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- *Exercise spiritual presence in relationships*
- *Be a catalyst for beneficial change in relationships*
- *Concerns provide meaning and perspective to life*

The love and peace of God is with each of you, surrounding you with comfort and strength. Your sharing of concerns is precisely the purpose that really brings you together. You pray for insight, you pray for understanding, you pray for wisdom, strength, and that is all good. But the purpose to which everything you pray for is applied can be seen in your sharing honestly and compassionately during this gathering. It is important for all human beings to find some environment where sharing can be honest, offered in the faith that it will be received with love. If whatever you share is offered with such faith, the sharing is expanded, the love is expanded, and the spiritual benefits of such sharing become immediately recognizable.

Being there for one another, listening, not judging, is the real purpose for human life, for you learn what it means to be nonjudgmental, compassionate, sensitive, caring. This is the exercise of your own spiritual presence, and it is ultimately the goal of human life. Yes, certainly in life you try to learn good listening. You work to understand and love another. But being willing to allow true openness is both a gift and a blessing to each of you.

At the root of so many difficulties of life are the challenges facing you related to others—the impact of others on your lives, the impact of you upon the lives of others. You are not islands. You do not live alone. You cannot interact yet remain alone. The commitment to interaction includes within it the possibility for disillusionment as well as joy. Not all people handle crises in the same manner. Not all are ready to ask for help when needed. Regardless of the manifestation of a compassionate love and presence, there will always be individuals or events that threaten one's exercise of an intense spiritual presence.

Much of what you encounter in life is the result of a lack of communication. This lack may be personal, intellectual, material, professional, familial. There are countless arenas that can deny communication with others. It is not so important to identify a lack of communication but rather to reinforce the necessity of strengthening communication. If members of a family do not work well together, it is hardly newsworthy to the family to be told that there are personality differences within the unit. What is important is how those differences are addressed, what the implications are, what the future may hold. Such advice then becomes meaningful and relevant when you understand the dynamics that belong to a given relationship.

Much of what disturbs you is not a function of deed or misdeed. It is a function of inertia, of not doing things or not changing the way things are being done when such change is necessary. You cannot personally truly alter relationships between two people

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on anything other than a superficial level. But by recognizing the difficulties that are encountered, you are in a position to have some influence on the reactions of one individual toward another. This influence is exercised through prayer. It is also influenced directly through personal contact. Such prayer, such personal contact is best done with a positive presence. It does no good to make others feel they are failing in their interpersonal relationships. It is extremely beneficial to help others understand how their relationships can be enhanced and made yet more beautiful.

The difficulties that you experience can be addressed positively. You can place yourself into situations by imaging a positive outcome of difficulties. Seeing yourself as an agent for positive transformation affects not only the end result but you yourself. In other words, you as a catalyst for beneficial change can be aware of that presence, the importance of that presence, the value of being a catalyst. Your awareness of that has a strengthening effect upon your own lives as well as the situation in which you find you are a catalyst.

Relationships with others—indeed they are the center of your own universe. They color everything you see. They affect the mood that you enjoy which in turn provides meaning to your experience of life. When you are up, your perception of life is positive and you become a positive influence. When you are down, the opposite happens.

You should seek ways to bring positive energy to those aspects of your life awareness that represent something less than pure joy. You pray for another—you are praying for joy to be visited upon another. That joy may be offered through the regaining of health or through the achieving of perspectives. That joy may be the result of an intensified acceptance of the value of you yourself. There is much beauty to life. There is much reason to be joyful.

There is much reason to be aware of injustices and suffering. There is reason to be aware of differences within a family that create tension and suspicion and disenchantment. Being so aware, you are then empowered to grow through your own response. As we have said before, it is the search that is important. It is the effort to respond that is important. You do not receive more points by responding perfectly than by responding ill-advisedly. If your response is motivated through compassion and love, the benefit is immediately forthcoming.

Your lives have much to be joyful about. They are battered at times by concerns of family, concerns of the workplace, concerns of health, concerns for the well-being of others as well as yourselves. But those concerns give meaning to your lives. They give perspective. They provide the framework for a godly and appropriate response. How false your lives would be if you had no such concerns, for you would be as the ostrich with his head in the sand, unaware and unable to respond. Allow those concerns to motivate you to become a comforting representative example of God's peace in the world.

We bless you as you seek ways to respond meaningfully. We bless you in your efforts to rise above the turmoil. We bless you as you seek a view of God that provides

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perspective, leading to peace and wisdom. Rejoice with the insight that comes following the challenge, and you will be bathed in the light of God's compassionate presence.

Amen.