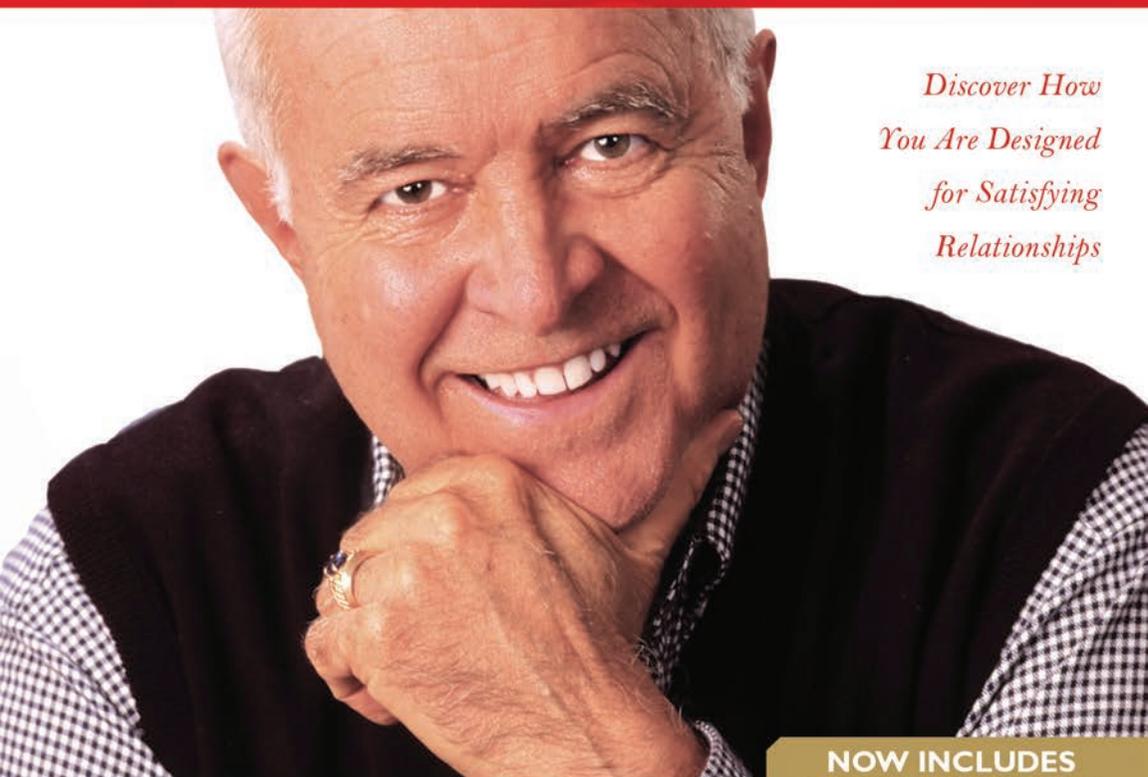


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“Gary Smalley continues to help all of us in our most important relationships. This new book will give you reinforcement to love God and others as you love yourself. We’re thrilled to know that thousands of people will be inspired and moved to take responsibility for their lives and stop blaming others for how they feel. We highly recommend this book to all ages for continual relationship repair.”

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“While leading biotechnologists have successfully cracked the DNA code, searching for hidden scientific mysteries in the human body, Dr. Gary Smalley and his team of experts reveal life-changing paradigms that will revolutionize relationships for decades to come. *The DNA of Relationships* magnifies the essence of all relationships—marital, family, and friend—for a well-rounded dynamic life.”

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“Once again Gary Smalley is on the cutting edge in helping us develop great relationships with those most dear to us. Gary’s earlier books have nourished our fifty years of marriage. We believe *The DNA of Relationships* is his best work to date.”

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“It’s both rare and refreshing to find a new approach to strengthening and enriching relationships. That’s just what Gary Smalley and the relationship team have done. After years of research and rigorous clinical development, this group of outstanding professionals has developed a unique approach that can heal broken relationships and strengthen healthy ones. This isn’t just another relationship book. It may be the most practical and helpful book you’ll ever read.”

