

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 — *Standards and Peer Pressure*

Do you ever have panic attacks of inferiority? Do you look around and see all your friends wearing orange shoes and chewing purple bubble gum - so you do the same! Sometimes the desire to "belong" is incredibly strong during the teen years. How do you maintain your Christian standards when everyone else goes against them? If you need help in getting a clear perspective on peer-pressure, this *Pathway* study offers you just that!

DAY ONE — Standards and Peer Pressure

Today's Prayer: Talk to the Lord about the decisions you face. Remember, He wants the very best for you! He cares about the choices you make from day to day.

Today's Verse: *Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established (Prov. 16:3).*

Decisions and More Decisions!

Brent sat in the school cafeteria feeling so confused. Just that day after Speech class his teacher had said, "You seem to have talent for public speaking, Brent. You should give the debate team a try. You're a natural for it!"

In some ways, Brent was interested. He wanted to be a lawyer, and debate would certainly help in working towards his goals. But on the other hand, he really enjoyed basketball, and had already played for two years. Now as a junior, he anticipated making the Varsity team.

Brent knew he couldn't be involved in both. There'd be too many schedule conflicts. If he gave debate a try, he'd have to give up basketball. But he loved playing basketball, so which should he choose? Well, he'd just do what he'd always done when faced with a tough decision. He'd ask his dad for advice.

But later that night, Brent's dad just shrugged. "Can't decide for you. You're almost grown up. Think about it, and pray about it. Then make your own choice."

That confused Brent even more. He had thought about it; he had prayed about it. In the past, however, his parents had always been there to suggest what he should do. Now they were saying he was old enough to make decisions for himself.

What about you? Do you like making your own decisions, or does it scare you? Be honest! Describe your feelings.

Brent told his friends, Scott and James, about his problem. At first, they both said Brent should stay on the basketball team because that's where his loyalties were. But as they talked, James changed his opinion. Experience on the debate team, he advised Brent, would be a bigger help in the future. Slowly, Scott agreed too.

Brent thought more about the decision, considered his friends' advice, and finally made his choice. This is one of the great things about having a Christian peer group! Your friends can help you through difficult situations and decisions!

But wait a minute. Before you go any further, write your definition of "peer group."

Now, look up the word "peer" in the dictionary and read that definition.

When you were a baby, your parents decided when you'd eat, sleep, and play. As you grew, however, you gradually made more and more of your own decisions.

Sometimes as you become less dependent upon your parents, you become more dependent on your peer group. As you begin making your own decision, you feel confused. So, you look at your friends. You see how they look, how they act, and how they talk. And you subconsciously think, *I need their encouragement and approval! I need to know that they think I'm OK.*

A Look in the Book: Read Proverbs 27:17. Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

Solomon wrote this rule book on friendship. He shows us the importance of friends encouraging each other and gives an illustration to help us understand what he's saying. If you want to sharpen iron, he says, you rub it against iron! Likewise, friends should be an encouragement (not a discouragement) as they help each other through the challenges of everyday life!

During this week, you'll look at different aspects of peer pressure. You'll discover how it can be both negative and positive. You'll see how you can set standards for yourself and keep to those standards when faced with opposition! With the right friends, you'll find that peer pressure can be healthy and encouraging to your Christian life.

DAY TWO — Standards and Peer Pressure

Hiding It in My Heart: *Memorize Colossians 3:17 today.* Apply this Bible verse to all areas of your life, including what you wear. *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.*

If you're not sure, discuss with your youth director (or his wife) whether or not your style of dressing honors the Lord.

Today's Prayer: Does your appearance compromise your testimony? Does it glorify God? Ask the Lord to give you discernment in choosing your dress styles.

Today's Verse: *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 (Rom. 12:2).*

Lookin' Good!

"My magazine's here!" Jenny yelled as she opened the mailbox. "I've been waiting weeks for it to come!"

Matt laughed and grabbed it from her hand, "Let me see this thing!" He flipped through the pages and started reading aloud. "'You'll Never Cry Again,' 'Have It All,' 'The Solution to Your Weight Problems.'" He handed the magazine back to Jenny. "These titles sound like life-and-death situations. And they're just advertisements for nail polish and designer jeans!"

"Hmmm ... wasn't it just last Saturday that we drove ALL over town looking for the right pair of high tops? You wouldn't be satisfied with anything but a certain style of leather ones!"

