

## Thinking for ourselves

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Recently on television, a teenage boy told why he and his friends went "train surfing" – riding outside on the roof of a speeding train – and a girl told why she and her friends attended "rave" parties where they took a drug called ecstasy. When asked why they put their lives at risk by doing these things, both said they wanted to have fun, to have friends, and to be part of the crowd. It was exciting to do something dangerous, they said, and "everyone was doing it."

Listening to their comments, you could see that they were not thinking clearly for themselves. Every day we have to make choices. Some choices may seem small or unimportant – will we wear our hair a certain way because our friends are wearing theirs in a similar style? Other choices are serious – will we bully someone because our friends have bribed us to do it? Will we smoke or drink because it's the cool thing?

Every time we are asked to make a choice, we need to do one thing – to think for ourselves. Before we make a decision, we can stop for a moment and remember that we don't necessarily have to follow the crowd. We don't *have* to let our friends tell us what to do. We can stand up for what we know is right for us.

Sometimes deciding what is right can seem hard. When I've been faced with this problem, I have prayed to God. Sometimes I've asked God to help me make the right choice. At other times I have asked God to help me *do* what I know is right. Praying to God in this way makes me feel strong. It helps me remember that, as His child, I am good and important. I know that God is not asking me to do bad things in order to be liked by others, and this gives me courage to say "no" to stupid or wrong things my friends might want to do. God cares for me and my friends. He would never want us to do unkind things to one another.

God is a true friend to you, me, and everyone. He loves us all and keeps us safe. This is how we should act toward each other. The Bible says, "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly" (Prov. 18:24). True friends are loving and thoughtful. They don't ask us to do things that could get us into trouble. They make sure that we have fun together through useful, worthwhile activities.

Good friends let each other reflect God, divine Mind, freely. A true friend doesn't try to turn us into something *he or she* wants us to be; nor are we being true to ourselves if we let someone else do this to us. How can we keep this from happening? By living these words from Christ Jesus: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matt. 7:12). Friends appreciate each other's courage and honesty. They allow one another to express God in their own individual ways.

We're not all merged together in a single blob called *friends*. We express God in being clever, happy, gentle, and full of life. Knowing our friends as God knows them, we're able to appreciate them in the right way.

At school, there was a girl in my class who was older than me. I was attracted to her because she knew more about boys and other things than I did. One lunchtime she asked me if I would leave the school grounds and walk quite some distance with her to a public telephone so she could call her boyfriend. I was impressed that she would ask me to go with her and said "yes" without stopping to think what we were doing.

At first I thought it was fun and exciting, even a little dangerous. But as we got farther away from the school, I began to feel afraid. When she called her boyfriend and spoke to him for ages, I knew I had done the wrong thing. By the time we got back to the school, we were late. Instead of our facing up to the situation, she suggested that I pretend to be sick and say that we were returning from the sickroom. I agreed. The teacher wasn't fooled and I was sent to detention.

As I sat there, I was tempted to blame it all on my friend. Then I realized that I had acted on impulse. I decided to pray to God. I asked Him to forgive me. Then I prayed to get rid of the bad feelings I was having toward this girl. I knew that God loved both of us. This meant I had to love both her and myself as well.

As I prayed I felt peaceful and able to go to the teacher and apologize for telling lies and disobeying school rules. I was allowed back in the class. The girl and I remained friendly, but I never did such a thing again.

It's perfectly natural to want and to have friends, but having fun and being accepted don't have to mean doing things that are wrong for us. In *Science and Health*, Mary Baker Eddy says, "The time for thinkers has come" (p. vii). This short sentence reminds me that before I say "yes" to a dare or bribe or anything a friend wants me to do, I can stop and think about it. God has given us the ability as well as the moral courage to do what is right. He has given us strength. When we pray like this and listen for His loving guidance, we are able to make the right decision.