**GARY J. OLIVER, TH.M., PH.D.**

executive director of *The Center for Marriage and Family Studies*, author of *Raising Sons and Loving it!*

“When people find out I’m a director in Hollywood, they inevitably ask who I’ve liked working with the most—Heston, Selleck, Landon, Cher, Jane Fonda, Kathie Lee, Chuck Norris? I always give the same answer. I’ve loved working with all of them, but the one person who has made the single greatest impact on my life is Gary Smalley. The communication and relationship skills that he taught me not only made my marriage the most fulfilling part of my life but also helped me achieve extraordinary success in my business as well. Gary’s communication techniques alone provided the critical foundation on which my partners and I have built businesses that have achieved billions of dollars in sales.”

**STEVE SCOTT**

cofounder of *American Telecast*

“How can a man’s passion grow stronger and stronger with each passing year? How can a man’s wisdom grow more effective with each book he writes? How can a man literally revolutionize millions of marriages around the world? It must be the hand of the Lord on that man’s life! My friend, encourager, and mentor Dr. Gary Smalley has done it again. Peer into Gary’s heart, and draw on his wisdom, which will set your life ablaze!”

**JOE WHITE**

**founder and president of Kanakuk Kamps**

“The DNA of relationships and the secrets of rebuilding relationships are revealed in this book. Gary Smalley shares the discoveries from marriage intensives created by Greg Smalley, Robert Paul, and colleagues. These secrets will enable people to learn to deal with their ‘hot buttons’ and be able to create a ‘safe zone’ for creating greater intimacy.”

**DAVID H. OLSON**

**Ph.D., author of *Empowering Couples*, president of Life Innovations**

“Gary Smalley’s teaching has had a lasting effect on the relationships in our family. Since I spend a majority of my time speaking to students, I’m aware of the desperate need this generation has for solid, healthy relationships. I look forward to the impact *The DNA of Relationships* will have on all generations!”

**MIKE MCCOY**

**vice president of Bill Glass Champions for Life and NFL defensive lineman for Packers, Raiders, and Giants**

“We have both benefited greatly from the message presented in the book you’re holding. Never before have we been so blessed and had our eyes opened to such new and powerful ways of living a more joyful life. I hope teenagers and other adults can each gain even half of what we have gleaned.”

**KATHY LENNON**

**(singer with the Lennon Sisters)**

**AND HUSBAND, JIM DARIS**

“You will love the unique approach Gary takes to explain how God designed us for relationships. Everyone who reads this new book and learns the new dance steps will improve every relationship.”

**DR. KEVIN LEMAN**

**author of *Sheet Music***

“I’ve known Gary Smalley for over thirty years, and I’ve watched him improve his insights for helping couples and families. But this new book, *The DNA of Relationships*, is by far his best work. Together with his highly trained research team, he has put together a book that can strengthen or repair any relationship. A must-read.”

**JIM SHAUGHNESSY**

**international relationships/manufacturing partner with BYL National Collection Agency and partner with AT Corporation**

“Not only has our marriage benefited from Gary’s teachings, but we also believe that the life-changing insights in this book will start a worldwide relationship revolution. Learn the dance steps in this book, and all of your relationships will be greatly enriched.”

**RICK AND CHERYL BARSNESS**

founders of the *Incredible Pizza Company*

“Bravo! Gary Smalley has given us an answer for the current relationship crisis facing this generation. Grasp what he is saying about relationship DNA, and you will have the key to make every relationship a loving, lasting one.”

**KAREN KINGSBURY**

coauthor of the best-selling *Redemption* series and author of *Let Me Hold You Longer*

“We all want our relationships with our spouses, family, and friends to be strong and healthy. But too often we experience pain and brokenness. We know the frustration of wanting to communicate our feelings without hurting others. Gary reveals the core problem of relationship struggles and provides solutions that work.”

**DENNIS RAINEY**

president of *FamilyLife*, author of *Rekindling the Romance*

“With the institution of marriage at great risk around the world, the Smalleys have come up with a plan to help at-risk couples find peace and renewed love in their relationship. At the top of every pastor’s list of challenges is the question: What can I do to strengthen and stabilize the marriages and other relationships in my congregation? Now they have it—*The DNA of Relationships!*”

**H. B. LONDON JR.**

vice president of church, clergy, and medical outreach with *Focus on the Family*,  
author of *For Kids’ Sake: Winning the Tug-of-War for Future Generations*

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## RELATIONSHIP REVOLUTION TEAM



