

*You must never think that their existence is a reflection of yours-Ayan Rand*

Why call it *Doing relationships*? It seems sexual. That's not my intent. Over and over I have rolled this title around in my head. People don't do relationships well. There is that word "do." What are we "doing" in a troubled marriage? Why did you "do" that to a relationship? I think relationships are all over the map. They are found in a home, work, and in private. We have relationships with a dog, hobbies, and a spouse. How are you "doing" in those situations?

Phycology today had an article online about relationships. I expected some far-off theory about how relationships work. Instead I got this.

*Failed relationships happen for many reasons, and the failure of a relationship is often a source of great psychological anguish. Most people have to work consciously to master the skills necessary to make relationships endure and flourish.*

Seems to me they found the same results. People suck at relationships. I can't understand why humans have such a hard time with the concept. Aren't we in relationships all the time? Since the beginning of time too? That article in Phycology Today also used an interesting word: *innate*. I thought the science community did not believe in design. I thought that they believed humans are a random act of nature. Instead I found this word *innate* that can mean *hard wired*. There is something in our DNA geared towards relationships? At-least this article believes we all have common traits as humans. One of those traits is not doing relationships well.

With that said, I want to help us do relationships better. Hence, this chapter is the beginning of the final part of this book. We need to be "doing" relationships well. In all our relationships, we should be doing better in marriage, work, and with friends. Somehow, even

though people appear to be hard wired for relationships, that is not happening well enough. I do agree with the psychology article as they broke relationships down to two problems: care and communication. Oh, I get it, were rolling our eyes with communication. Divorce lawyers love that word. The less communication, the more money for them. Then we have the care word.

Way back in the Bible is the story of Cain and Abel. God said to Cain that sin is crouching at his door. The next part is really interesting. God goes even further to say that he must master it. How do you master sin? Sin can be described as personal. I like to describe it as what we do to others for our own gain. Maybe, God's word is really referring to sin as relationships. Clearly Cain did not have a great relationship with anyone. He couldn't care less. Years later his descendants became the Canaanites. They were always fighting with everyone. I doubt he ever mastered relationships or sin. Maybe a little care would have helped?

What if all his relationships were crouching at his door. Maybe Cain was not doing relationships well. Was God asking him to master his communication skills? His own ability to master his desires and passions. Possibly, Cain should have mastered jealousy, anger, and insecurities. Instead he killed his brother and ruined his relationship with God. To make matters even worse he became a cast-off tribe of Adam and Eve. Shunned by his own family.

Since that time, most of the world has been doing relationships poorly. The dissention today towards everything is astounding. Tell me something you hate? Did you have to think long about it? I doubt it. The other day I went ice skating. Usually there are two arenas. One for the kids and another for the adults. This time they put everyone together. An ice swamp, great! As I stylishly floated around the ice, I noticed all kinds of people young and old. They noticed each other too.

One big happy family of human skaters, right? Oh, no, it was a swampy group of individuals vying for limited space. The kids went wherever they chose. The older guys had a routine of changing direction every 15 minutes. Not the kids. They changed direction every 15 seconds. Eventually, the elderly dudes were all lined up on the bench watching. They were not kid friendly. I just used the kids as moving pilons. It's a great way to skate better. I bet the old guys hated the young disrespectful kids. I assumed that the kids didn't give a rat's ass about the old farts on the bench. Hate is said to be a strong word. The scowls on the bench told me a lot about hate.

I think the ice rink is the perfect test. What a great way to do relationships better? Were all in it together. There is even a common cause. Why do relationships? Hopefully, it's because their fun. Kids love to skate for practice and because they can go anywhere, they please. Adults do it for enjoyment and exercise. Together the old could teach the young to skate better. The kids could teach the old to get a life. There is more.

Possibly we could share the ice. Maybe we could be positive, helpful, and talkative. Imagine people skating around talking. Possibly age would not matter. Instead, everyone had their own agenda. One kid is learning to skate. Another guy is trying to impress a girl. One girl was flying around there trying to twirl. In a crowd? Of course, the old are trying to get everyone to slow down and turn the right way. For the most part, everyone was skating by themselves. It was an amazing depiction of an ice swamp of relationships.

Over all, are humans getting better or worse at relationships? I have an idea, why not make it more complicated? Now were adding several different classifications of gender, sex and who knows what else to the mix. It's like the ice rink in overdrive. Ask everyone to turn the

other way and we might have a collision. Imagine sixteen genders telling the others they are going the wrong way. It most likely will end up like a smash-up on interstate 5. One of humanities biggest problems is *why are we here*. Clearly, many of us are skating in our own direction. We want to know why we're here. Yet, we refuse to look for answers together. That's bad news for relationships.

I have experienced divorce. So, I sympathetically mentioned a grieving person, who lost their spouse to death, that I understand. They freaked out saying "*how could I possibly know; your spouse is still alive.*" Trust me, when they leave, they might as well be dead. Yet, people are so uptight if their situation is not special. Imagine an alien abductee sitting in our conversation. Those aliens abducted their spouse. Who is in the most pain? What is the hardest tragedy? Imagine three grieving people being more upset that their tragedy is not greater than another person's personal loss? I think we are coming back to comedy and tragedy. Isn't another person's pain, painful? Who cares who has hurt more. But we do, don't we?

What is a relationship swamp? It's people trying to be relational, while not having a clue how to do that. My pain counts more. Your situation is not as harsh as mine. You're in my bubble. How about I'm smarter? Then throw in fear and loathing. Add masks and baggage. Mix in a little crud and you get a pretty good swamp.

