

Do you believe God has a plan for you? Do you trust that He already knows every detail about your future—what job you'll have, who you'll marry, what you'll name your children—and is preparing you for what's ahead?

## Chapter 7

# Patience

Why do you learn more from low points than high points? When you share your testimony of how God helped you survive a desert experience, how does it shape and influence the faith of others?

Truth #4: Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Otherwise you'll never stick to your guns.

**E**veryone at school liked Gina. Even though she was a sophomore, the most popular juniors and seniors had started inviting her to their parties.

Gina's quick wit and warm personality were easy draws. She appealed to people at all levels of the social totem pole, from nerds and overachievers to cheerleaders and jocks.

Her best friends, Anne and Bentley, went to a few parties with her, but after being ignored all night by the stuck-up seniors, they swore they'd never go back. The popular crowd

didn't take to them like they did Gina. Although no one said it, their company wasn't wanted.

When Gina got elected to the tenth-grade homecoming court, a senior named Mandy Jenkins—up for homecoming queen—took Gina under her wings. She invited Gina into her circle and arranged a shopping trip so they could find homecoming dresses together.

Gina couldn't decide what Mandy Jenkins saw in her, but the endorsement upped her rank in the popular crowd. When Mandy's best guy friend, John Wilson, asked Gina to homecoming so they could double date with Mandy and her boyfriend, Gina was ecstatic. John Wilson was the hottest guy in school! For years Gina had secretly crushed on him, and now this?

Gina couldn't wait to tell Anne and Bentley, but their reaction surprised her. "John Wilson is a *jerk*," they told her. "You're insane to go with him!" They also called Mandy two-faced and fake. It irritated Gina that they'd judge Mandy and John when they barely knew them. Maybe if they *tried* being nice, they'd see a different side.

Homecoming night was magical for Gina despite the tension with her best friends. The football team won by a landslide, Mandy was crowned homecoming queen, and Gina got treated like royalty. As her dad escorted her onto the field at halftime, he said he was proud of her. Gina loved seeing her father in good spirits. After losing his job, he rarely smiled anymore.

The post-game party for seniors was held at a farm outside

of town. There were no chaperones, of course—just kegs, hay, and a rowdy band you could hear a mile away.

When John left Gina's side to get drinks, she suddenly felt awkward. Everyone at the party was drinking, and half the girls were drunk already. Mandy had promised to stick by Gina, but when Gina glanced around, she saw Mandy dancing to the band and doing shots.

It hit Gina then how much she missed Anne and Bentley. If they were here, she wouldn't be the only one sober. The senior parties weren't uncomfortable when she'd had them to laugh with her at the maniacs losing control. But with her best friends and sidekicks gone, Gina grew insecure. She felt ridiculous standing alone like a stick in the mud, an outsider watching everyone else have fun.

John came back with two plastic cups spilling over with beer. The smell and foam on top almost made Gina gag. She didn't want to drink, but under these circumstances, she saw no choice. After all, she was stuck here for three hours. What was she supposed to do, spend the entire party being an outcast?

*Maybe this will help me relax.* Gina told herself as she took the cup. *Maybe I won't be so nervous around John and his friends.* Saying no at the senior parties was getting harder the more she came. She wanted people to like her and invite her back again.

Gina tried to take a sip, but she couldn't. Her stupid conscience was nagging her. *Why couldn't this be an easy choice?* Why did it seem like no matter what she did, she'd still feel awkward?

**"THEREFORE DO NOT BE FOOLISH, BUT UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LORD'S WILL IS."**

(EPHESIANS 5:1)



### YOU CAN'T GO WRONG DOING WHAT'S RIGHT

Like Gina, we all wind up in situations that test us. In a matter of seconds we're forced to make a choice that could hurt us or jeopardize our relationships.

If you're a people pleaser—as many girls are, putting acceptance from others over personal well-being and doing anything to stay in someone's good graces (i.e., letting your friend cheat off you so she won't get mad)—you may be scared to risk your relationships. Your friends mean the world to you, so how could you survive without them? What if they dropped you? What if you got left out of parties? What if your best friend chose a new best friend or your boyfriend picked a new girlfriend?

What then?

The root of these what-ifs is fear. And fear doesn't come from God; it comes from the enemy. Satan wants you to believe you'll only be accepted if you follow the crowd. He wants you to believe you have no alternative.

