

# *Pathway*

PERSONAL CHRISTIAN GROWTH SERIES

Set aside a special time each day to go through a *Pathway* study. Even if you miss a day or two, don't skip those studies. Begin again where you left off! Each daily study is designed to take only 10-12 minutes, or longer ... it's up to you! Be honest with yourself. This is a private time just between you and God.

## **Introduction — *Cheating***

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Doesn't everyone cheat, just a little? Everyday seems to bring temptations to cheat. And when you do cheat, it's easy to keep quiet about it. In fact, that's human. But in this *Pathway* study, you'll see that God has something different to say about the subject. You'll also read about one teenage guy who didn't realize that cheating his employer is sin.

## DAY ONE — Cheating

**Prayer:** Everyday can bring temptations to cheat. Ask God for His strength and courage to stay away from this sin.

**Today's Verse:** *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above ... Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. 3:1-2).*

## Who's Doing It?

Brooke and Susan were together in almost everything. They took Algebra, History, and Biology together. They took Speech and PE together. And now they are on detention together each night after school in the counselor's office for the rest of the month. Why? Because they were caught cheating.

Their Biology teach had assigned each student to independently research and report on the life cycle of wheat rust. It sounded dull to Brooke and Susan. So, they simply took a shortcut. They met at the library one evening and did the project together. Rather than write two papers, they typed one and then made a good-quality photocopy. Each looked liked an original. Brooke wrote her name at the top of the typed report, and Susan wrote her name at the top of the photocopy. The next day they both submitted their "independent reports."

You might say, "Not too smart." But the girls reasoned they had more than a good chance of pulling it off. There were four sections of Biology classes and about 20 students in each section. A student aid usually helped the teacher correct the papers. Maybe the teacher wouldn't even see both papers.

But he sure did. The teacher read both papers himself. And that meant trouble for Brooke and Susan.

Put yourself in their place. Below are possible excuses Brooke and Susan might give in their defense. Check the ones you might consider yourself.

- It's no big deal; everyone does.
- Getting caught is worth the risk.
- I need a good grade, and this is the only way I can get it.
- It's only temporary; as soon as I graduate, I won't cheat anymore.
- I would never have done this in the first place. I wouldn't need an excuse.

A lot of people use such excuses. But for Brooke and Susan, there's another consideration. They are Christians. And yes, that complicates the issue. The girls know Christians shouldn't cheat. That means Christians should not deceive, lie, mislead, trick, or take something that's not theirs.

**A Look in the Book:** Are you interested in how God wants you to live? **Read Ephesians 4:25-29.** *Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.* **Answer the following questions.**

**Because you're a Christian, what does verse 25 say to put away (or avoid)?**

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**What does verse 28 say to stop doing?**

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**Instead, what should you do?**

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**Now, think back to Brooke and Susan. How does lying and stealing specifically apply to what they did?**

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**Do the verses you read give a Christian any room to cheat "just a little"?**

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**Now, how about you? How important is it to you to keep from cheating?**

- Top priority
- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Slightly important
- Not important

## DAY TWO — Cheating

**Prayer:** Honestly tell God about areas of cheating and dishonesty in your life right now. Talk to Him about the steps you will take to change your behavior.

**Today's Verse:** ... neither was any deceit in His [Jesus'] mouth (Isa. 53:9).

### When It “Finds You Out”

When Brad's father came home from work, he was furious. He had received a call at his office from the city police. They told him that Brad was arrested at a discount store for shoplifting a blank video tape.

He ranted and raved at Brad for an hour. “No son of mine needs to steal,” he yelled. “If you wanted a tape, all you had to do was say so. Of all things, why did you steal a blank video tape?”

Actually, Brad didn't know why he'd done it. For some reason, he just “got the urge” when he saw the tapes at the store.

**Think back over the last week and list below occasions when you weren't honest.** It doesn't have to be stealing from a store. List when you took something that wasn't yours, said something false about a person, or when you let someone believe something that wasn't true.

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Now, take a little test. Go back and circle the occasions when you did something to correct your dishonesty.

**A Look in the Book:** Today, let's look at a man in the Bible who wasn't honest.

Abraham moved with his beautiful wife, Sarah, to the country of Gerar. Gerar was ruled by a king named Abimelech.

Now Abraham was, of course, fully aware of his wife's beauty. He thought that when the king saw Sarah, he'd desire her for himself. Since kings usually get what they want, Abraham began to worry. “If Abimelech wants Sarah,” he fretted, “he'll just kill off her husband. And that's me!” So rather than chance being killed, Abraham didn't let anyone know Sarah was his wife. Instead, he told people she was his sister.

Now that was sort-of the truth. Sarah was a close relative of Abraham. But Abraham knew he was lying.

Just a little lie you say? No! Not according to God!

What ended up happening was nearly tragic. King Abimelech was indeed attracted to Sarah. But later God told Abimelech he was about to die because he had taken into his home a married woman. And it was all Abraham's fault for deceiving! (You can read this entire story for yourself in Genesis 20:1-18.)

About this time, if you were King Abimelech, how would you feel toward Abraham?

