

# WHAT'S IN YOUR HAND?

*The Game of Life*



**KAREN REED**

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DISCLAIMER - This is a work of fiction inspired by my work as a coach and mentor to young women who have experienced events similar to what is described in this book. However, neither the characters, names, or events that take place in this story should in any way be understood or construed as real. Instead, they are the product of my imagination.

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## INTRODUCTION

**A**S A WOMAN WHO experienced many unforeseen trials in her teenage years, I have asked God, “Why me?” Now, I understand that those trials were necessary because they were part of my destiny. They were like the “No cross, no crown” of my life. These trials have refined and defined me. They were the fire that purified the gold in me. So, I no longer ask God why; rather, I give Him thanks.

As a mentor and coach, I feel it is only right to impart my wisdom to teenage girls for them to benefit from my wealth of experience having passed through that stage. Even though they probably won't relate to me 100%, still, I'm pretty sure our experiences will collide somewhere. For instance, these are some of the questions I asked that they are probably asking today:



- Why can't I be the one with a perfect family unit?
- Why can't I attend the best schools and have access to a nice car, a nice home, and nice clothes?
- What did I do wrong, God?
- Why was I dealt this hand in life?

I know these questions are not isolated to just teen girls but teen boys as well. However, I chose to focus on teen girls because I know, as an adult woman, how a teen girl's insecurities could lead them to bad or destructive behavior.

In society, we are often judged or defined by our economic status, where we live, our educational background, gender, race, outward appearance, and our family units. These societal constraints greatly impact how teen girls view themselves and how they embrace and define themselves. Teenage girls are more likely to compare themselves with others as they try to define their true identity without realizing that others are equally making comparisons about themselves. They often define beauty and success as what they see on social media, in magazines, and on TV. As a result, it can lead them to believe they are not good enough because they don't fit into having the "perfect life."

As time passes and culture changes, they are faced with many problems that previous generations never had to face, such as the false perception of social media, physical and/or cyberbullying, and the impact of abandonment. These

are just some of the problems that teenage girls face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This book will focus on how God is intentional on the hand He has dealt each of us, specifically teenage girls. Regardless of what society views as a winning hand, I believe it's all in how we play the hand dealt to us by God. Make no mistake, even the person you deem with the best hand doesn't always know how to play their hand to win or have all the winning cards.

Here are a few of my favorite quotes I want to share for every teen girl reading this book.

*“Be happy with being you. Love your flaws. Own your quirks. And know that you are just as perfect as anyone else, exactly as you are.” –Ariana Grande*

*“Everything you want to be, you already are. You're simply on the path to discovering it.” –Alicia Keys*

One of my favorite scriptures:

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**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)**

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Sometimes things don't go as we plan. Don't be disappointed; know that God has dealt each of us a hand in life, and it's not to harm us but to lead us to our destiny. My prayer is for every individual, after reading this book, to be

equipped to know they are destined for greatness regardless of the hand they were dealt.

In this story I will explore the hand dealt to five single moms and their teen daughters. One night at a company's holiday party, five single moms sat at the same table to enjoy the festivities. Their destinies would become forever connected. Nicole, the most senior employee at the ABC company, was the last to arrive and takes the last chair at the table with the other four ladies. She initiates the conversation that will ultimately lead the ladies on a journey that would reveal some of the most personal challenges they each were facing. Nicole, the leader that she is, would begin describing the hand dealt to her and her daughter. I will also highlight the challenging hands dealt to the other moms and their daughters, regardless of their race, culture, social or economic backgrounds.

Each mother and daughter have been dealt challenges including social media deception, abandonment, adoption, financial access, and suicidal thoughts. They shared their journey on how they played the hand they were dealt and the strengths inside of them. Ultimately, they learn that if the dealer (God) needs to add or remove something or someone in their life, it's to make sure they reach their destiny.



## WHAT HAND WAS I GIVEN?

ON A FRIDAY NIGHT, a week before Christmas, the ABC Company was hosting their annual Christmas party. There were approximately 500 attendees, and the venue was extravagant. There was lots of food, decorations, entertainment, games, and music. I have been an employee of the ABC Company for ten years, and I've witnessed the new and innovative events that are added to the annual Christmas party.

This year I arrived a little late, and by the time I arrived, most of the tables were full. I became a little nervous because I didn't want to sit in the back of the ballroom. As I began to scan the room, I noticed two tables in the middle of the ballroom, one table with two seats remaining that was filled with mostly guys and the other table with one



seat remaining with all ladies. I thought, “Let me grab this table.” I quickly walked to the table and sat down.

The other four ladies were very welcoming, and I immediately thought, “Great, I think I picked the right table and this is going to be a good night.” As I looked to my far right, I noticed Carmen. I met her two years ago when she began working for the organization. We worked on projects together and attended different offsites. We both made eye contact, smiled, and spoke to each other.