PHOTOGRAPH BY SHANN SWIFT

*Left to right: Dr. Michael Smalley and Dr. Gary Smalley of Smalley Institute, Dr. Robert S. Paul of the Focus on the Family Marriage Institute, and Dr. Gregory Smalley of Focus on the Family.*

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# THE DNA OF RELATIONSHIPS

*Dr. Gary Smalley*

*Dr. Greg Smalley + Michael Smalley + Dr. Robert S. Paul*



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This book is dedicated  
to the three other men on the  
Relationship Revolution Team:

DR. GREG SMALLEY,

*who not only assembled the team of experts at Today's Family, the Smalley Relationship Center, and the National Institute of Marriage to help develop many of the ideas in this book but also put his fingerprints all over the final versions; without his mentoring me during the past two years in the concepts found in this book, you would not be holding the book in your hand;*

DR. BOB PAUL,

*who developed much of the original concepts contained in this book through his marriage intensives;*

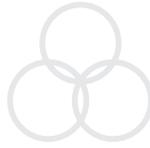
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MICHAEL SMALLEY,

*who has recently given me three very important things: help with this book; new life, literally, by donating one of his kidneys to me; and finally, the outstanding companies of Alive Communications, Tyndale House Publishers, and Allegiant to carry out my dreams for the next twenty years.*



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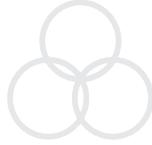
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And finally, thank you to my current small group—Dan and Shelly Bergland, Chris and Carole Essick, Mike and Becky McKnight, Mitch and Susie McVicker, and Elton and Carrie Youngblood—for your love for and commitment to each other and for your concern that America's relationships grow to what God intended them to be.

*Gary Smalley*



PART ONE  
THE  
FIRST  
STEP



# 1

## A RELATIONSHIP REVOLUTION



LIFE IS RELATIONSHIPS;  
THE REST IS JUST DETAILS.<sup>1</sup>

THIS IS THE GREATEST TRUTH.

EVERYTHING IN LIFE THAT  
TRULYMATTERS CAN BE BOILED DOWN  
TO RELATIONSHIPS.

Almost everything we do touches a relationship in some way. Just think about your day. Whether you're at home or at work, driving your car, playing, exercising, shopping, vacationing, worshipping at church, or doing any one of the many activities you and I do every day, we are constantly involved with people. We even interact with people in our sleep. There is no escaping relationships.

That is why for the past thirty-five years, I have felt passionate about helping couples, families, and individuals to strengthen, deepen, and enrich their most important relationships. That is what God has called me to do.

In this quest to improve relationships, I am always searching for what works and identifying what doesn't work. I love to take relationship theories, apply them to my own relationships, and see if they work for me personally. It makes no difference to me if I make the discovery on my own or if the new relationship idea comes from someone else. I'm always hunting.

So for three and a half decades I have traveled all over the world, delivering my message about how to improve relationships. Everywhere I go, I meet people who tell me that one of my conferences or one of my videos or books has helped save their marriage or improve their friendships or reconnect with family members. I feel deeply humbled and grateful for each of these encouraging reports.

Yet I also frequently hear something not quite so thrilling. Many people take me aside to say, "I watched your videos—but I lost my marriage." Or, "I read your book—but my wife still left me." Or, "I tried your material—but things just didn't work out." Whenever I hear stories like these, a deep sadness fills my heart. I know my message has helped a lot of people, but I also know it hasn't helped everyone. That's why I'm constantly on the lookout for anything that really *works* for the vast majority of people I meet.

## A Revolutionary Discovery

In 2002, while searching for information to improve relationships, I made what I now believe is the greatest discovery of my life. Interestingly, it happened right under my nose, in my own backyard. It came from my son Greg's marriage counseling and research center, now called the National Institute of Marriage.

Soon after Greg earned his doctorate in psychology, he began assembling a team of professional counselors, headed by Robert Paul. Almost immediately they started hearing reports, both encouraging and challenging, about my ministry. People told them that they loved the books and videos and conferences I had done—but many said they needed *more*. They needed someone to come alongside

them, to get “life-on-life” with them, and to help them put our material into practice.

