

APRIL 2011:

## HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy relationships bring happiness and health to our lives: studies show that people with healthy relationships have more satisfying lives, are realistic and flexible, and experience less stress. (That doesn't mean we get everything we want, but we make the most of what we face at any moment.)

As Christians, we understand that we are intended by our Creator to be part of a community. "Community" may be defined as a group of like-minded people (we share communion with other people of our faith) who have shared interests, shared values, shared problems, are mutually supportive and have face-to-face interaction. There's a sense of belonging... to our town, family, workplace, church, or softball team... a sense of unity.

### WHAT IF....

What if, once a year, each of us had to stand up before our family, friends, coworkers, or other peer group, and give a presentation on our relationship to that community? You know, just like the president gives his annual **State of the Union** address, reporting on the current condition of the nation and outlining his plans, prioritizing his goals for the future. Just the thought of preparing such a speech is probably making most of us nervous. Some of us may want to polish our relationships a bit (or a lot!) to improve the tone of our presentation.

Today, I challenge you to prepare a **State of Your Union** address – this may be both uncomfortable and uplifting! Begin with the relationship that would benefit most from change, whether that involves parent/child, siblings, boss/worker/coworker, professor/student, friends, or GOD!

- What are your most significant accomplishments together? (always start on a positive note!)
- What are your priorities and action plans for a better relationship in the future? (specific and realistic)
- Could your current relationships benefit from regular "check-ups" (like an annual job performance review, with a specific set of criteria, and goals for improvement)

### TEN TIPS FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- **Respect one another:** no one can be everything we might want him or her to be so keep your expectations realistic; sometimes people disappoint us (we disappoint them too!) Healthy relationships mean accepting people as they are, just as we want to be accepted without demands to change
- **Communicate:** it can't be said enough! Communication is essential in healthy relationships... it means **take the time** (really be there, paying full attention to what's being said and what it means); **genuinely listen** (don't begin to plan what to say next, and don't interrupt); **listen with your ears and your heart** (sometimes people weave strong emotional messages into their



"No man is an island, no man stands alone...  
each man's joy is joy to me, each man's grief is my own..."  
*(performed by Joan Baez and many other artists)*

words... listen/watch/feel those messages too); **ask questions** (clarify the other person's point; show your interest in truly understanding the message); **share information** (this is especially important as relationships begin; sharing information about yourself – without overwhelming others – demonstrates the "ties" – the shared interests or shared concerns – that form the foundation of community and unity)

- **Be flexible:** most of us are comfortable with familiar things and it's natural to feel apprehensive, even sad or angry when people or circumstances change, but healthy relationships mean change and growth are allowed!
- **Take care of you:** a strong desire to please others may cause an imbalance in your relationship; knowing yourself and your needs (realistic and flexible, remember?) is important in remaining a healthy partner of a healthy relationship
- **Be dependable:** if you make plans with someone, follow through! A deadline? Meet it! If you take on a responsibility, complete it... trust is earned!
- **Fight fairly:** most relationships have some conflict; stop blaming/shaming/criticizing, don't assume motives; deal with the topic; don't bear grudges, and say "I'm sorry" when you're wrong (healthy relationships are forgiving)
- **Show your warmth:** warmth and genuine caring are highly valued by most people in their relationships; we can overlook a lot of faults and failures if we know that interest and effort are sincere, so be warm, be human....
- **Keep your life balanced:** other people help make our lives satisfying but they can't create satisfaction for us; do not expect anyone to be responsible for your happiness – your life is solely under your control – life includes good and bad, give and take (the exception, of course, is domestic violence – no one is expected to take that! If you are confronted with violence, get OUT and get HELP!)
- **It's a process**..... sometimes it looks like everyone else is confident and connected; actually, most people experience insecurity at times, wondering how to fit in and how to establish relationships; it takes time to meet people and get to know them, so, make "small talk", respond to others, and SMILE! Healthy relationships can be learned and practiced, and keep getting better!
- **BE YOURSELF!** It's much easier and much more fun to be "you" than to pretend to be something or someone else... sooner or later, it catches up anyway... healthy relationships are made of real people, not images!

For more information about relationship building, speak with a certified Life Counselor, Marriage/Family Therapist or go to

[www.lifescrpt.com/.../the-state-of-your-union](http://www.lifescrpt.com/.../the-state-of-your-union)  
[www.k-state.edu/ciybsekubg/topics/relationships/relatn.html](http://www.k-state.edu/ciybsekubg/topics/relationships/relatn.html)  
Hybels/Mittelberg: (1994) *Becoming a Contagious Christian*

**PERMISSION GRANTED TO REPRINT!**