## **Divine Connections**

While the food was being served, we started with a small conversation about our families and our jobs with the ABC Company. I blurted out, “Before the servers get to our table, why don’t we introduce ourselves and mention one thing we are most proud of?”

All the ladies agreed. I was first.

“Hi, my name is Nicole, I work in marketing, and I have been with the ABC company for ten years. I love going to church, and I am most proud to be the mother of two kids, a young adult son in college, and a daughter Jada (16 years old), whom I adopted at three months old.”

Next was Krystal, who worked in IT for seven years, and was most proud of her only daughter Tiffany (15 years old) and the fact that she has traveled to all the seven continents. Then there was Carmen; she worked as an executive assistant for two years. She was most proud of her three kids,



two adult sons, her daughter Ayanna (15 years old), and her granddaughter (Ayanna's six-month-old daughter).

Tanya was next. She worked as an attorney for four years, and she was most proud of obtaining her Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree. She has twin girls and is also raising her niece Stephanie (12 years old) as her daughter since her parents passed away when she was five years old. Last was Vanessa, who has been in finance for five years, and she was most proud of working in her dream job and her daughter April (14 years old).

The timing was perfect. After Vanessa finished her introduction, the servers were at our table, and we could eat. While eating, the band was performing, and the people up front had finished their meals and began dancing.

We noticed all the excitement from the people up front, and to our surprise, the person that had their attention was none other than the CEO, Mr. Daniel Walton, AKA "Daniel," by whom everyone was so amused and astonished due to the serious stature he carries at work.

The TV monitors in the ballroom were all focused on "Daniel" doing his portrayal of Michael Jackson's moonwalk. Everyone was so surprised to see someone serious being so free and hilarious. All the women at the table were saying, "Girl, do you see this? Let's take a picture so we can remember this night." We were laughing so hard that we could barely eat our food, and the night was still young.

## All the Single Ladies

After we ate, the band played “Single Ladies” by Beyonce, and of course, we ran to the floor. We all had our phones out, taking selfies and making this moment as memorable as possible. We were so hyped that it felt like we had traveled back to our high school days. You couldn’t tell us anything; we knew this was the start of an unexpected bond between us single mothers. After that exciting moment, we headed back to the table for drinks to cool down because we knew this was only the first peak of the night. After we finished our drinks, we were ready for more entertainment.

Tanya looked at us and said, “Hey guys, let’s go into one of the breakout rooms to see what’s going on there.”

We all got up and tip-toed out and went into breakout room number five. To our surprise, there were a lot of games we played in high school, and it brought back so many memories. The game that caught our attention the most was UNO, so we decided to sit down at the table and play a hand. As I dealt the cards, we established the rules.

While playing UNO, we were looking to have a mom-less night of fun, but somehow, we still got on the subject of parenting. It started with Tanya discussing the Christian Single Mom’s Club. She mentioned the powerful support system she has with other moms and how it helps her raise her niece. One of their mantras is “God controls the hand we are dealt in our individual lives and with our families.”

It was unreal because, at that moment, there was a unanimous “Yes, girl!” that came from every mom at the table.

Carmen belted out, “Isn’t that ironic that we’re talking about the hand we were dealt as we play a hand of UNO? Little did I know what I thought would be a playful hand of UNO would turn into an intense conversation.

While we were playing our first hand, Tanya began to talk more about the Christian Single Mom’s Club. She mentioned the different topics they discuss, and she started to talk about abandonment. Immediately, I drifted off and had a flashback of my daughter Jada (16 years old), who I adopted at three months old, and how she felt abandoned by her biological family. I tried so hard to stay in tune with the game, but surprisingly, this became so emotional for me. I kept drifting in and out due to this topic being so personal. Even in trying to remain focused, my mind still went to my Jada and her struggle with abandonment. My memory of it isn’t so pleasant, but I know God always prepares us for the hand He dealt.



## THE HAND OF INNER STRENGTH

IT WAS AROUND 7:00 AM, and the alarm clock was going off. I thought to myself, Nicole, it's Monday morning, and it's time to get up for work. I thought I was dreaming because it seemed like I had just laid down. I jumped out of bed and started my morning routine to get ready for work. I knocked on the bedroom door to wake up Jada, but she was already up and dressed. It was 7:45 AM. I walked downstairs to the smell of bacon. When I walked into the kitchen, the table was set with a plate of bacon, eggs, toast, fresh fruit, and orange juice. Next to my plate were flowers, balloons, and a card. This was the perfect start and surprise to my birthday.



I was elated with Jada's thoughts and creativity. I said, "Thank you," and expressed how much I love and appreciate her. She said, "Mom, I love you too!"