Greg, Bob, and their team of highly trained relationship experts began doing what they call “marriage intensives,” where couples on the brink of divorce come for two or four days of intensive work on their relationships. Although I wholeheartedly endorsed Greg and Bob’s efforts, at that point I didn’t get deeply involved. I left them alone to do their good work.

But when their research team finished its first five-year study of the couples who came for the intensives, the results were staggering. The team found that 93 percent of the couples were still together—and thriving—in solid, healthy relationships! Take a moment to digest that amazing number: *That’s a success rate of better than nine in ten!* When highly distressed couples learned and applied the material you’re about to read, 93 percent not only managed to keep their marriages intact but also reported much higher satisfaction with their relationships!

After hearing such glowing accounts, I finally decided that I had to find out for myself what was going on. The team penciled me in to take part in both a four-day intensive and a two-day intensive. What I saw was amazing. I haven’t been the same since.

As the intensives began, I observed angry couples who couldn’t even stand to look at each other. They refused to hold hands. Many clearly didn’t even want to be there. Tears flowed freely from both the men and the women. I heard wrenching details of illicit affairs and habitual cheating, of serious financial problems, of fierce arguments and violent shouting matches.

Let me share the story of one couple to illustrate what I mean. Jim and Mary had already decided to give up on their marriage. After fifteen years together and three children, the couple came to the marriage intensive as a final attempt to salvage their marriage. I heard Jim say that if the marriage intensive didn’t change things, he was going to file for divorce the following week. He thought that the next four days would be a total waste of his time.

To me their situation seemed impossible. I wondered if they had any chance at all. They sat glaring at each other, hostility and tension written all over them.

The first years of their marriage had been reasonably good, but as Jim became increasingly involved in work and Mary became

focused on the kids, their relationship began to spiral into worsening emotional distance, combined with periodic angry outbursts toward one another. Mary felt that Jim abandoned her, and that she did everything she could to get him to talk about their problems and to work with her to make their marriage and family better. In response to Mary's pursuit, Jim grew cold, and at the time they entered the intensive, he admitted that he had lost all feelings of love toward Mary. He talked about being so tired of her trying to control his every movement and manipulate him to do the marriage her way. Over the years, they had sought help from several marriage counselors and a pastor, but nothing seemed to make any lasting difference.

The final straw was when Mary discovered that Jim was having an affair with a coworker. Mary felt completely devastated and deeply betrayed. The pain of losing her husband to another woman felt like the death of a loved one. She felt totally alone. But most of all, she felt helpless to keep Jim from this other woman. Mary had seriously considered ending the marriage, but her faith in God and her concern for her children caused her to look for an alternative. She was unsure if she could ever forgive Jim and wondered if she could ever trust him again.

Jim felt just as confused and distraught. His love for his wife was such a distant memory that he seriously doubted whether he could ever love her again. Worst of all, he questioned whether he even wanted to try. The only reason he came to the intensive was concern for his children and a desire to be able to say that he had tried "everything" to save the marriage. Neither Jim nor Mary was overly motivated to make things work.

Before they left for the intensive, their thirteen-year-old daughter, Sandra, had left a note for them:

*Dear Mom and Dad,  
I don't know how God will solve this, but I just can't imagine my parents divorcing and our family breaking apart. Thank you for trying. Yet, I feel like a young puppy left outside in the cold with no shelter. It feels like it's getting colder and colder each night, and winter will soon be here. The other dogs tell me that I won't believe how cold it will get. I know the snow is coming, and I feel so helpless to find a way to keep warm. I'm so scared*

*that I'll freeze to death before it's over. It's such a terrible feeling to be alone and to feel like no one understands what I'm going through. My friends have explained the pain I'll feel once you divorce, and it scares me. I feel so helpless, like I'm just sitting in my room waiting for the ice storm to hit. Each day is longer and longer, and it feels darker and darker. I'm sick inside all of the time. Please keep trying!*

*Sandra*

Before the intensive begins, the team asks each couple, “Do you believe that God could do a miracle in your marriage and provide a way for you not only to stay together but actually to fall back in love the way you once were?” During the four-day intensive, both Jim and Mary had a series of miraculous encounters that totally surprised them. They began to understand the powerful truths I will unpack for you throughout this book. As they worked through the various steps I’ll share with you, they each felt a deep sense of compassion and care for the other. They hadn’t felt this way toward one another for a long time. They also became aware of several significant beliefs that had led to frustration and failure. At one point Jim said, “No wonder our marriage has felt impossible for so long.” And Mary asked with exasperation, “Why hasn’t anyone ever told us about this before?”

