

When I was 17 years old, I faced heavy peer pressure at my high school. The friends that I did have didn't share my values. My friends and I participated in many appropriate activities together like playing basketball or football. But they also drank alcohol and smoked—two activities I didn't do with them.

One day a group of us was outside of our school studying for a test we would take later that day. With me were two of my closest friends, Juan and Francisco (names have been changed). At one point, someone got out lighters and cigarettes. I thought my friends had gotten bored with studying and had forgotten I was there. I learned I was wrong when they turned to me and said, "Now is the time for Hugo to learn how to smoke."

Before I even had the chance to react, Juan and Francisco leapt toward me and took me by the arms, one on



FROM BULLIES TO BAPTIZED



**By Elder
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each side. They held my arms down as someone pressed a cigarette between my lips. My body immediately rejected this, and I spit the cigarette on the ground, far from me. Soon after, I felt the blow of a clenched fist squarely connect with my cheekbone. They threatened me, saying, “We’re going to light the cigarette again, and you’re going to learn to take the smoke. Don’t throw it on the ground. If you do, it’s not going to go well.”

In that moment, I knew I was in trouble. I closed my eyes and said a quick prayer asking for some type of help. As soon as I finished my prayer, our teacher’s car pulled up and parked near us. Our teacher got out of the car and asked us what we were doing. My friends released me. “We’re getting ready for the test,” they assured the teacher. We went into the school and took the test, and the situation ended.

In spite of how hard that experience was, I forgave my friends for what they did. I knew they didn’t understand my standards and my decision to live the Word of Wisdom, so I forgave them and chose not to have any bad feelings toward them. When we finished school, I left on my mission but continued to communicate with Juan and Francisco. I wrote them frequent letters sharing with them the gospel and my testimony of Jesus Christ. I invited them to repent and to attend church. To my great surprise, one of them actually went.

I had frequently invited my friends to Sunday meetings before, but none had accepted until now. Although I couldn’t attend with Juan, my brothers and my father were there to help him and fellowship him. My family accepted him, and Juan felt very comfortable at church.

known, and now we’re working together to support the kingdom of God as members of the Church.

Always uphold the standards of the Church, even if you’re in a very difficult situation like I was. *For the Strength of Youth* instructs, “As you seek to be a

YOUR FRIENDSHIP AND RIGHTEOUS EXAMPLE WILL
BLESS YOUR FRIENDS AND GENERATIONS TO COME.

He started changing little by little until he made the decision to get baptized. I was thrilled for him and even more thrilled when he told me he had learned to love Jesus Christ because of my letters. When I came home from my mission, I also stayed close with Francisco, and after some time, he and his wife also got baptized. Today, Juan and Francisco are still two of my closest friends.

These events marked my life. I learned that the best way to influence lives is to live righteously, love others, and reach out. The *For the Strength of Youth* booklet says, “To have good friends, be a good friend. Show genuine interest in others; smile and let them know you care about them.”¹ This is what the Lord helped me do with Juan and Francisco. Because of it, I have the two greatest friends I’ve ever

friend to others, do not compromise your standards. If your friends urge you to do things that are wrong, be the one to stand for the right.”² Even if it seems like everyone else is doing what’s contrary to the commandments, stay strong, because your example is powerful. Be the type of example that your friends can think of during their times of need. In some cases like mine, your friendship might be the thing that helps them learn, repent, and be converted. **NE**

NOTES

1. *For the Strength of Youth* (2011), 16.
2. *For the Strength of Youth*, 16.