



GROW DOWN

HOW TO BUILD
A JESUS-CENTERED FAITH

 simply for students

KEN CASTOR



YouthMinistry.com/TOGETHER

Grow Down

How to Build a Jesus-Centered Faith

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DEDICATION

Kathy, Zach, Ben, and Elly:
Thank you for growing down with me.

In celebration of Galen Dolby.

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To all those in Canada, the U.S., and Northern Ireland who have borne my immaturity over the years and who have helped shape the idea of this book, thank you for partnering with me in strong, fruitful ministry. To Kathy, Zach, Ben, and Elly for contributing amazing ideas and for encouraging me daily. To my colleagues and students at Crown College, to my fellow youth workers in the Christian & Missionary Alliance, and to my dear friends at Brentview in Calgary and at Youth for Christ in Northern Ireland: Thank you for engaging with me and my countless, poorly drawn “tree diagrams.” To Steven McCready, Dan Leffelaar, Wilbur Sargunaraj, Gary Newton, Jason Ostrander, Matt Reeve, Brittany Nelson, Ginny Olson, Brad Mock, and Matty McCage: Thank you for your listening ear, creative vision, and personal enrichment of this simple message. Thanks to Stephanie Krajec, Rob Cunningham, Rick Lawrence, and the amazing team at Group for moving this project toward print.

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**GROW
DOWN**

INTRODUCTION

If “up” is the direction you are growing, stop now!

The pages that follow contain a radical pattern that runs counter to contemporary ideas about adulthood. It’s the oldest and truest pattern. Imagine a tree—where life is rooted, standing strong, and overflowing with life.

So rather than trying to grow up, this book encourages you to grow down into Jesus, and then to draw up from his unlimited resources and go out with an abundance of life that this world desperately needs.

That’s what a Jesus-centered life looks like.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Interact! Draw pictures, brainstorm your thoughts, and spread your ideas with the hashtag #growdown. Star your favorite phrases and scribble your best notes all over the pages that follow. Each chapter contains questions and activities meant to stir your reflection. You can go through this book on your own or explore it through a series of discussions with a small group of friends.

However you use it, may this book help you root into a deeper discovery of true life.

Grow Down,

— Ken Castor



*And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, you must continue to live in obedience to him. Let your roots **grow down** into Christ...and **draw up** nourishment from him, so that you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives **overflow** with thanksgiving for all he has done.*

– Colossians 2:6-7 (NLT 1996, bold added)



PART I:

THE PROBLEM WITH GROWING UP

“Adult: A person who has stopped growing at both ends
and is now growing in the middle.”

– Urban Dictionary¹

**GROW
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CHAPTER 1

WARNING: ADULT CONTENT!

GROW
DOWN

Among the greatest achievements of the grownup world is the creation of the Twinkie®, a yellowish cake-like dessert with a cream-like filling loaded with sugars and flavoring and glue-like chemicals.² Twinkies have been described as the “icon of junk food snacks and guilty pleasures, nutritionally worthless yet irresistibly yummy.” Legend says that Twinkies could survive both a store shelf for 30 years and a nuclear attack.³

But you shouldn't begin hoarding Twinkies in preparation for that nuclear zombie apocalypse. Tests have shown that after 30 years, Twinkies actually will chemically break down and, sadly, they'd be no match against a nuclear bomb.

Adults are a lot like Twinkies.

In order to look good and be filled, adults add a lot of guilty pleasures to their lives. But by the age of 30, even though they are slow to admit it, adults show signs of chemically breaking down. And against a nuclear attack, an adult doesn't stand much of a chance.

WARNING: ADULT CONTENT!

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE?

When you were younger, somebody probably asked you one of life's little questions: "What do you want to be when you grow *up*?" (People may *still* ask you that question!) While your answer might have been great for you at that time (such as a firefighter, a racecar driver, or a rock star), the question misguides the purpose of your life.

- First of all, what you are doing right now is just as important to God as what you will be doing in the future.
- Second of all, growing *up* is not as great as we've been made to think. It makes us think that adding more stuff is the best way to gain freedom. It tricks us into thinking that selfishness is the key to friendships. And as you might have noticed in the questionable behavior of some adults you know, it doesn't even guarantee maturity.

