



# Friendship

ΦΙΛΕΤΕΡΕΙΑ

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**A**ctually friendship is a vital part of young people's lives today. They cannot do without their friends. They would feel so threatened if they lost their friends. It is a natural part of growing up. Everyone needs friends; even adults cannot do without certain friends. So, it is a human need. Rarely do we find someone who does not have a couple of friends, especially in the teenage years.

I am worried however, that perhaps some people are becoming more individualistic and separating themselves from society. There are a lot of lonely people in today's society who have no friends, and no one who cares for them. Perhaps technology and the American society is promulgating this ideology. How, you may say, when everything around us is being automated? You go to get gas and all you have to do is put a piece of plastic into a machine and you have your gas. No one to talk to or give you the change or to argue with. You go to McDonald's or Burger King and the same thing happens. People are in a rush, no time to talk to others. So, you drive through speak to a machine and not to a human and get your order. You go to the bank and you can do your banking through the ATMs, no contact with a human soul and no hassles.

Even worse than this is the Internet; you can almost do everything on the Internet these days and without saying a single word to anyone. You could live in your own little world inside the Internet and do all of your chores, buy everything you want, pay your bills, and you can even get a pizza from Pizza Hut! What is this going to do to human relationships, especially between friends? Are friends going to be something of the past? I really wonder sometimes!

Also American society, in particular, encourages in us this type of behavior. Everyone here is very individualistic; it's how the society operates. Everyone is on his or her own. You may be living in an apartment block and not even know who your neighbors are! I pray and hope that this technology does not destroy our society.

Well, I do not want to go too far off the tracks of our topic. Friends are the lifeblood of adolescence. Young people may learn lifelong lessons from friendships, grow in the Lord Jesus Christ through friends, get in trouble because of friends and become very close to friends. We need to understand the three types of friendships, what the Holy Bible teaches about friendship, and the characteristics of true friendship. We also want to know what the fathers of the Church taught about friendship. You must also know what kind of friend you need to be.

**"A true friend is one that gives and not takes"**

## So what are the three types of friendship?

The first type I call acquaintances. They are people that you know. They may be fellow students at school in your same class or activity. Or they

may be acquaintances of your family, or on your sports team. You may not feel very close to these people, and it is probably a very superficial relationship. You know it's the type of relationship of "Hi, Sally, how are you doing?" and see ya tomorrow" type of thing. Just someone you know and meet perhaps everyday, but you do not actually sit and speak to this person on a personal level. It's just basically an exchange of greetings, or a working relationship. That means you just happen to work with this person and you may only speak to them concerning your work. So, these are just acquaintances or work mates. We cannot really call these types of people friends, but more preferably to call them acquaintances or colleagues.

The second type may be a friend that harms you. This type of friendship is one that wants to take from you all the time. Whether it is money, prestige or many other things. They may also be harmful in that they give you wrong advice and teach you to solve your problems in a wrong or evil way. They may be leading you to the path of death, whether spiritual or physical death. They may lead you to do things that are against your conscience or against your faith. Deep inside of you, you know that it is wrong and will get you in trouble. They may pressure you to smoke or have a boyfriend or to steal. Look at the example of Job and his



friends in the Old Testament. Job calls his friends, miserable comforters, because instead of assisting him to get over his distress, they make him more uncomfortable by their words. We also see the example of Rehoboam, who took the advice of the young men instead of the elders, and it brought about the division of the tribes of Israel.

If we look at some statistics of teen behavior, it reveals that:

- 66% lied to a parent, teacher or other adult,
- 60% lied to their parents,
- 45% watched MTV at least once a week,
- 36% cheated on an exam,
- 25% smoked a cigarette or other tobacco product,
- 1 out of 9 got drunk,
- 1 out of 10 used illegal drugs.