"Coach insists we have quality shoes."

"That first pair we saw was quality."

"The other guys have leather!"

"Aha! Now we're getting somewhere! So you do want to look like all the other guys!"

Oftentimes, teens use their friends as a mirror for themselves. The mirror theory can be proven in any high-school parking lot! If jean jackets are "in," then the parking lot will look like a warehouse for jean jackets. Everyone's wearing them, even if it's 10 below zero and heavier coats would be more appropriate. Most teens desire to look like (or to mirror) everyone else in their group. **How do you see this mirror theory to be true in your life?**

Do you ever have panic attacks of inferiority? Do you look around and see all your friends wearing orange shoes and chewing purple bubble gum — so you do the same? Then, do you instantly get a sense (however fleeting and unrealistic) of belonging, because you see yourself looking like everyone else?

A Look in the Book: *Take a good look at 1 Samuel 16:7. But the Lord said unto Samuel, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."*

There's nothing wrong with wanting to look good. Most teens really enjoy caring for their appearance and dressing in the latest styles. It becomes a problem, however, when you become careless about your priorities. Although people are interested in how you look, 1 Samuel 16:7 says that God cares much more about what's in your mind and heart!

Think of some guidelines you could use to decide whether following a fashion fad is right or wrong. Then write the most important guidelines here.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What did you decide? Does your list look something like this?

1. Is what I'm wearing modest?
2. Am I wearing the right "brand" simply as a way of showing I have money to spend?
3. Does what I'm wearing stand for something bad, such as a T-shirt with a dirty message?
4. Is what I'm wearing so extreme that it calls attention (in a wrong way) to my appearance?

DAY THREE — Standards and Peer Pressure

Hiding It in My Heart: Why not memorize special Bible verses that will help you stand up for the Lord when the going gets tough? **Start by memorizing 1 Peter 5:8.** *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*

Today's Prayer: Pray about the standards you need to set for yourself. Are you sincerely following what the Lord says in His Word, or are you guilty of compromise and rationalization?

Today's Verse: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).*

Thinking It Through

Horlick High School had just won the basketball championship game, and the mood in the locker room was wild!

"Don't forget!" Pete yelled. "Party at my house in 20 minutes!"

Mark finished combing his hair and went to find his girlfriend. "There's a party at Pete's," he told Shelly. "Want to go?"

"Pete Dunbar?" Shelly didn't even hesitate. "No, thanks. I've heard about Pete's parties. I also heard him say his parents are out of town this weekend."

"Well, I'm going anyhow," Mark told her. "I helped the team win, and I'm not missing this celebration!"

Twenty minutes later Shelly was safely home, and Mark was knocking at Pete's front door.

"Glad you came," Pete greeted. "Here, have a beer and celebrate!"

"Um ... I ..." Mark shifted nervously. "I ... don't ... drink ..." But by the time Mark stopped mumbling, he had a can of beer in his hand. Pete was already talking to someone else.

Mark looked at his can of beer. He didn't really want it, but everyone else seemed to be drinking. What am I doing here? he thought. I'm a Christian. I have standards.

Think about it. What was a warning signal that should have told Mark he was getting into a bad situation?

Unlike Shelly, Mark accepted Pete's invitation without thinking about the consequences. He also didn't think through what he'd say if someone handed him a beer. Although Mark is a Christian, his standards are only vaguely defined.

A Look in the Book: Look up and read what Peter wrote to Christians in 1 Peter 5:8.

Satan would love to see you devoured by the world. He'd love to see a dynamic Christian teen compromise his or her stands and go the way of unsaved friends. He'd love to see a testimony ruined in exchange for a "fling." That's why Peter warns us to be sober (self-controlled) and vigilant (watchful and cautious).

The Christian life is a battle! To be a good soldier in a battle, you must be prepared! **Grab your Bible and read Ephesians 6:12-13.**

Can you imagine an untrained soldier on the battlefield? He sees the enemy coming and says, "Oh, yeah, now how do I use this rifle?" It sounds silly, yet that's exactly how many Christians act when it comes to fighting the spiritual battle. "Mmmmm ... he offered me a drink. How do I feel about drinking?"

Just as a soldier in the army must prepare for battle, so must the Christian. That means you should think through questionable situations before you are faced with them.

