and I’ll point you to the tools God uses to equip you through his Word, his church, and prayer. I’ll show you why it’s important to keep a close watch on your words, emotions, and spiritual fruit, as they are all signs of spiritual life and health. There’s a lot to learn, but it’s all within reach.

Congratulations. You’ve picked up the book, you’ve made it through the intro, and now you’re ready to go. “Now to him who is able to strengthen [and grow] you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ . . . to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ!” (Rom. 16:25–27). Let’s get growing!

Part 1



PARTNER WITH GOD



Live to Grow

As a child, I was always in a hurry to grow up. I wanted the privileges and freedom that came with maturity, but I didn't want to wait through the awkward period of growing. It was this desire for unearned maturity that prompted me to ask for a makeover for my eleventh birthday. It was 1993, and a company called Glamour Shots was happy to prey upon my desire for change. For a fee, I could walk inside the local mall, and the Glamour Shots professionals promised to change my look, making me glamorously grown-up.

Right down the hall from the wafting smells of pizza and corn dogs in the mall's food court, my hair was teased, curled, and hair sprayed until it stood up by itself. My face was painted with layers of thickly caked stage makeup, my eyes sparkled with glittery eye shadow, and red lipstick only highlighted the fact that my crooked teeth were in desperate need of orthodontia. They dressed me up in feather boas and leather jackets bedazzled with rhinestones.

The makeover culminated in a photo session where I was coached to pose in laughably unrealistic ways: tossing my head back, staring solemnly into the camera, or placing my fist under my chin. After a few hours and a sizable financial investment on my parents' part, I walked out with pictures that made me look like a forty-year-old real estate agent. Happy birthday to me.

My “before and after” transformation was bizarre. They had contoured my cheekbones and jawline, dressed me like an adult, and dramatically backlit my photos, and in the end, I sure did look different. But, *creepy* different. I didn't look more mature. I looked like a little girl whose dress-up play had gone terribly wrong. When I left the mall that day, I went home and washed all the hairspray and makeup off and returned to my regularly scheduled life as a normal makeup-less eleven-year-old. Growing up required more than makeup, big hair, and a bedazzled jacket.

Sometimes as Christians, we can become so preoccupied with looking mature that we attempt to skip the process of actually growing up. Like little children wearing their mom's high heels, we clip-clop around pretending to be all grown up before we've had the chance to gain the wisdom necessary to become mature. In order to avoid the Glamour Shots edition of Christian growth, we need God's help to grasp the beauty of true growth in godliness.

The Original Picture

I love a good “before and after” reveal. I can't wait to see how beautiful my teenage daughter's once-crooked teeth will look after her braces come off. And I am guilty of fast-forwarding through hour-long episodes of television shows like *Fixer Upper* just to catch the big reveal of the beautiful house at the end. As a growing Christian, you are likely painfully aware of all your imperfections and the ways you need to grow in holiness and your ability

to honor God. You know where you need God to work. But before the work begins on your *before* picture, you'll need to understand the *original* picture.

Most *before* pictures aren't complete pictures; they leave important pieces out. When my daughter's orthodontist took *before* pictures of her crooked adult teeth for her medical chart, she ignored her original set of perfectly straight baby teeth. She cared only about the unruly progression of the adult teeth. As Chip and Joanna Gaines escort homebuyers and cameras through dilapidated homes on *Fixer Upper*, I always wonder what the homes originally looked like when they were first built. How impressive were they before the previous owners ruined them? As viewers, we never see the glorious *original* picture that preceded the less-than-glorious *before* picture. Instead, we cut in on the dirty middle. The place in need of assistance. The work in progress.

Your *original* picture dates back to before you were born, when God spoke the heavens and earth, planets and stars, seas, mountains, plants, and animals into being and called humanity *very* good (Gen. 1:31). He formed you *imago Dei*, in the image of God. By nature, you are wonderful because you were made to reflect God throughout creation, bringing him glory in all you do. In the original picture, your spiritual parents Adam and Eve stood smiling in the garden, still in good standing with God. They trusted him, enjoyed fellowship with him, and walked in obedience.

Like the dilapidated house ruined by previous owners, your original glorious picture eroded before you stepped foot on the scene. You wouldn't have done any better. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve listened to the voice of the enemy, questioned God's goodness, disobeyed his command, and ate the forbidden fruit, and the eyes of both were opened. The Lord said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" and in righteous anger cursed the man and

woman for their disobedience. So long, life of ease and peace with God. Hello, painful labor against ground now filled with thorns, sweat-filled brows, and eventual death. You have never had the chance to enjoy the original picture.

The Before Picture

Your life picks up right where most transformations begin—in the middle of the *before* picture—broken and rebellious. While you were originally created by God to wonderfully reflect his image, instead you rebelled like Eve. Ephesians 2:1–3 explains “*you* were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world” and “were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” You are stained by the curse of sin and an enemy of God. Without God’s intervention, you are decaying and headed for destruction.

There is an answer to your brokenness. Ephesians 2:4–7 goes on to say, “*But God*, being rich in mercy . . . *even when we were dead* in our trespasses, made us *alive together with Christ*—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Your broken *before* picture has been granted the hope of redemption. God rebuilds what sin destroyed by making you alive in Christ and then renovating your brokenness until you look even more beautiful.

The After Picture

We love the part where the old is gone and the new has come because we instinctively know the *after* picture is always better than the *before* picture. For the Christian, completion waits for us in heaven. “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will

dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former [broken] things have passed away” (Rev. 21:3–4). God is making all things new (21:5) and will reveal his work in the *after* picture upon completion saying, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (21:6).