But when it comes to your life, there's *always* a choice. And with God's help and grace, you can face your fears with confidence and choose what's *right* over what seems *safe*. God knows the peer pressure you're up against, and He doesn't leave you alone to deal with it. Throughout Scripture He reminds you not to fear, to leave the future to Him and have faith that He's in control.

Peer pressure isn't something you outgrow. You never reach a point in life where you "figure it all out" and stop feeling tempted. There will always be people who try to persuade you to their way of thinking or make choices for you. It may be new friends or people you love and trust. In some cases, they may think they're doing you a favor. In others, they intentionally hope to mislead you.

Either way, it helps to be prepared. It helps to practice early how to set your limits and say no. Nobody lives a positive life by accident. It takes conscientious effort and deliberation. Deciding ahead of time how you'll handle peer pressure makes you ready when the moment comes.

It's not a matter of *if* you'll be pressured, but *when*.

What you should know is this: *People will push you as far as you let them. Unless you establish parameters now, you'll be talked into things against your better judgment.*

You can't go wrong doing what's right. The safest choice is the right choice because it honors God and allows Him to bless you. I know you want to fit in. I know you want to be popular. But when fitting in and popularity are your goals, you're going

to sell out. You'll do things you wouldn't normally do simply to earn approval.

It's okay to be the only person not drinking at a party. It's okay to be the only one not skinny-dipping in the lake. Standing alone may be awkward at first, but people get over it. They quit hounding you once they realize you won't budge. Honestly, you'll be surprised by how much *more* people respect you for not following the crowd. A lot of people wish to be that brave.

As for the friends you fear losing, consider this: Would you drop a friend for making her own choices? If she's into horseback riding and you're into dance, is that a reason to part ways? If she loves Mexican food and you love Italian food, is your friendship doomed?

A true friend wants you to be true to yourself. She respects your choices even if they're different from hers—although she will challenge you to grow and reconsider any poor choices you make. The best friends have a lot in common, but they also help fill in each other's voids. Where one is weak, the other is strong.

If someone drops you because you're not playing by their rules, they're not a friend. You don't need their influence. It's a great test to see who stands by, actually, when you're not a puppy. You can weed out the users quickly by seeing who expects you to compromise your values and beliefs.

And since peer approval is fickle, chasing it is like chasing the wind—an impossible quest. Even if you became the most

popular girl in school, you'd still be insecure because on any given day, you could lose that popularity. Just one mistake or change in the tide could take you from hero to zero.

Your only security is your relationship with God. Everything else—family, friends, talents, possessions, social status—can change overnight. While the right choice is often the unpopular choice, it's easier to lean that way when you seek affirmation from God, not peers.

Right is right even if nobody is doing it. Wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it. If standing by your morals distances you from other people sometimes, it's not a sign you're doing it wrong. It's a sign you're doing it *right*.

**“THERE IS A WAY THAT SEEMS RIGHT TO A MAN,  
BUT ITS END IS THE WAY TO DEATH.”**

(PROVERBS 14:12 KJV)



### THE GIFT OF YOUR GUT

The first time I tried a cigarette, I was at a restaurant in Dallas with college sorority sisters. Since they all smoked, I decided to try it. Naturally, my friends were happy to show me the ropes. I wanted to look cool and relaxed like them, but I didn't.

Every time I inhaled, a voice in my head interrupted with thoughts like these:

*Smoking is bad for me, and I just learned in psychology that nicotine is extremely addictive. Do I really want to get hooked on something I'll have to quit later?*

*Guys say kissing a girl who smokes is like licking an ashtray. Is that what I want my mouth to be, an ashtray?*

*I won't be able to exercise as well if I smoke. The chain smokers I know can barely run a mile. Is it worth it?*

*Smoking will turn my teeth yellow. Gross.*

*I look dumb doing this, plus it tastes disgusting. What's the point?*

In short, I couldn't enjoy that cigarette because my mind rambled. It simply wouldn't stop. It stayed on my case until I heard what I already knew: smoking is a terrible habit that harms the body, and to knowingly do that to myself was foolish.

Like me, you have a conscience. You have gut instincts, hunches, intuition, and a sixth sense about what is good for you. You can push these things down and pretend they don't exist, but you can't make them vanish. God uses these channels to speak to you. Through the Holy Spirit, He may nudge you a certain way or hold you back. Either way, the purpose is to protect you.

Ever wondered why you can't rebel and feel good about it for long? Why does your guilty conscience kick in, often

subliminally, when you make bad choices? The internal forces keeping you in check are a gift. They help you recognize when you're headed for trouble.

