

# *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 — *People Like Me***

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People in the Bible didn't have to deal with the pressures you face today — or did they? In this *Pathway* series, you'll discover that Bible characters are real people — some of them your own age! Spend this week being challenged by David, to have a heart for God; by Mary, to say yes to God; by Joseph, to run from temptation; by Daniel, to live by your convictions; by John Mark, to get up after failure; and by Timothy, to faithfully serve your Lord!

## DAY ONE — People Like Me

**Prayer:** Is your heart in tune with God's? What gets in the way of obeying Him? Confess it. Then ask for His help to want to obey Him and then to follow through on that desire.

**Today's Verse:** 1 Samuel 16:7

## David — Having a Heart for God

"Oh, no!" Todd groaned to his friend as the new topic of study was introduced. "This is going to be booring!"

The teacher, Jeff, heard his comment and looked surprised. "What's so boring about Bible characters?" he asked the high school Sunday School class.

For a few seconds no one spoke. Then Todd finally admitted, "Talking about Bible characters always makes me feel guilty. They were so spiritual, and I'm not."

Brian agreed. "Yeah, people in the Bible seem to be perfect."

"They lived in a different culture," Jan added. "They didn't have to deal with all the pressures we face today. I'd rather study something relevant to my life..."

"Well," Jeff interrupted. "I guess you all have a LOT to learn! Because, for starters, some of the people we're going to talk about were about the same age as you. And they weren't perfect spiritual giants, either. Their culture wasn't the same as ours today. But they faced similar pressures and problems as you do. Most of them learned to overcome them with God's help, just like God expects you to do."

Jeff's Sunday School class wasn't too excited about studying Bible characters. What about you? If you had been in that class, **what comment would you have made about the topic?**

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David is one of those less-than-perfect Bible characters Jeff mentioned. He's famous for his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. But he had a reputation for something else that started when he was a teen. Today you'll look at that aspect of David's life.

**A Look in the Book:** When King Saul disobeyed, God chose David to replace him as ruler of Israel. David was a teenager at the time and wasn't even considered a candidate by the adults involved.

The prophet, Samuel, had the responsibility of anointing Saul's successor. God told him the next king would be one of Jesse's sons. So Samuel invited Jesse and his family to a sacrifice. However, Samuel was not looking for the same qualifications as God.

1 Samuel 16:1-13 describes this event. **Read 1 Samuel 16:7 and focus on the last part in particular.**

**What does man look for?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**What does God look for?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When the Bible speaks about our hearts, it usually refers to the combination of mind, will and emotions, or a person's inner character. What did God notice about David's heart? **Read Acts 13:22 to find out.**

**How does the verse define David's character?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Before being chosen to succeed Saul, David was a shepherd. Psalm 23 tells us some of the things he learned about God during that time. David's experiences helped him develop a heart for God. **Read Psalm 23**

**Write two facts about God that especially stand out to you.**

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

How can you begin to develop a heart for God like David had? **Think about and write one thing you can do today.**

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## DAY TWO — People Like Me

**Prayer:** Talk to God about a tough situation or problem you face. Tell Him honestly how you feel about it. Then, ask for His help to obey Him like Mary did.

**Today's Verse:** Luke 1:38

### Mary — Saying Yes to God

Can you remember back to when you were real little? (It may be difficult, but try!) That was when you learned to say “no!” very well with your voice and actions. The adults in your life didn’t always appreciate your new ability to make choices! They struggled to get you to say “yes” instead. Sometimes it seemed like a game; sometimes it was a war of wills.

The “choices game” hasn’t ended, even though you’re no longer a little kid. It’s just gotten more complicated. Let’s look at a few examples.

“Forget it, Tom,” Rick said. “I already have plans for tonight. You can get along without me.”

“Where have I heard that before?” Tom said in disgust. “You always have an excuse for not helping with something. But when we have a party, you manage to show up every time.”

“Well, you have to have some priorities!” Rick joked. But Tom didn’t laugh.

“What am I going to do, Melanie?” Sue asked her friend. “Jason keeps pressuring me to go further and further on our dates.”

“Do you want to?” Melanie asked.

“Well ... yes and no. Part of me wants to go along, and part of me knows it’s wrong. I really like him, maybe even love him. And it’s hard to keep saying no. But I really want to follow God like we talked about in youth group last week.”

“Hey, Greg!” Brad called down the hall. “Wait up, I need to talk to you.”

Greg waited reluctantly for Brad.

“What’s happening, Greg? Where ya’ been lately? We’ve missed you in youth group!”

“I’ve really been pretty busy lately with my job. I’m saving to pay for my new car and insurance. I doubt if I can get off work that night. I don’t really have time for youth group. I’ve decided to do other things instead.”

As a player in the “choices game,” what are some of the tough decisions you’re facing? **Write two of them here.**

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Mary, the mother of Jesus, also faced some hard choices as a teenager. Let’s look at one of those situations.

**A Look in the Book:** In Luke 1:26-47, Mary was a teenager when she had to decide whether to say “yes” or “no” to God. **Grab your Bible and read the passage**, then answer these questions.

