



*Commentary...*

## *The Negative Effects of Friendship*

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**F**riendship is a wonderful thing. It makes you feel like you always have somebody to fall back on when you're feeling down. In good times and bad times, you will always depend on your friends to share your feelings with. A true friend is there to help build you up spiritually. A true friend is there for you when you need advice or a shoulder to lean on. A true friend is there for you when you are in trouble. A true friend is also especially there for you when it comes to having a good time. So overall, we see that friendship is something that appears to be very positive.

But when is friendship negative? Even though you may love your friends and they may love you, they may not always be healthy for your spiritual life. Friendship can build you up in so many positive ways, but you should be careful, because friendship may also bring you down in so many negative ways.

Friendship is the worst when it brings you down spiritually. Your friends may want to go out on the weekend and have a good time. "One weekend won't hurt", you say to yourself. So you decide to go out and skip going to church. You'll feel like you've been missing out on all this fun and you want to go back the next weekend, and the next, and the next. It may start out with a simple night at the movie theater. The next weekend, there's a concert. The next, it's a friend's birthday party. The places you go and people you're with may continue to get worse.

You continue going out to these wrong places with the wrong crowd, not realizing that your spiritual level is gradually slipping away from you. Your prayers begin to decrease until they completely stop. You don't go to church as often as you used to. You stop showing interest in prayer. It all becomes boring to you or you

may say you don't have time to pray or to go to church. You may not realize it or try to deny the fact that your friends are influencing you. They may not be doing this intentionally, but sometimes, they just don't know any better. The process of your spiritual level falling happens slowly, but may gradually grow worse if you don't realize it in time. Once you realize what is happening, it may be too late. Therefore, it becomes a lot harder to bring yourself back up to where you once were spiritually.

Now let's talk about what the wrong crowd may do to you to bring you down spiritually. Just because people are astray from the church, it doesn't mean they are bad, but like we said before, they just may not know any better. Their parents may not have raised them in the church and they may not have had anybody to guide them towards the right direction in life. We may feel bad for these people and want to help them get on the right path, but how can we do this if we are spiritually weak?

They may overpower us and bring us down with them. In the book **"Words of Spiritual Benefit"**, H. H. Pope Shenouda III states that "The one who does not lift you up cannot be your friend. Your friend is not the one who is courteous to you but the one who loves you. He is not the one who wins your content by agreeing with whatever you do, no matter how wrong it might be . . . But your friend is the one who truly loves you, wishes you good and saves you from yourself and, if necessary, saves you from your wrong thoughts." Therefore, the Holy Bible says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." (Proverbs 27:6). An enemy is one who will bring you down spiritually by discouraging you from going to church or praying. This person may lead you away by introducing you to more worldly



pleasures rather than encouraging you to go to church. Worldly pleasures such as hanging out with the wrong crowd at unjust places may lead you to drift off into a world of wrongdoing. In the Holy Book of St. James 4:4 it says "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Also in the Holy Book of I Corinthians 15:33 it says "Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits."



**St. James**

your attitude towards your family. This may bring bitterness to the household. A person who is bitter towards their loved ones will have the same attitude towards everybody around them. They most likely have a bad attitude towards life and a bad attitude towards God. So instead of following these people, we should lead them. But be careful not to get too close or involved in their lives, for they may overpower us and bring us down, spiritually, with them. In the Holy Book of Proverbs 27:17 it says, "As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance (appearance) of his friend."

Although we sometimes do not realize it, many of our negative influences in life come from our friends. For example, one may try to be a good friend by giving advice when a friend is in need of it. Even though they love you and want what is best for you, it's not always a good idea to take advice from our friends, especially if they are in our same age group. The reason for this is that they are still going through the same stage of life that you are going through, so they may not have enough experience to advise you to do what is right. They may unintentionally give you bad advice that may cause your situation to get even worse. So it is better to talk to your father of confession, a parent, Sunday school servant, or a trusted elder that you feel comfortable talking to about whatever the situation may be.

Another example of a negative influence is a friend with a bad attitude. A friend with a bad attitude towards their family may influence you to change



**St. John**

A very important factor of friendship is love. What is a friendship if it lacks love? H. H. Pope Shenouda III states that, "Your true friend should be one who is sincere in his love. The one whose love has no hypocrisy, dishonesty, feigning, or doubt, all his feelings are completely true and real." A friend should be kind, caring, and giving and should not expect to receive anything in return. One who cares for you should know to keep your secrets sealed, for H. H. Pope Shenouda states that "A true friend is one whom you can trust your secrets." Also, as St. John Chrysostom says, "Let your friends be a thousand, and he who keeps your secret, one of a thousand." So if a friendship lacks trust and honesty, it's not a healthy friendship.

A friendship that brings down your spirituality as well as your self-esteem is poor. A friend should be there to build you up and make you feel good about yourself. A good friend should not be there to criticize



you, but instead, one should be there to be supportive of you and help you do good things. Friends should not make you feel insecure in the good things you do, instead they should help you press on and continue to make the right decisions in life, achieve goals, go to church, pray, and serve the Lord in the church. In addition, a friend should be alongside you in doing these things. In Proverbs 12:26, it says, "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray." Also in the Holy Book of Job 16:20, it says, "My friends scorn me; My eyes pour out tears to God."

So when I feel like the world has warred against me and my friends have scorned me, I shall turn to the Lord and say a prayer from the Agpeya in the Third Watch of the Midnight Praises:



**King David the Psalmist.**

(Psalm 141)

"With my voice to the Lord I cried; with my voice to the Lord I made supplication. I will pour out before Him my supplication. My affliction I will pour out before Him, when my spirit was fainting within me, and You knew my paths. In the way in which I was walking, they hid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, for there was no one who noticed me. Refuge failed me and there was no one who cared for my soul. I cried unto You, O Lord, and said, "You are my hope, my

portion in the land of the living. Attend to my supplication, for I am brought very low; deliver me from those who persecute me, for they are stronger than me. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may confess Your name, O Lord. The righteous wait for me until Your reward me." ALLELUIA ✠