Imagine if no alarms went off when you were tempted to sin. What would stop you from making one bad choice after another? How would you not harm yourself or others? How could anyone hit rock bottom and decide, "Enough. I'm tired of this lifestyle" if bad decisions brought peace and happiness?

I'll be honest—sometimes I'm annoyed by my conscience and gut feelings. They spoil the fun I want to have. Whether I'm gossiping, overspending, or taking out anger on someone, there are times I want to indulge my will without that voice whispering, "You know this is wrong, Kari. Stop while you're ahead."

Can't a girl sin in peace? Can't I get it out of my system without feeling ashamed or regretful afterward?

The answer is No. Sin doesn't work like that—and that's a good thing. You and I both have an innate sense of what's right and wrong. Even if "right" isn't immediately obvious, we know when we're in over our head. Our sins separate us from God, and the only way to close that gap is to admit our sins and ask for forgiveness.

Whether you make good choices or bad ones, you'll sometimes feel uncomfortable. Discomfort is an unavoidable part of the human experience. It's okay to feel uncomfortable because it means you're holding on to what you believe. *If you never felt uncomfortable, you'd never grow and become a better person.*

Whatever your choices are, there will be a trade-off. When you live for your friends, constantly caving to peer pressure, your life will lack inner harmony. You may seem fine on the surface, but deep down there will be an uneasiness you can't shake.

When you live for God, you can enjoy inner harmony but will sometimes feel left out, torn, or lonely when everyone but you jumps on a bandwagon. In times like these, when you're sad because your choices have separated you from friends, ask Jesus to fill the void. Let your relationship with Him help you push through the circumstances.

This world can't offer perfect peace, but there *is* peace in knowing God loves you and has your back. Decide now which comfort you seek: the comfort of fitting in (temporary) or the comfort of pleasing Him (eternal). Get comfortable with being uncomfortable as you tune in to what God tells you. And if you're not sure about something, don't do it.

Trusting God helps you trust yourself. It gives you a lead to follow. Many of your friends want to act on their God nudges too. Why not be the one who makes that okay? Why not be the one who makes living in faith an acceptable alternative?

### Five Ways to Cope with Peer Pressure

- Choose *the right friends*. Every group has its own culture—a common way of thinking, acting, and behaving. For better or worse, you rub off on each other.

I mentioned earlier how hanging around a wild crowd impacts your choices. You won't lift them up to higher standards; they'll drag you down to theirs.

When I was in high school and college, I noticed a phenomenon I still see today: A sweet and innocent girl starts mingling with the wrong crowd by dating the wrong guy. Like Gina from my story, she feels unworthy to be with someone older and more popular.

What starts as drinks here and there may eventually lead to bigger things, like drug use or sleeping around. This can happen to anyone, not just girls with a wild side. When you consistently

**“AM I NOW TRYING TO WIN THE APPROVAL OF HUMAN BEINGS, OR OF GOD? OR AM I TRYING TO PLEASE PEOPLE? IF I WERE STILL TRYING TO PLEASE PEOPLE, I WOULD NOT BE A SERVANT OF CHRIST.”**

(GALATIANS 1:10)

expose yourself to negative influences, your resistance weakens.

The right friends won't like you dating the wrong guy. They won't care if he's cool; they'll care about whether you're in safe hands. The right friends can have fun with you anywhere—hanging out in your bedroom, singing in the car, even babysitting your baby sister. They're loyal, loving, and kind.

Most of all, the right friends lift you up. They want you to go places, not fall into ruts.

- *Keep the right attitude.* When you make good choices, stand firm. You don't have to apologize or justify yourself. Be careful, however, not to adopt a false sense of superiority. No one sinner is better than another (Luke 6:41-42). Taking pride in your moral record is a sin in itself.

God calls you to love others, not judge them. People can respect you for being an individual, but when you're self-righteous about it, you're likely to get ostracized. Your peers may also seem particularly happy when you make a mistake. We all mess up, and we all need more compassion, not judgment, from others.

- *Choose the right environments.* When it comes down to it, where you go matters as much as who you go with. Avoid situations that may cause you to slip.

If you think there will be alcohol or drugs at a party, for instance, skip it. You and your friends can have fun anywhere, so find better things to do, like going to concerts, riding roller coasters, or having a girls' karaoke night.

Sometimes you'll wind up in a compromising situation by accident. You'll arrive at a party and realize it's not the party for you.