**What was Mary’s difficult situation?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**What problems did she face as a result of this news?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How do you think she felt?** \_\_\_\_\_

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How did she respond to this situation (v. 38)? **Write your answer in words Mary would use today.**

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**Choose one tough situation or problem you face.** What can you do today to demonstrate that you are saying “yes” to God in this situation?

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**On My Own:** Talk to a couple of mature Christian adults, such as your parents, youth sponsors or Sunday School teacher. Ask them for suggestions on how to say “yes” to God. What helps them to obey God? **Write their thoughts here;** then choose one suggestion to practice during the next few weeks.

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**DAY THREE — People Like Me**

**Hiding It in My Heart:** Quoting God’s Word can be a great help in overcoming temptation! **2 Timothy 2:22 is a good verse to memorize and use daily.**

**Prayer:** Thank God for His help in resisting temptations. Ask for His power to overcome persistent and unexpected temptations which come your way today.

**Today’s Verse:** 1 Corinthians 10:13

## Joseph — Not Yielding to Temptation

### *Does this situation sound familiar?*

A government official puts a handsome young man in charge of his house, trusting him completely. The official’s wife is attracted to this youth man and shamelessly tries to get him to go to bed with her. She enjoys the convenience of being in the same house with this young man and persistently tries to take advantage of the situation.

But there is a conflict between them. Although he keeps refusing her, she doesn’t give up. One day, all the household help are gone for a period of time, leaving the two of them alone. She grabs him and begs him to have sex with her. He runs away, and she yells that he was trying to rape her.

This situation has all the elements of a TV soap opera, or a PG-13 movie. But in case you didn’t recognize the plot, it is the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife from Genesis 39. Surprised? Names and places may change, but the basic temptations don’t. Satan is still using an old bag of tricks.

Temptation to sin is all around us. There is no way to avoid it. However, what may be tempting to one person might not affect someone else. If you are not able to identify with Joseph’s situation, you surely encounter plenty of other problems. **What temptations do you face regularly?** List three of them.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

Being tempted is not sin. It’s what we do with the temptation that counts. You don’t have to give in. Learning from the example of Joseph can help you overcome your temptations instead of yielding to them.

**A Look in the Book: Read Genesis 39:7-12.**

**Why did Joseph resist the bold advances of his boss’ wife by running away?**

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**How can Joseph’s reasons help you when you’re tempted?**

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**What strategies do the following verses give for overcoming temptation? Put the guidelines in your own words and write them after each verse.**

Psalm 50:15: \_\_\_\_\_

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Proverbs 4:14: \_\_\_\_\_

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2 Timothy 2:22: \_\_\_\_\_

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Hebrews 10:24-25: \_\_\_\_\_

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James 4:7: \_\_\_\_\_

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**How can you use one or more of the above strategies the next time you face this temptation?** Be specific and practical.

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## DAY FOUR — People Like Me

**Prayer:** Is it difficult for you to practice your convictions? Tell God about it and ask Him to help you resist the pressure to follow everyone but Him.

**Today's Verse:** Romans 12:2

## Daniel — Living by Your Convictions

"It's OK. Everybody's doing it."

"It won't hurt you to try it one time."

"Don't be so stuck up. You're no better than the rest of us."

"Just this once. No one will ever know."

How many times have you heard these or similar lines? Pressure to conform is a temptation everyone encounters, even adults. **Think about the pressures you face.** Check which of the following apply to you and write in any others.

- Cheating
- Not talking about your Christian faith
- Accepting evolution instead of creation
- Drinking
- Shoplifting
- Skipping school
- Trying drugs
- Criticizing teachers and parents
- Swearing
- Getting too physical with your boyfriend or girlfriend
- Doing other activities instead of attending church and youth group
- Other(s) \_\_\_\_\_

It's difficult, if not impossible, to avoid pressures to do things you know are wrong. And it's not easy to resist them. A study of Daniel's life, however, proves it is possible to live by your convictions.

**A Look in the Book:** When Daniel was a teen, the king of Babylon captured the Jewish city of Jerusalem. The king ordered one of his officials to bring some of the best young men to Babylon to serve him. Daniel was among those who were taken from their families and homeland. This event is described in Daniel 1. **Read Daniel 1:8-15.**

**What pressure to conform did Daniel face?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did Daniel handle this pressure?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What was the result?** \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel was able to live by his convictions instead of giving into the pressure to conform.

**Which pressure to conform is the hardest for you to resist?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How can you stand against this pressure today?** (Read the following suggestions for ideas.)

### How to Live by Your Convictions (and Still Have Friends)

1. Be familiar with God's Word! Know what the Bible says. Although it does not specifically address all contemporary issues, the Bible does give principles or guidelines for making decisions.
2. Determine to obey God. Knowing what the Bible teaches is not enough. You need to practice it, and that involves a deliberate choice.
3. Decide ahead of time what you will and will not do. If you're at a party and someone comes in with alcohol, it's easier to resist the pressure to drink if you've already thought through this issue.
4. Say "no" without condemning your friends. You can stick to your beliefs and still be friendly. Let your friends know you want to be their friend, even though you don't want to get involved in a particular activity.
5. Propose an alternative. Suggest another activity or another time to get together.
6. Be prepared to lose a few friends. Not everyone will respect your convictions or be willing to accept alternatives. Their attitudes will hurt, but the pain won't last forever. And there are others who will accept and support you.
7. Ask for God's help in using all these suggestions. The Lord is eager to give you the courage and power to stand up for Him.