By the end of the four days, they both recognized they had a challenging road ahead, but they each felt tremendous hope for the future of their marriage and their family. Jim’s heart began opening to his wife, and he was overwhelmed with gratitude toward God. Mary was thrilled with a new understanding of herself, and of Jim and their marriage. She felt the new knowledge and key skills were exactly what they needed to create a satisfying and safe marriage that both could be thrilled with. Like most couples who attend one of these intensives, after the third day, Jim and Mary were seen holding hands on the way to dinner.

When Jim and Mary arrived home, they sat down with their children. Jim began, “Kids, we have good news and some bad news. The bad news is that your mom and I will need more prayer and help with our relationship. The good news is that we are staying together. We believe with God’s help and the things we learned in the intensive that

we can make it. We want this for us and for you. We love you and want to stay together as a family.”

Instantly, Sandra jumped into their arms. With tears running down her cheeks, her words were powerful, “Thanks for getting me out of the cold and letting me back into the warm house. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!”

The astounding turnaround just floored me. I’m in my early sixties, and this new discovery not only has changed me but also has taken me to a whole new level of understanding how to enjoy and improve my important relationships. What Greg’s team has taught me these past few years has empowered me to determine how happy I am with each relationship, no matter what others are doing. I get to choose how fulfilled I am and that other people can’t rob me of my being full. When you finish this book, you’ll understand why I’m so excited about this new way of living.

Can you imagine my joy as I saw dozens of couples stabilize their relationships? And it made me wonder, *What is the secret to these miraculous turnarounds?*

## Discovering the Destructive Dance

As Greg, Bob, and the team began to chronicle and analyze their experience with the marriage intensives, they discovered a recurring pattern that was remarkably easy to identify. In the relationships of *every* couple that came to an intensive, they found consistent, predictable negative behavior that harmed the marriage. None of these men and women realized that they and their spouse had been doing and saying things that ignited this vicious cycle, but whenever it happened, they immediately fell into the well-worn ruts of their own hurtful responses, triggering round after round of the same sad cycle of escalated arguments. Without even realizing what was happening, these couples would begin a destructive dance.

After the team helped these distressed couples understand how their destructive dance was destroying their marriage, they helped them to break the rhythm of that dance and learn new dance steps that would restore their relationship and renew their love for one another. Sounds like a tall order, doesn’t it? Yet in better than nine out of ten cases, it worked.

Now, let’s get real honest. Does it sound doubtful to you that

couples *even on the brink of divorce* could, in a matter of days, do a 180-degree turnaround and start enjoying the marriage they always wanted? Does it seem far-fetched that by understanding and applying a few key concepts, sour relationships can turn sweet and anger can give way to joy? I used to think so. But then I saw with my own eyes what can happen when God steps in and lends his infinite power to the remarkable plan for relationship success that we want to share with you.

In this book, we're going to show you how to revolutionize your relationships and turn them into something deeply satisfying and even thrilling.

And you know what? It's easier than you think.

## Understanding the DNA of Relationships

When you and I look around, we see countless relationships that need a miracle. Every day we see shattered relationships—husbands and wives, parents and children, sisters and brothers, neighbors and coworkers who aren't talking to each other, who intentionally or unintentionally hurt each other. You know what I'm talking about.

Relationship pain keeps growing in our country, but it doesn't have to. I believe the best way to address this crisis is to understand how God designed us to live, to understand our relational DNA. Just as understanding our physical DNA reveals the mysteries of how our bodies work, understanding our relational DNA unlocks the miracles and mysteries of how our relationships work. After five years of watching the amazing miracles happen in our marriage intensives, we have concluded that people change as soon as they understand and apply themselves to what we are calling the basic DNA of all relationships.

What is the DNA of relationships? It is simply the genetic relationship code with which we were created. It's our relational hardwiring. It's the unalterable, immutable relationship truth that is true for all people, for all times. We've never seen the exception.

To help you understand how we discovered the DNA of relationships, we want to take you back to the beginning, to the oldest story of mankind, Adam and Eve, which is really the story of us all.

THE DNA OF RELATIONSHIPS IS  
OUR RELATIONAL HARDWIRING.

