

# THIS IS HOW WE GROW

## Book Club Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of the book, but before Shannon dies, Christi has experiences that make her feel she “has to be the strong one now.” Though she initially cringes at the change, she knows she must shift her attitude and repeats the mantra “I am the strong one now.” How do you see yourself in your important relationships? Do you feel strong? How does your self-perception affect your response to your own circumstances?
2. Inspirational quotes are important to Christi and frequently appear through out the book. What are some of your favorites? Do you collect and rely on inspirational quotes in your own life?
3. Dr. Hibbert advises us to focus on “how” instead of “why” in the midst of personal tragedies. When you are faced with trials and crisis, what do you do to focus on “how,” to move through them instead of wallowing in “why”? Did you learn any “how” techniques from Dr. Hibbert that resonated with you? Discuss.
4. Dreams frequently haunt Christi after Shannon’s death. Dreams that Shannon is still alive, dreams that she is being tricked, dreams that she is trying to save Shannon but loses her. Do you see her dreams as part of a healing process or more of a cursed reminder of her reality? What about your own dreams? Do you pay attention to or record your dreams, and could doing so help you to heal from your own wounds?
5. When Shannon’s boys come to live with Christi and her children, she has to open her heart wide to become their mother. This is a process that takes time and she is frequently impatient with herself. What are some moments that stand out to you as her moments of growth as a new mom to the boys? What did she do and what patterns did she follow that made them truly become her children over time? How does this relate to your own parenting situations and what can you do to both accept and love yourself as a mother?
6. Therapy plays a prominent role in Christi’s healing. What are your experiences with therapy? Do you feel it’s helpful? What about “going deep”? How do you balance “going deep” with not “circling in the wake” of your past?
7. Christi at one point decides to go on an anti-depressant to help feel better, but it was a tough decision, and she resisted for some time, even though she is a psychologist herself. What are your thoughts towards anti-depressants? Do you feel they are helpful or overly prescribed? Should they be as stigmatized in our society as they are?
8. As a Christian, Christi is a firm believer in the power of prayer and shares her conversations with God throughout the book. The night before Shannon’s funeral

she feels a powerful presence of love that calms and sustains her. What are your own thoughts on God or a higher power? Have you ever had a spiritual experience like that?

9. Christi talks about driving to a sunny location during the middle of an actual hard winter just to have the sun warm her and to remember it did exist. She also visits Lake Powell and finds the location both cathartic and healing. How does setting and place fit in with her healing process? Is there something to the idea of visiting a physical special place or space that facilitates the process of personal growth? Do you have any places like that for you that restore you or charge your batteries?
10. At one point in the story, Shannon sat her family down and told them she was an alcoholic trying to recover. This shocks Christi, as she didn't realize the severity of her sister's drinking problem. Christi tells her boys their mother would still be alive if she hadn't been drinking the night she died. Do you agree with this? Do you think that alcohol and suicide is more of a problem than our society is willing to admit? (Statistically 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of all suicide victims are intoxicated.)
11. Talk about anger. Christi struggles with allowing herself to feel anger because she fears the anger will overtake her and change her into a "bad" angry person. What are your thoughts on feeling anger? Do you try to avoid it at all costs? Is there any benefit from acknowledging anger? How do you move past it once you acknowledge it?
12. According to Dr. Hibbert, grieving should be a family affair, and yet she realizes that individuals all grieve differently. How can we come together during moments of grief to help one another instead of isolating ourselves and shutting others out while still attending to our individual grieving needs?
13. Shannon's in-laws, the Cutlers, cause a lot of stress for the Hibberts as they try to adopt the boys. What do you make of how she handled that situation and her attempts to adopt them? How would you have dealt with such a difficult situation?
14. Like all mothers, Christi deals with fighting kids, sick kids, kids' schedules, and kids' feelings. Do the children help her remain hopeful and positive during her hard times or add to her stress, or both? How so?
15. Christi has some difficult phone calls with her mother. Do you think she is fair with her mother? Discuss the relationship she has with her mom. How do we improve our own relationships or challenges with have with our mothers?
16. Symbols resonate with Christi, like when a bird bangs into her window but she takes hope when it later flies away, or how she perceives the street signs in Ireland as analogies for life lessons. Do you see the world through a symbolic lens? Do you find this helpful in your personal growth?
17. A loving and supportive spouse helps Christi through all her challenges. She says, "OJ and I are in this together, one hundred percent: a team." But they also have

- times of arguing and tension (and the golfing!). Were there any moments between them you found touching or moving? What were they and why did they affect you? How do you relate to your own significant other and what techniques could you use to improve your own important relationships?
18. Towards the end of the book (on page 370) Christi says, “It felt like the moment Shannon died, God gave me a sharp turn in life. I was moving along brilliantly when the wheel was jerked ninety degrees. At some point, I started trying to turn back, find the old path, and carry on. . . .But today I finally understood. That path is dead and gone, and it is okay.” What are some moments in your own life when your path took a sudden unexpected change? Are you okay with your new path or do you find yourself still searching for the old self?
  19. Christi dreams of “flourishing,” of not just being okay, but of being really great. What do you think of her dreams and goals? Do you find her overly ambitious? What is your own definition of “flourishing” and how do you balance goals with the realities of life?
  20. Everyone goes through “winter” seasons of life. What did you learn from Christi about how to help someone who experiencing a personal tragedy or trial? Have you changed any of your behaviors because of something you learned from her? Share.
  21. Truly forgiving Shannon takes time and effort. Forgiveness takes Christi years longer that she had anticipated. What is it about time plus work that can allow for healing to take place? How does reaching forgiveness change Christi’s life? Do the years of sorrow make the peace that much sweeter once she does achieve it? How do you open your heart and allow space for more forgiveness in your own life?