## DAY FIVE — People Like Me

**Hiding It in My Heart:** Paul's testimony in **Philippians 3:13-14** encourages you to forget about past failures and go on for God. **Memorize these Bible verses.** Then review them frequently.

**Prayer:** Ask God to help you learn from your failures and to go on serving Him.

**Today's Verse:** Philippians 1:6

## John Mark — Failing Is Not Forever

**FAILURE.** This word has an ugly sound to it — and a variety of side effects. Some people, after only one failure, quit trying and retreat into boring lives of doing nothing. Some have nervous breakdowns. Some think they're worthless or useless because they can't do everything perfectly. But others, like Thomas Edison, view defeats as learning experiences. After 10,000 tries at inventing the light bulb, he didn't see his efforts as failures. Instead, he knew 10,000 ways not to do it, kept trying and eventually succeeded.

What about you? **How do you usually react to failure?**

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John Mark is a person who failed in a big way. But he didn't let that failure cripple him. Instead, he used it as a step to growth. Today, you'll discover the change in his life.

**A Look in the Book:** When Paul and Barnabas were sent out on the first missionary trip, they chose John Mark to go along as their helper. He was Barnabas' cousin and probably an older teen at the time. **Read Acts 13:1-5, 13 for the details.**

Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

**How did John Mark fail in this responsibility?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Why do you think he failed?** \_\_\_\_\_

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About a year after they completed their first journey, Paul and Barnabas got ready for a second one. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them again, but Paul refused to do so. As a result of their disagreement, they split and formed two teams. (You can read about this in Acts 15:36-40.) John Mark had certainly made a bad impression on Paul and caused him a lot of grief!

However, about 10-14 years later, Paul mentioned John Mark favorably in three of his letters. **What do you learn about him from the following references.** (Note: In some places John Mark is called Marcus.)

Colossians 4:10: \_\_\_\_\_

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Philemon 23-24: \_\_\_\_\_

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2 Timothy 4:11: \_\_\_\_\_

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Even though John Mark quit in the middle of his first missionary trip, he evidently grew from that mistake. In fact, he wrote the Gospel of Mark, based on what Peter told him. He didn't let his failure cripple him for the rest of his life.

**What is your biggest failure as you've tried to serve the Lord?**

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**How has it affected you?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How can you avoid the same thing again?** What can you learn from a past failure that will help you serve God better today and in the future?

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## DAY SIX — People Like Me

**Prayer:** Thank God for Timothy's example of a young man who was a faithful servant. Ask God to help you work on areas in your life that hinder you from being an example of servanthood to others.

**Today's Verse:** 1 Timothy 4:12

### Timothy — Faithfully Serving God

Teens get a lot of bad publicity. Newspapers and newscasts regularly report about teen criminals, pregnant teens, teen suicides, runaways, teen prostitutes, underaged drinkers and alcoholics, rock concerts and parties that turn into destructive events.

There are many teens, however, who never make the news, but are positive examples. Hundreds of high schoolers spend part or all their summers in missionary work around the world. Teens donate thousands of hours helping other people in their communities. Many teens help out in Awana programs. They serve as Counselors-in-Training at camp and as Leaders-in-Training in club. They juggle school, extracurricular activities and part-time jobs.

In fact, there are young people who are better examples to follow than some adults. Timothy was one of these.

**A Look in the Book:** Early in his second missionary journey, Paul met Timothy in Lystra. Read about their encounter in Acts 16:1-5.

**What did Paul choose for Timothy to do? Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Timothy was not perfect, but he was a good follower and learner. This is the kind of person God can use! He traveled with the Apostle Paul for several years, was in charge of a couple of churches and went on special missions for Paul. Paul tells us quite a bit about him in his letter to various churches, and to Timothy himself.

**Read the following passages and record what you discover about the kind of person Timothy was.** (Note that the first two are written about Timothy, and the rest are written to Timothy.)

1 Corinthians 4:17: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 2:19-22: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1 Timothy 4:12: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 1:7-8: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 3:14-15: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Which of these characteristics contributed to Timothy's reputation as a faithful helper? Put a plus sign in front of each one. Which ones could have hindered him from following God? Mark them with a minus sign. In spite of these potential problems, Timothy was a dependable young man who served the Lord. Can others say the same thing about you?

**On My Own:** Get together with a mature Christian adult who knows you well, such as your Sunday School teacher, Awana Varsity leader or one of your parents. Ask him or her to help you evaluate yourself as a follower of God. **What characteristics do you have that enable you to be a faithful servant?** Write them below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**What qualities do you need to develop in your life?** List several here.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mark the one quality you need to work on the most. Discuss with your adult partner specific steps you can take to begin to develop this quality. Then **record here your strategy for growing in this area.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Arrange to report your progress to this adult on a regular basis. Also ask him or her to pray for you.