The word *adult* is made up of two Latin words: *ad*, which means “toward” or “add,”⁴ and *ultus*, which means “fully grown.” At least grammatically speaking, an adult is someone who has “added enough to their life to have fully grown.” The first two dictionary definitions of the word *adult* reflect this:⁵

a•dult [uh-**duhlt**, **ad**-uhlt] 1: fully developed and mature: grown-up / **2**: of, relating to, intended for, or befitting adults <an **adult** approach to a problem>

Grownups sit at the *adult* table during family meals because they are oozing with fully developed maturity, right? If this is true, then why does the third definition of *adult* in the dictionary take such a disturbing turn?

a•dult 3: dealing in or with explicitly sexual material
<**adult** bookstores> <**adult** movies>

The word *adult* is filled with questionable ingredients. Does this math equation look correct to you: Grownup + Explicit Sex = Adult? I don’t blame the dictionary for describing what “we” mean by our language. But by what form of grammatical gymnastics does the combination of these things make sense?

Virtually everyone in our messed-up-and-confused-morals culture understands that exposing children to that sort of thing is inherently wrong.⁶ Yet at some point, as a person grows *up*, our society believes and even expects explicit behavior. Even if it diminishes dignity, ruins innocence, creates addictions, and damages relationships, adults feel justified to add explicit things to their supposedly “developed” lives. Like a spider entrapping a victim in its web, *adulthood* seduces people into a deceptive trap.

Maybe the following definition is much more befitting of many adults:

child-ish [**chahyl**-dish]: marked by or suggestive of immaturity and lack of poise
<a **childish** spiteful remark>⁷

Growing *up* doesn’t stop people from childishness; it just gives them more experience at it. Most grownups have moments of melting down, dissing someone, spreading gossip, becoming more stubborn (“You can’t make me!”), making senseless decisions, and throwing tantrums.

A HOT DOG MADE OF HORSE LIPS?

As if the problems with the word *adult* weren't substantial enough, if *ad* is combined with another prefix, *alter* (which means “other”),⁸ other truly sinister *grownup* words are generated:

a·dul·ter·ate [*uh-duhl-tuh-reyt*]: to corrupt, debase, or make impure by the addition of a foreign or inferior substance or element.⁹

You'd be pretty ticked (or feel pretty pukey) if you bought a hot dog that was advertised as “all beef” but turned out to be full of horse lips and chicken intestines. Someone adulterated that hot dog by adding junk that never should have been added. That's exactly what many people do with their lives when they grow *up*.

a·dul·ter·y [*uh-duhl-tuh-ree*]: sex between a married person and someone who is not that person's wife or husband.¹⁰

There is a reason it's not called “childery.” Children don't commit adultery. Adults commit adultery.¹¹ Yet our society

WARNING: ADULT CONTENT!

pushes children toward that pattern. Adultery is the sad culmination of a twisted process of development that corrupts the heart of once-innocent people. Forty-five years ago, as he considered the self-absorption of North American adults, one philosopher concluded, “Today’s child is growing up absurd!”¹² Since then, I fear, the situation has gotten worse.

Blame it on Adam and Eve, if you want. They began innocently enough in an unspoiled relationship with God. Then for some mind-blowing reason, they got swept up in temptation and added the knowledge of evil to their formerly blameless lives. I guess they felt that the fulfillment they had wasn’t enough for them. They wanted more. They became dissatisfied, so they added another ingredient. They adulterated their lives—and grew *up* in a hurry.

RESISTING PANEM

In *The Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins, a society of adults living in a post-apocalyptic nation called Panem had become insatiably addicted to self-indulgence. Their explicit minds devised a contest where innocent children were pitted in battle to the death. The more flamboyant the drama and the more grotesque the violence, the more

these adults salivated. The only hope for redemption rested in some simple, radical teenagers who had to learn to stand uncorrupted in a complicated, adult world.

In the landscape of our real world, the situation is just as dire. We need an uncorrupted generation to rise up from the adulterated ashes of our civilization. One of the last verses in the whole Bible, Revelation 21:27, tells us that nothing impure will enter the kingdom of heaven. From beginning to end, the Bible urges younger generations to resist the winds of this world and, instead, to grow in God's patterns.

Ultimately, we were created to have a pure relationship with God. "Faith is the gaze of a soul upon a saving God," wrote A.W. Tozer.¹³ For a generation of self-absorbed adults, the call to a Jesus-centered life means there is no room for self-centeredness.

TILLING THE SOIL:

- How is an adult like a Twinkie?
(Spread the word: #growdown)
- When you were younger, what did you want to be when you “grew up”? Why?
- In what ways have you personally noticed the pressure for young people to “grow up” in our society?
- Which of the key words surprised you the most in this chapter, and why?
- Why do you think people give in to the temptation to adulterate their lives?
- List three things you’ve added to your life that can mess up your love for God:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- How can you pray in response to this chapter?



THIS IS A SAMPLE

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