Think of specific areas in which you are often pressured to sin. Then answer these questions in relation to each individual area.

1. **What does the Bible say about this?** _____

2. **What do my parents think?** _____

3. **How do the leaders in my church feel about it?** _____

4. **What would I say if my friends were urging me to do wrong in this area?**

5. **What are my personal conclusions about the situation?** _____

Having your thoughts in "black and white" will help you to be more confident and determined to do what you know is right!



DAY FOUR — Standards and Peer Pressure

Today's Prayer: Thank the Lord for His willingness and desire to listen to you. Remember, He's always with you, no matter what your circumstances may be.

Today's Verse: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1).*

I Need Help!

Erin is a Christian. She comes from a good family, is active in her church youth group, and gets good grades. In fact, life was sailing along pretty well for Erin. Then she had an absolutely horrible week ...

First, Erin failed a Chemistry test. Then, her best friend “let out” something Erin had told her in confidence. And to top it off, her boyfriend lied to her.

Talk about feeling miserable! Erin sat in study hall, trying to hold back the tears. That's when another “friend” tried to console Erin by suggesting she try marijuana.

“... so let's meet after school,” the girl concluded in her note. “I'll tell you how to get it.” Erin didn't meet the girl after school, but she was shaken. It wasn't so much the temptation to try drugs that upset her. But it really bothered Erin that someone had so quickly picked up on her vulnerability. Even worse, the girl from study hall continued pressuring Erin even after her other problems were solved.

If you were in Erin's situation, what would you do? Would you ignore the pressure, get support from your Christian friends, or talk to an adult?

Often, teens get advice from other teens about their problems. Sure, sometimes that really helps (as you read on Day 1). But other times (like for Erin), it may be a matter of one confused teenage guy or girl telling another confused teen how to be even more confused!

A Look in the Book: *Read the wise words of Solomon in Proverbs 11:14. Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.*

If you were seriously hurt in an accident, you'd get help from paramedics, nurses, and doctors. Yet when people are hurting spiritually, they often think, No, problem, I can handle this myself.

Solomon wrote that we need guidance in order to succeed. **Read Proverbs 12:15.** *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.*

Yes, counsel or advice is important — especially for teenagers. **But besides your friends** (which in Erin's case were not helpful), **to whom should you go for counsel?**

1. First of all, of course, you should go to the Lord. Pray and read your Bible. By communicating with God, you'll be able to “hear” what He wants to tell you about the situation you're facing.
2. Your parents may be an ideal source for help, especially if they're Christians. They are probably more concerned about your making the right choices than you are!
3. If your parents aren't Christians, you might feel more comfortable talking to the Christian parents of a friend. Usually, they will be more than willing to listen and guide you.
4. Your pastor is another person whom you should consider. He has training and experience to help you set standards and make decisions. Listen to what your pastor has to say!
5. Your youth director and Sunday School teacher are also concerned about what is happening in your life. Ask if you can schedule a time to talk!
6. Do you feel close to a man or woman in your church? Many adults can look back at their teen years from a lifetime of experience and give excellent advice.

Name two or three people with whom you would feel comfortable talking when faced with a problem or decision.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Remember, no matter where you are or what your circumstances, the Lord is right there with you. You can talk to Him ANYWHERE, ANYTIME, and about ANYTHING.

DAY FIVE — Standards and Peer Pressure

Today's Prayer: Pray about your influence on others. Are you a good influence or a bad influence? What kind of things do you “pressure” others into doing? Be honest with the Lord.

Today's Verse: *That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15).*

Can Peer Pressure Be Good?

Sometimes peer pressure is very good.

It's good when your friends convince you to go down the water slide at least once, even though you're absolutely positive you'll drown!

It's good when your friend says, “Look, you should be reading your Bible. We could be accountable to each other.”

And it's good when it leads you away from temptation. For instance, a classmate offers to “sell” you an English test. But the mere presence of a Christian friend makes you instantly answer, “No way.”

Think for a moment. How can you help “pressure” your friends into doing the right thing? Think of two practical ideas.

1. _____

2. _____

Maybe you've never thought before about YOU being the “peer” who is doing the pressuring. Perhaps it's always been the other way around.

