I can remember many years ago, as a young man, reading women's magazine trying to get insight on how women thought men should behave. I was pretty convinced that none of the writers were men, but despite this conviction over time I found myself modeling the image they projected.

If it was a "Cosmo man" they wanted, then it would be a "Cosmo man" they would get. I hid the real me, certain that the less others knew about how I thought, the better off I would be. I became a chameleon reflecting the expectations of my environment. To make matters worse, the game became more and more disparaging over time. This game of shadows was a negative approach to relationships, but as a young man, it was the only one I knew.

When you play games, you are not being true to yourself. My game of shadows was a cloak of deception that whether intentional or unintentional, was unfair to all and harmful to any healthy relationship. No one can be someone else without losing themselves in the process. Therefore, it is necessary for men and women to be themselves. For most, this will require a drastic change in behavior. Do not waste time trying to get others to change. Because change is personal, some will rebel against it. You will be better served working on yourself. Shakespeare wrote in Hamlet, "To thy own self be true." This is a profound statement that all should take to heart.

Being true to yourself improves your relationships. Over time, as I matured, I learned to be true to myself. By being true to myself, I was able to attract people to the real me. This was not easy, but the journey was well worth it. You will always be the constant in your relationship. You are numeral uno and the numerator in your relationship equations. When others bring spiritual, emotional, and financial value equal to yours, the relationship becomes one or whole. On the other hand, when their baggage is greater than your resources, the relationship becomes a fraction of what it should be. Before you can be true to others, you must first be true to yourself.

Being true to yourself is a life long process. Because life constantly adds and takes away, it is wise never to measure your life's total worth by any single period in it. William Ernest Henley wrote the poem "Invictus" from his hospital bed. Although he had survived tuberculosis at age twelve, in the process, he had one foot amputated. He subsequently resisted the doctor's assurance that the only way to save his life was to amputate the other. As a result, Henley was discharged from the hospital in 1835 with one foot intact, and he went on to live an active life for thirty years despite his disability. This sort of belief in self is where true victory begins. The things you think and say about yourself will always supersede the words spoken by others. You are truly the master of your fate and the captain of your soul.

Spend time with self so you can know yourself. You must learn to enjoy your own company before you can enjoy the company of others. And for that, you need time alone to evaluate your

behavior, develop, improve, and grow. We all live in a world in which other people make constant demands on us, and as a consequence, we need time alone to sort through and evaluate the complexities of these relationships, and help us to get along better with others. Self knowledge changes us. It is the vehicle that allows us to change our perspective. It gives us a new perspective thereby giving us a new point-of view. Being true to yourself brings forth the best you possible, and the world will benefit because of it.

Timothy Houston is an author, minister, and motivational speaker who is committed to guiding positive life changes in families and communities. For questions, comments or more information, go to www.tlhouston.com.