

Chapter 6

Perseverance

Truth #5: People peak at different times in life.
Trust God's plan for you.

A friend of mine from high school recently shared a video called *The Man and the Butterfly*.⁵

It's about a man who finds a cocoon and watches for hours as the butterfly struggles to fit through the cocoon's tiny hole. When the butterfly stops making progress and looks as if he'll go no farther, the man decides to help. Using scissors, he snips away the cocoon and sets the butterfly free.

The butterfly emerges easily, but its body is swollen and its wings are small and shriveled. The man keeps watching, expecting the wings to enlarge and support the butterfly's body,

but they don't. The butterfly spends the rest of its life crawling on the ground, never realizing its potential.

What the man didn't realize is that the butterfly needed a longer struggle to strengthen its wings. Both the tight cocoon and the work required to push through the tiny opening are God's way of forcing fluid from its body to get the butterfly's wings ready for flight. By "helping" the butterfly, the man actually crippled it. He opened the cocoon too early, depriving the butterfly of the opportunity to develop skills he'd need to survive.

Do you ever wish your life was easier? Have you ever felt stuck inside your cocoon? Have you ever wondered if God deserted you by allowing pain and suffering? If someone offered you a shortcut out of your cocoon, a quick and easy escape, would you take it even if it fundamentally changed who you are forever?

In terms of freedom, are you so ready to feel the wind beneath your wings you can barely stand it sometimes?

If you answered "yes" to these questions, you're normal. Nobody likes to struggle. Nobody likes to be stuck. Nobody likes to wait for good things to happen. Given the choice, we'd all take shortcuts out of our cocoon. We'd all cut corners and find freedom on our terms.

But following God means trusting that every obstacle serves a purpose. If God removed a challenge you're facing right now, you might not be prepared for what He's planned. Your wings wouldn't be strong enough to fly. Regardless of how

your struggles may appear, they aren't a waste of time. God works all things together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28), and having faith means trusting that.

Only when you push through life's impossibly small holes do you understand how much you need God and how miraculous your life can be through Him.

God's plan for you has perfect timing. Even when you feel neglected or forgotten, His plan is in motion. He's bringing people and circumstances into your life that will enable you to later break free and fly. Forcing your cocoon open too soon messes with God's timing. Quitting or taking the easy way out prevents you from developing the character, endurance, and resilience you will need to handle the real world.

When you leave your cocoon, your life will still be hard. You will face ups and downs, seasons where you fly and seasons where you crawl. And while you can't always avoid the dips, you can learn to cope. You can see them for what they are—growth opportunities—and become a better person by using your downtime to reflect and regroup.

What happens while you're waiting is often more important than what you're waiting for. God cares more about the person you're becoming than anything you achieve. For Him it's about the process, not the results.

I hope you find comfort in that. I hope you find freedom in knowing that every trial you experience prepares you for what's to come.

**“AND ENDURANCE DEVELOPS STRENGTH OF
CHARACTER, AND CHARACTER STRENGTHENS OUR
CONFIDENT HOPE OF SALVATION.”**

(ROMANS 5:4)



YOU DON'T WANT TO PEAK IN HIGH SCHOOL

When I was growing up, I came in second place a lot.

In many organizations, I was elected vice president. In two high school beauty walks, I was named first runner-up. Committee heads often asked me to co-chair. And while my grades were high, I was never in the top tier of students with high standardized test scores and scholarships galore.

I was grateful for my opportunities, but deep down I wondered if I had a defect. I wondered if this would be my life theme forever—my giving no percent and coming in second best. For just one day or one night, I wanted to *win*. I wanted to rise above the crowd and receive the top accolades.

It never happened, and life went on. My mother, who understood my frustration, would sometimes say, “You’ll peak later in life, Kari. You’ll get better and better with age.”

She meant this as a compliment, explaining how some

people peak too young and fizzle, never reaching the same high again. And while I appreciated Mom’s faith in me, I still thought I had a defect. I suspected something must be seriously wrong with me.

Today, I can laugh at my “runner-up” insecurities. I’m thankful I have stories of highs and lows to share with my daughters and now you. My mother was right—my life has gotten better with time, not because I win more, necessarily, but because I found my true callings later in life as a wife, mother, and writer. This stage I’m in “clicks” for me.

And while I loved high school and college, I’m happiest where I am now. My best days aren’t behind me; they’re in front of me and still ahead. A peak, I now realize, goes beyond accomplishments, spotlights, and moments of glory. A peak can mean different things to different people, but to me it means the following:

- Strong, loving relationships
- Work that matters
- A full heart
- A happy home
- Self-confidence and purposeful living
- Intimacy with God

What you should know is this: *People peak at different times of life. And if you’re not peaking now, that really is okay.*

You don’t want to be the girl who peaks in high school—or



junior high or college for that matter—but crashes when real life kicks in.

I'm not saying the girl who is Miss Everything at your school is doomed. Plenty of young stars have lives that improve with time because they have the substance and smarts to keep growing. But oftentimes, life outside the high school cocoon is disappointing for Miss Everything because suddenly she's a small fish in a big sea. Her charmed life is over.