I looked at the clock, and it was 7:55 am, and I had not eaten my breakfast. I thought, *Why am I going to work for a half-day? I think I'm going to start my birthday early.* I called my supervisor and told her that I would take the entire day off.

She said, "That's no problem. I wondered why you were coming into work on your birthday."

## A Day Together

After I hung up from her, Jada asked if she could take the day off from school since it was a light day for her. I agreed to let her stay home. We ate our breakfast, talked, and laughed about memories. Then, we decided to spend the day together, pamper ourselves, and visit the museums downtown.

After eating breakfast and spending time together, we looked at the clock, and it was 10:00 am, so we decided to get our day started. We went back upstairs and finished getting dressed. It took Jada a little longer to get ready because she wore her hair in natural styles. She decided to wear her hair in twist-outs.

I yelled upstairs to Jada, "Are you ready?"

Jada replied, "Give me 10 minutes."

Jada was trying to decide what to wear, but due to time, she chose to dress comfortably, and she put on a sweatsuit and Ugg® boots.

Our first stop was the nail salon. We both got manicures and pedicures. We were the first two clients in the shop and were by ourselves. We started talking about Jada's relationships. Jada had one close friend but wasn't into dating anyone, although she liked this guy named Damion. She seemed so wrapped up in her academics that she never pursued him.

I asked her about him, and she said, "He's not going to like me; I'm not popular, I'm not a size 5, and I don't have long, straight hair like the other girls my age."

I looked her in her eyes and told her, "You are beautiful, healthy, and intelligent; any young man can see that."

She said, "Mom, let's talk about this later; other customers are coming in."

## **I Never Knew**

As we finished our manicures and pedicures, I thought, *I never knew this about her*. She always seemed so focused on her academics that I never realized that she didn't have a social life. Besides, she and her friend Denisha would hang out sometimes on the weekend. They would have sleepovers, go shopping, and talk on the phone.

While in the car on our way downtown to the museums, we continued our conversation. She said, "Mom, I know this is your birthday, and I don't want to make this about me, so can we talk about you?"

I insisted we continue the conversation.



She said, “You know I’m 16 and thinking about running for president of the school council, but I probably won’t get elected because I’m not as smart as the other candidates.”

I asked, “Where is this coming from?”

Jada blurted out, “I never fit in. It’s like I have a sign on me that says, ‘You’re adopted, and you were abandoned by your own mom.’”

I felt pain and disappointment rise in me and tears roll down my cheeks.

I said to her, “You were adopted because I chose you. I know when you were younger, you experienced being teased by your peers who said that your mother gave you up and she didn’t want you because you were too dark and ugly. I never knew this still bothered you.”

Jada began crying uncontrollably. Trying to get her words out, she said, “Therapy helped some, but I still feel an emptiness. I don’t know who I look like and when we go to family reunions, everyone is always talking about how my cousins look like granddad or grandma. I don’t look like anyone. I’m dark-skinned with dark brown eyes, full and thick hair; and I’m a size 14. All my cousins are light-skinned and petite with shoulder-length hair.”

*You were  
adopted  
because I  
chose you.*

Thankfully, we arrived downtown at that moment and found a parking spot. We sat in the car and talked.

## About My Life

I looked at Jada and told her, “I need to tell you about my life and why I chose to adopt you. I always wrestled with when I would tell you, but I feel like now is a perfect time. I always wanted to have two kids: a boy and a girl.

I was a young mother when I had Maurice. His father and I were best friends in high school and dated for six years. He married another woman after he left me, and I was devastated.

I dated one guy after that relationship, and we were engaged. During that time, I had three miscarriages, and after that, I decided not to try to get pregnant anymore. My fiancé at the time wanted to have kids, and when I couldn’t give him a child, he left me.

For many years I suffered from depression. Until one day, I decided to get professional help. Once my outlook on life switched from negative to positive, I began to make better choices.

I knew I wanted to have a baby girl, and I wasn’t going to let my circumstances stop that from happening. I reached out to an adoption agency and went through the process, and I was matched with you. There was no doubt in my mind when I saw you at 3-days old that you were my little girl. I was so excited that God blessed me with you, and I hope you know that you are my daughter, and I love you as much as if I birthed you myself.”

Jada looked over at me and said, “Wow! I never knew that about you. That is what made you decide to choose

me as your daughter! Mom, now that you have opened up about your life and how I became your daughter, I need to share some things with you.”

Jada began to open up about crying herself to sleep at night because she would dream that her birth mother would come and pick her up from school. They would spend time together, and she would shower her with so much love and apologize for giving her up for adoption.

## The Confession

She looked at me and said, “Mom, I have a confession. Please don’t hate me when I tell you this. I have been secretly trying to find my birth parents. I have been searching for my birth mother online and on social media. I located her on social media and sent her a message requesting to meet her. I even sent her a recent picture of me. She wrote back

*I’m going to make sure you get the help you need.*

to me and told me she didn’t want to meet me and requested that I never contact her again. After that occurred, she closed her social media account, and I never heard from her again.

