

Practically Popular

By MaryEllen Van Engelenhoven

(Based on a true story)

“A friend loveth at all times” (Proverbs 17:17).

“**S**ince you’re friends with us now, you can’t be friends with anyone else,” Jada told me.

“OK,” I said. I couldn’t believe I was friends with the popular girls! I was so lucky! This year was going to be so cool. I could hardly wait to see what popular kids did to be, well, popular.

I didn’t want to risk losing my new friends.



After school my old friend Aaliyah met me. “Hey, La-Neisha, are you ready?” she asked. We lived on the same street, and normally we walked home together.

I looked around me. I didn’t want Jada to see me talking to Aaliyah.

“No, I don’t want to walk home with you,” I said. Aaliyah looked confused and sad as I turned and walked home alone, but I didn’t care. I didn’t want to risk losing my new, popular friends.

That Sunday in Primary, I looked for a place to sit. Aaliyah waved at me. There was an empty seat by her, but I didn’t sit there. Even at church I couldn’t risk sitting by someone who wasn’t popular, I decided. Besides, who needed friends at church? Having the right friends at school was more important.

The next few days, Aaliyah kept asking me to walk home with her, and I kept saying no. *Why won’t she leave me alone?* I thought. *Can’t she see I’m not her friend anymore?* I was hanging out with my new friends a lot. Being popular was fun! I tried not to notice Aaliyah at school or church. I told myself she had other friends, so I didn’t have to talk to her.

One night the phone rang. Mom answered it and frowned as she listened.

“Don’t worry,” she said. “I’ll talk to her. Thanks for calling.” Mom hung up the phone.

“La-Neisha,” Mom said to me. “That was Aaliyah’s mom. She says you won’t walk home with Aaliyah or even talk to her. Aaliyah is really sad. She doesn’t understand why you keep ignoring her.”

My stomach got tight. I tried to come up with something to say, but I didn’t think Mom would understand how important my new friends were to me.

“I just don’t want to be friends with her anymore,” I said. But I felt guilty. I knew that wasn’t true. I thought of how mean I had been to Aaliyah lately. We used to be good friends. I knew in my heart that the way I was treating Aaliyah was wrong.

On Sunday, Sister Hong gave a lesson on repentance. She said, “If you do something wrong, you need to ask the person you have hurt for forgiveness.” I kept thinking about those words. I knew what I needed to do. I didn’t care what Jada, or any of my popular friends, thought. I was going to talk to Aaliyah and say sorry.

After church I saw Aaliyah. My stomach knotted, but I knew I should ask her for forgiveness. I needed to be kind at school *and* church—and everywhere in between. I swallowed hard and took a deep breath.

“Hi, Aaliyah,” I said. “Can I talk to you?”

Aaliyah’s face lit up. “Of course.”

The knot in my stomach came undone. Aaliyah didn’t have to forgive me, but I still wanted to ask. Maybe we could start walking home together again. And we could be new, old friends. ◆

The author lives in Utah, USA.



“All of us need true friends to love us, to listen to us, to show us the way.”

President Henry B. Eyring, Second Counselor in the First Presidency

True Friends, Ensign, May 2002, 29.