Imagine if you'd always been the center of attention. If you never had to share the spotlight, and if everyone treated you like a queen, doing anything you said. Wouldn't you be more self-centered than your peers? Wouldn't your self-perception and sense of reality be a little warped? Don't you think it'd be a rude awakening to discover—WHAM!—life won't always work in your favor, and you're not more special than everyone else after all?

Think about all the Hollywood starlets who crash and burn because they have no limits, no one telling them no, and no spiritual path to keep them centered as they get everything they want at a young age and lose sight of what's important.

Yes, being Miss Everything has perks, but there is a flip side. Being catered to doesn't strengthen your wings. It doesn't prepare you to cope with the humbling truth that nobody remains the center of the universe forever because this universe isn't about us, it's about God. It doesn't teach you how to root for your friends when their life is up and yours is down.

When you're Miss Everything, you don't want life to change. And that's the problem—it will change. Whatever record you set,

someone will break it. Whatever title you win, someone will replace you.

How well you roll with the punches depends on the hype you believe about yourself. If your success goes to your head, letting go of the past will be hard. If you enjoy your success while it lasts but never define yourself by it, you'll be humble enough to handle any circumstances that follow.

I want you to have fun. I want you to feel like these are the best days of your life because your friends are awesome and you can't fathom life without them.

After all, who else has seen you through the nitty-gritty rawness of growing up: buck teeth, braces, training bras, crushes, acne, puppy love, boyfriends, breakups, heartache, and most embarrassing moments?

Who else knows how weird your family can be?

Who else remembers how you barely survived geometry?

Who else witnessed that awkward phase you went through—and promises not to mention it again?

This roller coaster of "firsts" you're riding can be stressful yet magical. Whoever takes these loops with you, you're bonded for life. Only your earliest friends will know the 1.0 version of you, and that's why these friends are special. They see your "before" and watch you change from there.

Because if you live correctly, you won't stay at 1.0. You'll get better, smarter, and more capable each year. You'll broaden your horizons and discover parts of you that bring you closer to your ultimate design.

Girls who peak too early never make it past version 1.0, 2.0, or 3.0 of themselves. They don't grow, adapt, and mature. What's important in high school is not what's important in life, so don't lose hope if you haven't found your sweet spot yet. Listen for God's voice in your life and follow it, because in due time your day in the sun will come.

because girls are my comfort zone. I grew up with three sisters, I'm raising four daughters, and I know more amazing women than I can count.

My first writings were essays on motherhood. I thought they were great until every agent and publisher I queried rejected them. Unable to get my foot in the door through nonfiction, I switched to fiction. Fiction lit a fire in me, and over the course of five years, I wrote three novels.

I had a lot of bites with my fiction—agents requesting full manuscripts, one agent so interested I spent five months making revisions for her—but in the end no one wanted me. No one would take a chance on this diamond in the rough. Believing in myself when industry professionals didn't was tough. My sensitive soul wasn't prepared for that.

I wanted to quit sometimes. I wished for a different passion, one easier to break into than publishing. Deep down, however, I knew God wouldn't give me the gift of writing and a fire for it without a purpose. So instead of making my journey about me, I made it about Him. I found peace in limbo by reminding myself that as long as I'm pleasing God, I'm on the right track (Psalm 37:4).

It took me seven years of committed writing to get a book deal. Seven years! That's a long time to wait for a dream to come true, right?

The good news is, it happened with this book. While I never expected my journey to published author to take seven years, I'm happy my first "baby" to enter the marketplace is for girls

**"FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU,
DECLARES THE LORD, 'PLANS TO PROSPER YOU AND
NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO GIVE YOU HOPE
AND A FUTURE.'**

(JEREMIAH 29:11)



**FAILURE ISN'T THE END OF YOUR STORY—
IT'S PART OF YOUR STORY**

asked me to speak to her girls. Soon after we set a date, a tree fell on my family's house during a storm. It caused major damage and forced us to move out. I was so stressed I considered cancelling on my friend, but I wanted to keep my word. Even though the timing wasn't ideal, I knew I should follow through.

The speech went well, and when my friend invited me back a year later, I tweaked it and added stories. About six months after that, I needed a blog post, so I took that speech and created an article called "10 Truths Young Girls Should Know."

Immediately the article was a hit, going viral on Facebook and Pinterest. I'd never experienced such a tremendous response and interest. While I knew there was a market for a anything I'd written. While I knew there was a market for a book, I decided I'd wait to write it because I was busy pitching my fiction work to literary agents.

Then two months after the excitement died down, I received an e-mail from an acquisitions editor. She'd seen my blog post and expressed interest in creating a book. For years I'd prayed for an opportunity like this, but never did I expect it to fall in my lap.

To be honest, that's not how my life works. When something good happens, it's typically because I chased it. To have someone *want* me and reach out without any initiative on my end was a strange yet wonderful sensation.

I share these details to illustrate how God works in mysterious ways. Even when He's quiet or when you think He's not listening, He's spinning wheels in motion behind the scenes. You have to trust that. Listen to the small voice inside you

urging you to do the *next right thing*. What that voice suggests may seem irrelevant. You may wonder what the point is because it doesn't fit with your journey.