It's like Dr. Seuss' *Yertle the Turtle*. One dude is trying to be king of the land on the backs of other turtles. It's a pretty tall tower of turtles. One turtle at the bottom decides to be an individual. He burps and the pile comes crashing down into the mud. All of a sudden everyone is the same. Why do we need to be on top? Nobody ever stays there for long. Recently there have

been a rash of Hollywood deaths. All 76 years old too. No matter how famous, rich, and talented you are, everyone is equal eventually. Death has a way of evening the playing field.

For thousands of years we have done relationships poorly, how can it possibly be fixed? I know that many books have offered good solutions. Smart people have broken down sex, gender, and commitment into the finer points of discussion. I think we're making relationships more complicated. If so, many human relationships are broken, then, I'm saying this line from the TV Show Seal "*How do you unbreak the broke?*" What nobody wants to hear is that the solution is simple: practice makes perfect. It's not rocket science.

Does it matter who wrote the best book on marriage, parenting, friendship, or sex? No, they all have good ideas? The Bible likes to use reversed psychology. It tells us what not to do. Haven't you ever wondered why the Bible tells the bad side of Biblical relationships. A ton of them too. God says focus and the people say no. Things go badly and God asks them to focus again. That's the Bible. People have written that we need positive reinforcement. The Bible says negatively, don't do it this way. Yet, it's the same message. Same crud but different turtle pile. Focus on your relationship rather than yourself.

Dr. John Gray wrote a famous book called *Men are from mars and Women are from Venus*. Duh! We know men and woman communicate from different worlds. Dr. Gray wanted us to focus on the words and not our understanding of them. Seems God-like. Slow down and focus. Clearly, opposite sexes will cause misunderstandings. We think differently. If we want to do relationships better, then we need to focus on understanding people just a little bit better. Draw different worlds together by slowing down to understand.

What's interesting is this whole gender, sexual orientation, and politically correct thing. Each group feels they have been hard done by. They also believe that their cause is the most important. Each are turtles trying to get to the top. At the bottom is most people. Imagine trying to have dysfunctional relationships while agenda vying turtles are pressing on you. Something will eventually have to give. A hick-up or burp? I have wondered if we're heading for a societal relationship disaster?

I bet, when it does go down, we will find everyone sitting in the mud. Muddy people look the same by the way. Who is who? Imagine that, back the basics again. Can we talk? Can we understand? Will we give our time for another's needs? Again, I ask you, what's really in the relationship swamp? It's people like you and me trying to be relational. The other stuff floating around in there is just life's crud that we all encounter. Why can't we encounter it together?

The thing is this. A widow has feelings about their situation. So, does a war veteran and divorcee. A person who lost their arm in a traffic accident is no less handicapped than a soldier who lost an arm in a battle. Yet, we treat them differently. Recently a bus of hockey players was obliterated on a rural road to a game. The whole world came together and gave money to help the survivors recover. One writer was indignant that the world was too eager to help white kids, but was ignoring black kids in another country. Oddly enough, she seemed to be blind to the whole world helping part. It was not just white people.

Yet, she is not far off. We tend to pick and choose who we help. We are attracted to this thing and repulsed by another. Why is that? We're people. God said he made us as individuals. Hard wired to feel, have an opinion, and seek personal desires. Even if you believed we came

from amoebas in a swamp. This human race is similar. We all do relationships poorly. There is a lot of “I” in the relationships we make.

Then we have relationships. It’s not something we can avoid that easily. Have you ever seen those pictures of dogs and their owners? Why do so many people look like their dogs? Many couples look the same too. I do believe we are mentally attracted to similar types. Even a pet seems to be like us. I’m a nut like my Russell is. I have attitude like my wives do. Yet, inside were polar opposites.

Imagine two people that look different. They like different things, have different dogs, and different jobs. Each one works in a different career and on different schedules. Yet, they marry. Are you kidding me? Let’s say they divorce. Each one says they were looking for something different in that marriage. They equally say that they had little in common. People are weird. I believe that they could have survived within that marriage. Yet, they feared the other persons life being better than theirs.

Franklin Roosevelt said “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” It’s iconic, but true. If that couple would have feared losing the other it might have worked. If they feared not learning from the other it might have worked. Congruently, if they picked a like minded spouse it might have worked too. Different people will understand differently. Why start out that way. It seems doomed to fail. Yet, in human relationships, that’s how we roll. We love the different for some reason.

Why have humans repeatedly done relationships poorly? It comes back to the quote from psychology today at the very beginning of this chapter. Every book written is trying to fix relationships. Every councilor has a good solution. People are people. We were hard wired to do

relationships. We were also hard wired to be our own God, number one, and on top of the turtle pile. God said he made us in his image or likeness. It's his universe. We think it's ours.

Relationally, we pretend to be little gods running around. It makes for a relationship swamp.

Basically, we think we own the market on relationships. Each one of us, deep inside, thinks we got it right. When things go wrong, we believe it's their fault. Most likely, it's "our" fault. How are we really "doing" in relationships? There are many types. We succeed and fail in marriages, friendships, and family relationships all the time. It's not all bad, yet, its not all good either. We could do relationships better.

Let's go through a few types of relationships. Everyone of them is a disaster in the making because people are people. For some reason God opened me up to meeting some of the most horrible people. People who believed they have cornered the market on relationships. Humans that believed they are greater than most. These people had no problem saying they know me better than I do. They equally said that they know the world better than I do too. The arrogance of humanity is sickening at times.

I have been dysfunctional in relationships. After 53 years, I still am dysfunctional at times. How can we do relationships better? I have no magical answer, but what I do have is a bag of practical answers like the Wizard of Oz. What can we add to our person that could help out relationships? To make marriages to friendships just a little better. If we talk about how they tick, maybe well see some good answers. Possibly, well make "doing relationships" look better than it has been. Let's go there now.