A study on peer pressure showed that teens are more easily influenced to do good than to do bad. That should be encouraging! But if you look around you, it probably seems jut the opposite. Even though you KNOW what is right, are you hesitant to speak about it to your friends? Are you afraid others will laugh at you?

A Look in the Book: *Grab your Bible and read Daniel 3.*

Here were three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. This wasn't just an idle decision of theirs, either. It was a matter of life and death!

Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “... do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?” (Dan. 3:14). What if Shadrach had said, “Well, sure, I guess I can worship your gods just this once, O King.” Then, Meshach also agrees, “Yeah, one time won't hurt! After all, I don't want to spend the night in a furnace!”

Now, imagine that Abed-Nego is left alone. Would he have the courage to stand up for what he believed, even though his friends backed down? We don't know. We don't even need to know, because the three friends DID stand together for their Lord.

You'd probably readily agree that it's important to have Christian friends. But have you ever thought through the reasons why it's important? **Fill in some ideas below.**

Christian friends can help me in these ways:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

“It's true that I need Christian friends. But there aren't many (or any) other Christian guys or girls my age at church or school.”

That's a common problem. But there are at least partial solutions available to you. Spend the summer working at a Christian camp. Participate in church youth. Witness to an unsaved friend. There ARE other Christian kids out there! Make an effort to find them!

Nobody is immune to negative peer pressure. Negative peer influence, however, has a lot less effect when you are also surrounded by those Christian friends who are “pressuring” you positively.

DAY SIX — Standards and Peer Pressure

Today's Prayer: As a Christian, have you already “blown it”? Ask God to help you make things right with those you've hurt. Determine to obey Him. He will help you get back on track!

Today's Verse: *I waited patiently for the Lord; and He ... heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit ... and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth ... (Psalm 40:1-3).*

I Blew It!

Jason walked along the lake shore watching the waves. “I blew it!” he said. “If only Erik and Jon hadn't made such a big deal about the rock concert!”

Deep inside, however, Jason knew he couldn't blame his friends. It was still all his own fault, even though Erik and Jon had hassled him when he said his parents wouldn't let him go.

“Why not?” Erik asked. “What's your problem?” Then Erik and Jon laughed and taunted. Finally, Jason decided to lie to his parents and go to the concert.

Lying to his dad and mom was bad enough. Afterwards, things got worse. Jason drag raced down the Interstate and was stopped by the police. All the guys ended up at the local police station.

Jason threw a stone into the water. “What a mess!”

Do you sometimes feel like Jason — in a mess ...?

Maybe you've already mastered the art of cheating on tests.

Maybe you've already tried drugs or alcohol.

Maybe you've already learned how to get away with lying to your parents.

Maybe you've already let down your moral standards on a date.

And now, you figure it's “too late” for you to make things right.

But wait! It's NOT too late.

A Look in the Book: David, in the Bible, is a good example of someone who had reason to feel he'd “blown it.” David arranged for Bathsheba's husband to be killed in battle, so Bathsheba would be free to become his wife. Just in case you can't figure it out for yourself, the author of 2 Samuel makes sure you know that David's actions displeased the Lord. **Read 2 Samuel 11:27.** *And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.*

Now grab your Bible and read Psalm 32:1-5, written some time later, which describes how David felt about his sin. **Put David's thoughts from verse 5 into your own words.**

In spite of everything, David knew the Lord still loved him and would forgive him. And even though the results of your sin may remain, you CAN get back on the right track.

1. **If you have not accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, do so now!** If you don't completely understand the plan of salvation, talk with a Christian who can help you.

If you are a Christian, admit to God that you've sinned. Then rejoice in the promise that your sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ.
2. **If your sin involved someone else, go to that person and apologize.** Make things right with him or her today.
3. **If certain friends influence you to sin, stay away from them as much as possible.** Surround yourself with guys and girls who want to live according to God's Word.

Are YOU easily influenced by your friends to sin? **Evaluate yourself honestly.**

I am _____ influenced by my friends to sin.

_____ often

_____ occasionally

_____ hardly ever (or never)

If you marked either of the first two answers, write what you think you should do to change things in your life.

Sometimes our old, sinful nature seems to take control (Rom. 7:18-19). We get discouraged because we're messed up in things we know are not pleasing to God. But still, the Lord loves us and promises to encourage and strengthen us in our Christian living!

Christians have something the world cannot offer — hope and joy in the Lord Jesus Christ.