**A true friend  
shows continual  
loyalty**

A lot of this behavior is influenced by peer pressure. Young people face severe peer pressure to act in certain ways, to talk in certain ways, to dress in certain ways, to join certain groups, and to try certain things. Any deviation from what is considered the normal or popular thing to do can result in ridicule and rejection. If someone does not have a boyfriend/girlfriend they may be considered abnormal or gay.

### **What are the effects of peer pressure?**

- Experimentation: The teen may be asked by his friends to try something and is told that it won't hurt him.
- Fear and frustration: He may be afraid because deep inside of him he knows that it is wrong. It frustrates him because he wants his friends to accept him.
- Depression: Repeated attempts at conformity (to fit in) results not in fulfillment but frustration and loneliness.
- Confusion: Between peer values and family and religious values.

Negative peer pressure involves a choice of what to:

1. Act like
2. End up like
3. Feel treated like by this group or others.

Peer pressure promises acceptance and approval to young people, but it is an empty promise. These type of friends are not real and true friends. Peer pressure is natural and understandable. It can be positive or negative. It is unavoidable, not only do young people face it every day,

but their parents, teachers and others do too. Our Lord Jesus Himself was faced with peerpressure, yet without sinning. The Bible says that He was, tempted in every way, Just as we are, but yet without sin. In Romans 12:2 St. Paul tells us, and do not be conformed to this world, but be

transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

### **So who are my true friends then?**

This is what we want to concentrate on. There is a nice saying which says, tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are. Your friends reveal you, and your personality. Unfortunately sometimes people will judge us by the people that we hang around with. If we have friends that are into crime, drugs and raging, then people will automatically assume that we are the same because we hang around all the time with such people. You may say, they are just friends, I don't do the things that they do. It may be so, but the question is for how long? How strong are you. What type of personality do you have, are you strong enough to resist all temptation? Do you have the ability to lead such people to repentance or will you eventually give in and follow them?

A true friend is one that gives and not takes. Good friends challenge each other to goodness. A true friend shows continual loyalty as was the case with David and Jonathan in the Old Testament. Jonathan helped him even at the cost



of Saul's anger and Jonathan's own claim to the throne (1 Samuel 18:1 - 23: IS-18). True Friends are also willing to sacrifice and persevere with each other, iGreater love has no one than this than to lay down one's life for his friends.î (John 15:13) Even if their friends do something wrong, they are willing to forgive them, lead them to repentance, and teach them in humility what is right, without hurting their feelings. Our Lord goes to the stage of laying down His life for his friends on the cross. He also said to His disciples, iI will no longer call you slaves but friends.î Barnabas was a faithful friend to the apostle Paul and was there to sponsor him when the early Church held St. Paul in suspicion. The faithful friendships between these people in the Scriptures brought blessings beyond measure. Barnabas launched St. Paul into a ministry that spread the the Holy Gospel through the Roman Empire.

**“A friend loves  
at all times”**  
*(Proverbs 17:17)*

**Let us look at some verses in the Holy Bible that speak about friendship.**

- i He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyedî (Proverbs 13:20). So, wisdom comes from speaking and dealing with people who possess wisdom, but if you deal with foolish people, they will lead you to death and destruction. They can totally destroy your life.
- i A friend loves at all timesî (Proverbs 17:17) So, love is a vital part of a true friendship, and as we said that true love or friendship is the one that gives and not takes.î
- i A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.î (Proverbs 18:24) So, do not expect people to be nice to you if you treat them badly or never smile. It is true that sometimes friends can be closer to us than our brothers and sisters. Treat people in the way you expect them to treat you. If you swear at people and fight with them, then expect the same treatment back. Some people who

act in such a bad way expect people to be afraid of them and to treat them with respect, but they find the opposite and get their own treatment back.