If you cheat, or act deceitfully, it's easy to keep quiet about it. In fact, that's human. Most people don't go out of the way to announce their sins. Yet sooner or later, dishonesty and trickery can catch up with you. **Read 1 John 1:8.** *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

Covering up sin just makes it worse. Have you ever heard the saying, “Be sure your sin will find you out”? **When can you recall being dishonest — and then having the truth come out and “catch up with you”?**

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### DAY THREE — Cheating

**Prayer:** Are you conformed to this world, or in tune with God’s ways? Spend time with Him today talking about your view of sin. Do you need to become more sensitive to pleasing Him? Is there even a hint of deception in your life?

**Today’s Verse:** *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me (Gal. 2:20).*

## Shortchanging Others

Kevin works part-time at an athletic shoe store in the mall. Tonight, when it came time for his 15-minute break, he went to get a soft-pretzel with cheese. A quarter of an hour was plenty of time, but why watch the clock? Kevin sauntered back to work 10 minutes late. He knew it didn’t matter. The boss was never around, anyway.

And although the mall officially closes at 9:00 p.m., tonight Kevin closed the cash register at 8:50. He turned away two customers. “Sorry,” he told them, “we’re already closed.” Kevin explained to the new girl who just started, “I’ve gotta get home and finish my homework. You probably have homework, too, right?”

**Write two ways Kevin has cheated his employer this evening.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

Kevin also cheated the store in another way. He gave a friend his “employee 25-percent discount” on a pair of soccer shoes.

Seventeen-year-old Kevin is a Christian. Yet, he’s never fully realized the sin in what he’s doing. These three things — a long break, sharing his employee discount, and closing early — all seem normal to him. Kevin knows that most teens working at the mall do the same. But whether he knows it or not, these things are WRONG! Kevin is cheating the store out of money. He’s not being honest with store policies for 15-minute breaks, personal employee discounts, and closing time.

**What about you? What cheating goes on around you in everyday living — whether at home, school, on the job, or elsewhere?**

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### A Look in the Book:

1. Sometimes when we’re not walking in close fellowship with God, we don’t see sin in our lives. But we need to be sensitive to what God wants of us. The Bible tells Christians to be different and to be a witness to others in what’s

right. **Read Romans 12:2.** *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* This verse tells us as believers to “be not conformed” to everything that’s happening around us in the world.

2. Jesus demonstrated to us the very essence of truth. He said, “*I am the way, the TRUTH, and the life ...*” He, too, lived in a corrupt world. But there wasn’t even a hint of deception in Him, the Son of God. **Today, if we as Christians are to imitate His example of living, how should some of our attitudes change?**

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3. When we truly want to be like Jesus, we’ll begin to view things in an entirely new way. If, for instance, Kevin wants to honor God in all he does, he’ll spend more time in God’s Word. He’ll become more sensitive to those areas in his life that don’t reflect Christ. Sometimes cheating may not seem like sin. But to a Christian in tune with God’s thinking, these sins will become clearer. Read Romans 12:2 again. **If you decide to be not conformed to the ways of the world, what would change for you personally?**

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When a friend wants to use your “employee discount,” you might say: “I’m sorry, but it’s for personal employee use only. Do you want me to watch for a sale on this sweater and let you know?”



## DAY FOUR — Cheating

**Prayer:** If today's study has spoken to you personally, you probably need to get something straightened out with the Lord. Don't feel bashful when talking to Him about your sins. He's ready and waiting to wash the slate clean.

**Today's Verse:** *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Gal. 6:7-8).*

## For What Shall It Profit You?

*"I'd do just about anything to get rid of these guilty feelings."*

"Everyone in my high school cheats," Patty, a high school sophomore, complains. "At least it seems like everyone. I walk into Geometry class, and everyone is copying everyone else's homework assignments. The teacher always comes in late, so she never sees how students go against her instructions to do the work on their own.

"A few of us do our homework every day," Patty continues, "but everyone wants our answers. I used to say, 'No way! You can't have credit for my work. Do it yourself.' But the kids around my desk kept bugging me. I finally got so tired of arguing that I began to let them copy my work. Now it's an everyday occurrence. Really, it's all a joke, though. They're not only cheating on the assignments, but they're also cheating themselves out of an education. Plus, they can't pass the tests ...

"The worst part of it, though, is how I feel inside. I know I'm cheating too, in a way. I don't know what to do ..."

Patty isn't alone in not knowing how to make a decision concerning cheating. Many Christians who have told lies or committed crimes would do anything to get rid of their guilty feelings. They'd rather come forward and confess than live with the deception and knowledge that they are displeasing the Lord.

But letting the Lord down is only one of the results of deception. Here are six other emotional results. **Check those you think would affect you the most.**

\_\_\_ Suspicion of others. When you cheat, it's easy to assume everyone else does too, even those you respect. Soon, you don't trust anyone.

\_\_\_ Fear of being caught. When you know you've sinned, your self-image suffers. *It's only a matter of time before he or she will catch on*, you think in panic.

\_\_\_ Lower self-worth. A person not at peace with himself isn't at peace with anyone.