At one social event I went to in college, I heard about some girls and guys snorting cocaine in a bedroom. Since this fraternity was known for drug use, I should have expected this, but I didn't. Fortunately, it was easy to escape. My friends and I said good-bye and left. No harm done.

But sometimes your escape won't be easy. You may get stuck and need a back-up plan. If you haven't discussed this already, talk to your parents about a "help first, ask questions later" emergency call system. If ever you're in a bind,

you can call them for help. They'll pick you up immediately and save the questions for later.

- *Imagine hard scenarios—then imagine a response.* It's tough to think clearly when you're on the spot, especially if you're with someone who makes a bad idea sound good. By thinking ahead about potential tests, you'll be prepared to stand strong.

How would you handle the following?

- Your chemistry class has a cheat sheet for today's pop quiz. Everyone has a copy and is memorizing it. You're teetering between a B and a C and need a high score. Do you cheat too?
- You're at a sleepover where the girls are texting boys. One boy asks a girl to text a picture of her boobs. When she does, the other girls text pictures too. They think it's funny and no big deal. Since you're the only girl holding back, they tease you about being a prude. The guys place bets on you, and one offers three hundred dollars for your prize picture. Do you accept?

- You and your best friends all have a pact: no drinking before age twenty-one and no sex before marriage. But a few weeks ago, while spending the night at one friend's house, she confided to you that she and her boyfriend just went all the way. Now you're at a party, and you see another friend accepting a wine cooler. Do you stick to the pact or give in like your friends? Do you say anything to your friends to get them back on track?
- Your boyfriend dumped you for a mean girl. Everyone hates her, and your friends have started a social media smear campaign. They're making up rumors that put a pit in your stomach: Do you let the campaign continue, or do you call it off?

- *Know yourself.* Everyone has weak points and temptation areas. My weakness may not be your weakness, and vice versa. *Whatever is important to you—popularity, money, academic success, pleasing others, perfection—is where*

you're most likely to compromise your values. Be honest as you consider your goals and how far you'll go to accomplish them.

provide a way out. Remember this when you hit a crossroad. Ask for strength and wisdom to handle any situation that tests your resolve.

Keep in mind, too, how resisting temptation makes you stronger and prepares you to handle life's bumpy ride. As the saying goes, "A calm sea never made a good sailor." To grow in faith, you must be willing to endure rough waves.

**"NO TEMPTATION HAS OVERTAKEN YOU EXCEPT WHAT IS COMMON TO MANKIND. AND GOD IS FAITHFUL; HE WILL NOT LET YOU BE TEMPTED BEYOND WHAT YOU CAN BEAR. BUT WHEN YOU ARE TEMPTED, HE WILL ALSO PROVIDE A WAY OUT SO THAT YOU CAN ENDURE IT."**

(1 CORINTHIANS 10:13)



### SETTING YOURSELF UP TO WIN

There is always a choice with sin. You can engage in it or run from it.

God promises you won't be tempted beyond what you can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). Whatever the potential sin is, He'll

You'll always have peer pressure in your life. It will take many forms: pressure to rebel, pressure to succeed, pressure to look perfect, pressure to find a great job, pressure to get married, pressure to make money, pressure to buy a big home, pressure to have babies, pressure to raise perfect babies—honestly, it never stops.

Only you can say, "Enough, this is *my life*." Only you can draw boundaries and set yourself up to win by (1) putting faith first, (2) surrounding yourself with positive influences, and (3) expecting to stand alone at times. Accept this now and it won't be a big deal. Mentally, you're prepared.

Feeling uncomfortable is a feeling to trust, not fear. So lean into the awkwardness and ask yourself what lessons you can take away. Weigh the *inner harmony* of living God's way versus the *outer harmony* of living the world's way. Remember that when you choose well, it's easier to love yourself.

Trusting your instincts sharpens your instincts. The sharper they get, the more clearly you see God's presence and understand His will.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you ever make poor choices to fit in? Does giving in once make it easier to give in again?

2. Do you push friends against their will? Do you lead your friends to get in trouble with you? If so, what does God think of that? What sin do you consider worse, *making* a poor choice or *leading others* to make a poor choice with you?

3. What causes you to stumble? Are there certain people you can't say no to or situations that heighten your insecurities? If so, devise a plan to handle them. Imagine yourself making conscientious choices instead of impulsive ones.

4. On a scale of one to ten, how comfortable are you with being uncomfortable? Do your trust or fear those feelings of discomfort?

5. Why does resisting peer pressure build character? How might a disciplined social life lead to a more disciplined spiritual life?