- i Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.î (Proverbs 27:6). This means that a true friend will always persevere with you and even if he hurts you at times, he realizes his mistake and apologizes. So, such friends understand each other and know how to deal with each other in a Christian way. Those that appear to be your friends but really speak about you behind your back or cannot keep your secrets are like the kisses of an enemy, just like the kiss of Judas to Christ.
- i Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. i (Colossians 3:12-14)
- i Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.î (Philippians 2:3-5)
- i True friends do not become jealous, as in the case of Joseph and his brothers, they can keep secrets, and they can resolve their problems peacefully as in the case of Abraham and Lot. They are also honest with each other and don't speak about each other to other people.

**Listen to some advice from His Holiness Pope Shenouda III:**

*iDo not seek what people have. They will love you. Do not make others feel that you are their rival who wants to take*



what they possess or what they are trying to obtain. Endure others' weaknesses and win them by your patience, forgiveness and open heartedness. Praise others and make them aware of your appreciation. Make them feel that you know their good deeds and admire them. Respect others and treat them politely...work for building people, not destroying them. Understand people and help them to understand you, quietly and with a good spirit. By doing this, you will be able to live with them in mutual understanding, love and peace. Share in people's joys and sorrows. Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). Do not miss a chance to comfort people's hearts. †

Truly golden words, that we need to consider and live by. Yes. True friends must always be there for each other.

### **What do the Church fathers say concerning this subject?**

Let us see what we can learn from Saint John Chrysostom. He says in his homily in 1 Thessalonians Chapter 2, *He who loves, ought so to love, that if he were asked even for his soul or life, and it were possible, he would not refuse it...Truly a faithful friend is the medicine of life. (Ecc. 6:16). Truly a faithful friend is a strong defense (Ecc. 6:14). For what will not a genuine friend perform?...Though you should name infinite treasures, none of them is comparable to a genuine friend... If anyone has a friend such as I speak of, he will acknowledge the truth of my words. Though he sees his friend every day, he is not satiated. For him he prays for the same things as for himself...from a friend we may both ask a favor, and receive one without suspicion...! speak of spiritual friends, who prefer nothing to friendship. Such was Paul, who would willingly have given his soul, even though not asked.... But consider, in the tinge of the apostles, I do not speak of the chiefmen, but of the believers themselves generally, all, he says, were of one heart and soul: and neither did anyone say that any of the things possessed was his own ...and they distributed to each, as anyone had need.†*

### **Saint Ambrose says:**

*Preserve, then, my sons, that friendship ye have begun with your brethren, for nothing in the world is more beautiful than that. It is indeed a comfort in this life to have one to whom thou canst open thy heart, with whom thou canst share confidences, and to whom thou canst entrust the secrets of thy heart. It is a comfort to have a trusty man by thy side, who will rejoice with thee in prosperity, sympathize in troubles, encourage in persecution. What good friends those Hebrew children were whom the flames of the fiery furnace did not separate from their love of each other! Of them we have already spoken. Holy David says well:*

*Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant, inseparable in their life, in death they were not divided.† Let not thy warning be harsh, nor thy rebuke bitter, for as friendship ought to avoid slavery, so, too, ought it to be free from arrogance. For what is a friend but a partner in love, to whom thou unites and attaches! thy soul, and with whom thou blindest so as to desire from being two to become one; to whom thou entrustest thyself as to a second self, from whom thou dearest nothing, and from whom thou demandest nothing dishonorable for the sake of thine own advantage. Friendship is not meant as a source of revenue, but is full of seemliness, full of grace. Friendship is a virtue, not a way of making money. It is produced, not by money, but by esteem, not by the offer of rewards, but by a mutual rivalry in doing kindness.†*

Finally, what kind of a friend do you need to be? Simply speaking, you should be a good example to your friends in the way you speak, act, dress. You should be leading a holy life and lead your friends to know the Lord Jesus Christ and love Him, and to have Him as your best Friend. You should be patient and not self-seeking. You must pull your friends up and have a strong personality and not allow them, to pull you down. You must be willing to listen to your friends, so that they will listen to you. †