\_\_\_ Concern that you can't achieve without cheating. You become fearful that you'll never make it if you're honest.

\_\_\_ Guilt. When you cheat, you know you've sinned against God. You feel horrible about what you've done to disappoint Him.

\_\_\_ Depression. Isaiah 59:2 tells us that our sins separate us from God. Being out of fellowship with God is depressing.

**On My Own:** Sin always does these kinds of things to a Christian really desiring to please God. **Talk to your youth pastor, a parent, or another Christian adult you respect. Ask what he or she feels are the bad effects of cheating for a Christian. Write his or her answer below.**

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If a sin, such as cheating, can do all this to a Christian, you begin to wonder if it's ever worth it. **Read Psalm 38:3-6.** *There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long.*

**Write how you personally feel about the sin of cheating.**

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If a classmate begs to copy your homework answers, you might reply: "Listen, I did all this work. It's not fair to either of us if you take my answers."

## DAY FIVE — Cheating

**Prayer:** Ask God to help you honestly face your sin. If cheating is part of your life, ask God to help you apply what you learned today and make it right.

**Today's Verse:** *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight ... (Psalm 51:2-4a).*

## When It's All Said and Done

After Brooke was caught cheating on the Biology paper and had served her detention time, she found it hard to face the teacher again.

"Every time I see him, I remember that I cheated," Brooke told Susan. "He doesn't have to say anything. He just looks at me, and his look hurts."

Perhaps it's because Brooke is a Christian that the cheating bothered her so much. It went against all she'd been taught and read from the Bible.

Brooke told Susan that even though she'd "done her time," it didn't help. Brooke still felt guilty.

**What do you think Brooke could do to erase the slate? In the space below, list two things you would advise her to try.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The results of sin may live for a long time, even though the sin is forgiven by God. David confessed his sin with Bathsheba, but God still allowed their first child to die (2 Sam. 12:13-18). God's grace can help Brooke grow stronger. Yet, it's possible that Brooke's teacher may never completely trust her again.

But that doesn't mean Brooke can't set the record straight.

1. First, she should assess the situation and learn from it. **What could Brooke learn from her experience?**

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Because God is concerned about His children, He expects you to accept His correction.

*My son, despise not the chastening [correction, discipline] of the Lord ... For whom the Lord loveth, He correcteth ... (Prov. 3: 11-12).*

2. Do what's necessary to change and fix any correctable damage. Sometimes you need to confess to the person you cheated. Other times you need to restore the hurt relationship. **If Brooke wants to make things right with her teacher, what might she say to him after class?**

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3. Ask God to forgive you. **Read 1 John 1:9.** *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. What does this verse tell us about God's forgiveness?*

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4. Determine in your heart that you'll not cheat again. **Write how you would feel about cheating now if you were Brooke.**

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Even though you've cheated, there's good news! Forgiveness comes from God.

## DAY SIX — Cheating

**Hiding It in My Heart:** As discussed earlier, 1 John 2:6 tells us how to live a victorious Christian life. **Memorize this Bible verse today:** *He that saith he abideth in Him [Jesus] ought himself also so to walk, even as He [Jesus] walked.*

**Prayer:** Talk to God about what you've studied and learned this week concerning cheating. Discuss with Him how important honesty is to you. Ask for His help to overcome temptations to cheat.

## How to Stop!

Being honest will cost you in some ways. When you won't give a classmate your homework answers, he or she might make your life very miserable.

The person who won't "use" a friend's swimming pool pass will spend more money than the teen who will.

The Christian who doesn't cheat on his taxes may pay more than his neighbor who tries to get away with as much as possible.

Someday a boss could ask you to cheat for the sake of the company. Remaining true to your Christian convictions may end up costing you your job.

So how do you stay strong and live honestly as Jesus Christ wants you to live?

**A Look in the Book:** You can start by memorizing God's instruction to live the Christian life. *He that saith he abideth in Him [Jesus] ought himself also so to walk, even as He [Jesus] walked (1 John 2:6).*

The same God who asks you to follow Jesus' example will give you the ability to do so!

Then commit your decision-making process to the Lord. A helpful verse is Psalm 37:5. *Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.* **Write this verse in your own words so it applies to you.**

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When the temptation to cheat comes, turn at once to God. Ask Him to help you make the right decision. **Read 1 Peter 5:7.** *Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.* **Now write it in your own words below.**

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When you realize that God is even more interested in your success than you are, you can rely on Him. In Philippians 4:6, Paul tells you not to become anxious and upset. Rather he says: *In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.* **Now read verse 7.** *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* **What does God promise will happen?**

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You can use what you've learned this week about cheating not only in your own life, but also to help your friends. **If you find yourself involved in a situation where friends are cheating, apply these tips.**

1. Don't criticize your friends and try to come off looking superior. Understand that everyone has weaknesses. Without God's strength, it could be you cheating.
2. If your friend is a Christian, patiently share with him or her the biblical guidelines about how to handle temptations to cheat. Refer back to these Pathway studies to refresh your memory.
3. Urge your friend to do what's right. Be a consistent example of real honesty.