While we love what’s revealed in the *after* picture, we don’t love to wait. It’s why I attempted to find maturity at Glamour Shots and why I always fast-forward Chip and Joanna. But before any big reveal, there is always a lot of behind-the-scenes work to produce real change. The rebuilder must identify what stays and what goes, remaking inside and outside until all shines like new. As Christ works in the hearts of his people, he cleanses and prepares them to present to his Father “without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). Stripping away the brokenness until you are “altogether beautiful” with “no flaw in you” (Song 4:7) takes work.

Work in Progress

As Christians, we are works in progress, awaiting full redemption. Stained by sin, we are no longer the original picture we were created to be. Made alive in Christ, we are no longer dead in our sin, decaying like the dilapidated *before* versions of our selves. But we aren’t yet the fully redeemed *after* picture either. We are in the work-in-progress stage of being made new.

We want our love to “abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that [we] may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:9–10). We strive to become “blameless and innocent, children of God

without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation” (Phil. 2:15), not for our own glory but for the glory of God. But right now, Christ is at work, establishing our hearts “blameless in holiness” before God at his coming (1 Thess. 3:13). Until then, we must “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18) until the work is complete.

Growing in Godliness

From the instant God makes you alive in him, he begins working in your heart through the power of the Holy Spirit, in a process called *sanctification*. Sanctification is an all-day, everyday process that makes you more and more free from sin and more and more like Christ in your actual life.¹ This process cleans the “yuck” of sin in your heart and makes you more godly. Godliness simply means more God-likeness. If you are a Christian, you are growing in godliness as you wait for God to complete his *after* picture. You have a role to play in your sanctification. While your role is not equal in ability or power, God uses your willing cooperation and submission as part of the collaborative process. Philippians 2:12–13 specifies you are to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, while also assuring you it is indeed God who is at work within you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. God is pleased to work in your life as you trust and submit to him. When you partner with God by surrendering to Christ, you have the ability to become increasingly holy and righteous, *like God*. This growth in godliness, or God’s-likeness, grants you an increasing capacity to exalt God. Author Jerry Bridges describes *godliness* as the “devotion to God which results in a life that is pleasing to him.”² Bridges also writes:

The practice of godliness is an exercise or discipline that focuses upon God. From this Godward attitude arises the

character and conduct that we usually think of as godliness. So often we try to develop Christian character and conduct without taking the time to develop God-centered devotion. We try to please God without taking the time to walk with him and develop a relationship with him. This is impossible to do.³

You can't fake or rush Christian maturity. There is no Glamour Shots version of holiness that is convincing to God on the day of redemption; only the work of the Spirit will do. In order to know God and please him, you must work with God to *grow in godliness*. Surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit and ask him to give you wisdom to understand the character of God and the desire to be more like him.

The Big Reveal

If you are alive in Christ, your spiritual growth is facilitated by the inexhaustible resources of the Holy Spirit. As you await the big reveal, trust that you are in good and powerful hands. Second Peter 1:3–4 assures believers:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Can you even imagine what it will be like to no longer experience the corruption of sin and to finally find freedom from your sinful desires? What a gift it is to know that one day you will enjoy *all* of God's precious promises! When God reveals the glorious

after picture of his bride made new, the change will be drastic, and in response you will worship *him* (Rev. 22:3). Until that day:

Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and *are increasing*, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:5–8)

Live to grow in godliness. Partner with God in the pursuit of holiness until Christ returns for the big reveal, and we will all see the glorious *after* picture together. Until that day, get to work as a work in progress, striving to see God's glory revealed in increasing measure in your life.

Grow Up by Progressing in Godliness

The mature Christian woman continually submits herself to the pursuit of holiness.

Practice Progressing in Godliness

- ☼ Ask yourself if you identify more with the “dead in sin” or the “alive together with Christ” description found in Ephesians 2. If you are a Christian, what are some examples of growth in godliness that you’ve observed in your life?
- ☼ *Identify* a few ways that your life has been a representation of “dead in sin,” and if you’re growing in godliness, a few ways that you’d like to see God’s power at work.
- ☼ *Write* 2 Peter 1:3 on a note card and tape it to your mirror or your school binder. Work to commit this promise to memory.
- ☼ *Pray* for God to give you patience as you work to grow in godliness. Ask him to help you rely on his power at work in your life. Pray that he would soften your heart and reveal areas of weakness or brokenness that need your attention.



Your teen years matter.

Of all the ways you're learning and changing during the busy teenage years, your growth in Christ is the most important. God intends to use your teen years as a launching pad into a lifelong pursuit of looking more like Jesus.

This book will help you prioritize your Christian growth—pointing you to the resources God has given you in his Word, in prayer, and in the church; offering help for managing your emotions, watching your words, and bearing spiritual fruit; and challenging you with ways to center your life around this important task. Even as a teenager, you have all it takes to grow in godliness.

“Carlson’s book communicates a refreshing and much-needed message: maturity starts now. And it offers parents a rare gift as well: the golden opportunity of faith-infused dialogue with their young-adult child.”

JEN WILKN, Director of Classes and Curriculum, The Village Church; author, *Women of the Word*; *None Like Him*; and *In His Image*

“This advice could be life-changing for you, or for someone you love.”

RUSSELL D. MOORE, President, The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

“This is hands down my favorite book for teen girls. Its fresh writing, theological grit, accessible advice, grace-driven counsel, and practical application of the means of grace make me want to put it in the hands of all of the girls I know.”

ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD, Former Professor of English, Syracuse University; author, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*

LINDSEY CARLSON is a pastor’s wife and the mother of five children. She serves in ministry alongside her husband in Baltimore, Maryland, where they planted Imprint Community Church in 2017. She enjoys teaching and discipling women in her local church and through writing and public speaking. You can find her writing at lindseycarlson.net.

CHRISTIAN LIVING / TEENS