Before she closed her account, I saw her profile picture and noticed we have the same physical features. This was five months ago, and I’ve been devastated ever since. I am so angry with myself and God because I don’t understand what’s wrong with me. Why doesn’t she want to know me? This is my junior year of high school, and I wanted her to

know me so she could be at my high school graduation next year.

“After that incident, I started sleeping with random guys and using drugs to fit in. I attended a party with Denisha two months ago because I wanted to detach from my situation and emotions and just have fun. It was a house party, and there was alcohol and drugs. I got wasted that night and slept with this guy I met at the party. Two weeks later, I took a pregnancy test because I thought I was experiencing morning sickness. The test came back negative. I was relieved because I knew I didn’t want to bring a baby into the world at this stage in my life. I want to give up. I don’t want to live anymore! God, why did it have to be me to go through this? Mom, why doesn’t my birth mother want to know me? I don’t know where to go from here. I know you love me, but my own birth mother abandoned me, and she doesn’t love me.”

At that moment, Jada began to cry uncontrollably. I hugged her tightly and said, “I’m sorry you had to go through this by yourself. I promise to be with you every step of the way moving forward. I’m going to make sure you get the help you need to deal with this situation. Jada, you may not know this now, but you have an inner strength within, and you will make it through this season victoriously.”

*I sat back in my chair, wondering, “How did I miss this?”*

Jada said, “Mom, it’s your birthday, and we’re at the museum. Do you still want to go inside?”

I replied, “How about we stop at the bakery around the corner and get some ice cream and cupcakes?”

Jada replied, “That’s a good idea.”

We decided that we would seek professional help the following morning, but the remainder of the evening would be devoted to celebrating. Jada ordered my favorite cupcake, cookies and cream, with two scoops of vanilla ice cream. The staff sang “Happy Birthday” and we enjoyed the evening sitting outside while people-watching. Before heading home, we stopped by one of my favorite restaurants and ordered take-out for dinner. That night I tossed and turned, thinking about Jada’s confession.

After hearing such a shocking and emotional confession, I sat back in my chair, wondering, “How did I miss this?” As parents, you can think you know what’s going on with your child but at the same time be left in the dark about certain issues. Every time I hear the word abandonment, it makes me think of this moment in time because it was the first time I was able to feel my daughter’s pain.

As I sat there in silence, I heard, “Nicole! Nicole! It’s your turn.” That’s when I realized that I drifted off longer than expected. I quickly responded, “I’m sorry, you guys,” because I wanted to cover up that my mind wasn’t there; it was somewhere else.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Reed is the CEO and founder of Momentum Pathway, LLC, which provides self-esteem and etiquette coaching to empower young women between 12 and 18 years old.

Raised by loving parents, the late Joe and Lorraine Reed, in Meherrin, VA, Karen has always had a passion for mentoring young girls—both formally and informally. She volunteered as a big sister with the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. Karen has also served 10- to 12-year-olds in children's church. Through her trials and life experiences, she was inspired to start Momentum Pathway.





The company is dedicated to empowering young women to be successful and change the world through its unique programs.

Karen has a Bachelor of Science in Social Science from the University of Maryland Global Campus and resides in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Learn more at [MomentumPathway.com](https://MomentumPathway.com).

# IT'S ALL IN HOW WE PLAY THE HAND WE'RE DEALT

**W**hen you look on social media, in magazines, and on TV, does everyone's life seem better than yours? Do they seem prettier, smarter, wealthier, and happier? Do you wish you could be someone else, have a different home, family, a brand-new life? Why didn't you get the winning hand?

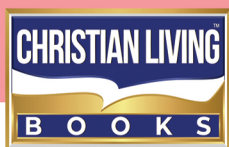
The game of life can seem unfair, especially when your cards include heartbreak, poverty, abandonment, depression, being bullied, and trauma. And when you compare your life to others, it creates the perfect storm that leaves deep wounds and scars.

Discover how to turn the odds of everyday life in your favor. Without pretense, Karen deals with the real issues teens struggle with every day in their homes, schools, churches, social settings, and the deep crevices of their souls. Especially to teenage girls, Karen imparts godly wisdom that will help them avoid destructive decisions, find inner strength, identify deception, know who they are, build self-esteem, and succeed.

You may not be able to switch the deck, but you can surely play and win, regardless of the hand you have been dealt!



**Karen Reed** is the founder and CEO of Momentum Pathway, LLC. The company provides self-esteem and etiquette coaching to 12- to 18-year-old young women and is dedicated to empowering them to be successful and change the world. Karen has a bachelor's in Social Science from the University of Maryland Global Campus and resides in Upper Marlboro, MD.



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