When my friend asked me to speak to her junior high girls, for instance, I saw no benefit to me. I know this is selfish, but one reason I almost backed out after the tree fell on my house was because I wasn't writing for teens at that time. I was writing for parents. Since these girls weren't my reader base and didn't live in my community, I doubted we'd ever cross paths again. I knew my friend would understand if I cancelled, yet for some reason, I felt a need to follow through. I considered it a chance to gain valuable experience.

What if I'd ignored that voice urging me to go? If I'd never written that speech, would I have written the blog post that led to this book? Probably not. What I thought was a favor to a friend was actually an opportunity in disguise. It was the genesis of something bigger to come.

In this world, there are people plans and there are God plans. The strategies humans employ to get ahead—connecting with connected people, hustling to get noticed, setting concrete goals—are not God's methods. While it's important to work hard and be ready when opportunity knocks, it's also crucial to be still and let God move (Psalm 46:10).

Leave space for God to surprise you. Watch Him fulfill the desires of your heart through unexpected channels. God plants people in your life for a reason. Don't discount anyone or burn bridges, because it may be the person you least expect

who holds a key to your future. You never know what God has up His sleeve or what plot twists He'll use to carry out His will. Will you go the extra mile to achieve your dreams? Will you let obstacles be an excuse to give up—or a chance to strengthen your wings?

Too many people let their obstacles win. They chase the dreams God's placed on their heart until it gets hard. Then they assume something must be wrong, because why else would there be impediments? But the truth is, life is difficult. And any dream worth having will have obstacles to separate those who are committed from those who are merely interested.

If you accept this now, challenges won't shock you. You can expect them and brace for them. Knowing obstacles are *normal* and nothing to take personally makes all the difference in whether you stick with your goals or abandon them.

Nobody's life is a constant mountaintop experience, because even wildly successful people have peaks and slumps. The two go together, and to see this concept illustrated, try drawing a mountain on paper. Notice the downward slopes on either side? Those represent your failures, rejections, and down times.

Failure isn't the end of your story—it's part of your story. It's the learning curve that leads to your next peak.

Your attitude determines your altitude. And if you consider failure shameful and something to avoid at all costs, you'll live in fear of it. You'll aim low and not challenge yourself. This may be safe, but it won't make you happy. Your peaks will be

minimal and mildly gratifying. High peaks require high risk. The greater the risk, the greater the potential reward.

If, on the other hand, you see failure as a temporary dip that helps you grow and make better choices next time, it serves a purpose. It becomes a launching pad for your next peak. To rise up, you must push through the slump. You must persevere when you're most tempted to quit.

Will life get easier as you get older? Will you ever reach a point where you stay high all the time? Unfortunately, no. But you will stop seeing slumps as the end of the world. You will realize how they, too, are necessary to your story.

I know you're eager to make sense of life. You're hungry for reassurance that everything will be okay, that God will keep His promises to always be with you, never leaving you or forsaking you (Deuteronomy 31:6). But life can't be understood by looking ahead. If it could, you wouldn't need God. You'd have no incentive to walk with Him, no opportunities to earn His trust.

Faith is built when you let God carry you through hard times—and look back to recognize what He did. Only then, in hindsight, can the puzzle come together. That rejection from your school softball team? It led you to join a travel team that gave you more playing time and elevated your skills. That art show where you only sold one painting? Well, that one customer is now opening a restaurant, and she was so impressed by you that she's invited you to display and sell your work.

When the right door opens, you become *thankful* for things

that didn't pan out because if history had been different, you wouldn't have this moment. And when you praise God in the storm, or whenever there's a problem, you show you trust Him in advance. You turn the uncertainty of the present into hope for the future.

Do you trust God's plan for you? What about His timing?

Do you believe that slumps can lead to peaks, failures can breed success, and trials can prepare you to fly?

If so, you have nothing to lose by trying. Even in the worst-case scenario—you fail—there's still hope for next time. So dream big, take risks, and keep the faith. Pour yourself into your heart's desire and God's will for you. Take on life's impossibly small holes like a butterfly pushing through a cocoon.

At the edge of your limits is where God's grace kicks in. That is where He performs miracles and shines brightest through you.

God sees your hard work, and He *will* reward your faithfulness. He knows the peaks He's planned for you, so as you wait for those peaks to arrive, praise God. Praise Him for the past, the present, and the future. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

A grateful heart cultivates love for the Lord. As your heart for Him grows, so will your awareness of the beauty that exists in every high and low point of your journey.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Using the "Man and the Butterfly" analogy, what stage are you in? Are you hiding in a cocoon, struggling to get out, or flying free?

- What hard experiences made you a better person? Have you faced a difficulty that strengthened your wings?

- How do you cope when you feel stuck, hopeless, or impatient with life? Do you get mad at God and write Him off, or do you pray and rely harder on your faith?

4. 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

5. 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, uncomfortable, your guns.

Everyone at school was a sophomore, though Gina's quick wit started inviting her to parties with her, but after seniors, they swore off her best friends.