Adam was the first person created. He must have felt a harmonious connectedness to his environment and an intimate connectedness to God. The Garden of Eden was a true paradise, a safe place to exist. There was no war, famine, natural catastrophes, or sin. But Adam felt not only safe and at peace with God but also at peace with himself. Adam was confident of his place in the universe. God gave Adam everything he needed: work to do, a close relationship with his Creator, everything he needed to take care of himself.

Though we have no record that Adam complained about his condition in the pristine Garden, something was, in fact, missing. Even though Adam's relationship to God was very fulfilling, God wanted to give Adam something even more—a human companion, a human connectedness. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone."<sup>2</sup>

We can only imagine how Adam might have responded when he first saw Eve. I suspect he felt an irresistible longing for her, for a deeper intimacy than their physical senses could experience. For God had planted deep within both Adam and Eve a desire for an emotional and physical connection, a bonding of the inner spirit, an intimate attachment of the soul called *human relationship*.

The rest of the story is familiar to everyone. God gave Adam and Eve responsibility over everything else he had made and allowed them unlimited access to the fruit of the tree of life in the center of the Garden. Life was very good for Adam and Eve. They were safe and deeply satisfied in their relationships with God and each other.

There was only one catch. God told them not to eat any fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But along came Satan, the deceiver, who convinced them otherwise. He told them that if they ate the fruit from the tree, they would be like God. Wanting the same wisdom and power as God, Adam and Eve chose to disregard God's instructions, and they chose what they thought was the better deal.

The next time God came walking in the garden to spend time with them, Adam and Eve hid from him because they were ashamed and afraid of the consequences of their actions.<sup>3</sup> When God questioned them, Adam pointed the finger at Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Neither was willing to take responsibility.

Adam and Eve's choice changed everything. Gone was the harmonious relationship they had enjoyed with God. Gone was the satis-



rying relationship with each other. Their relationships were shattered. And as a result we have been struggling with shattered relationships ever since.

## The DNA Code

Everything we need to know about the DNA of relationships is encoded in the story of Adam and Eve. This DNA code is made up of three simple yet profound strands:

1. *You are made for relationships.*
2. *You are made with the capacity to choose.*
3. *You are made to take responsibility for yourself.*

Though these principles sound simple—and they are—understanding them could revolutionize your life and your relationships. That’s what this book is about—applying these three profound concepts to the relationship problems you’re facing right now.

We still see people who show up at our marriage intensives with the attitudes Adam and Eve had. When people exclude God and try to navigate their own way through the relationship maze, we see much more fear prevalent in their lives. But we have also found that relationships change the fastest and easiest when people understand the relational DNA and apply the principles to their relationships.

### DNA OF RELATIONSHIPS

1. *You are made for relationships.*
2. *You are made with the capacity to choose.*
3. *You are made to take responsibility for yourself.*

#### 1. YOU ARE MADE FOR RELATIONSHIPS

The other day, I received a letter from a young man who had gotten back together with his girlfriend after a difficult conflict and a terrible fight. Eric had been working through some things at our counseling center, and it apparently had helped him and his girlfriend, and they

got back together. Eric's closing sentence was, "Sometimes I feel that I can't live with her, and yet I know I can't live without her."

How often do we hear that said? Well, there's a reason for that. It's in our DNA: We are made to need relationships. Even when they are hard, difficult, or just plain frustrating, we need relationships. It's the way we are wired. We have a longing to belong to someone, to be wanted and cherished for the valued people we are. Dr. Allan Schore of the UCLA Medical School has found that our basic genetic structure within the brain is hardwired to form emotionally based connected relationships right from birth.<sup>4</sup>

Relationships are not optional. From the moment we're born, we're in relationship with parents, siblings, and other relatives. Soon we're in relationship with other children. Later we have relationships at school and in the workplace, and we develop relationships with close friends. Eventually, most people develop a relationship with someone they deeply love.

When a relationship becomes difficult or painful, we tend to dismiss the relationship and may for a while try to abandon all relationships. But inevitably we come back and seek connection again.

Though we can choose *how* we will participate in relationships, we have no choice about *whether* we will participate in them. This is a critical point. Our only real choice is whether we will work to make our relationships healthy; whether we will do things that hinder or enhance them.

Dr. Dean Ornish has found in his research that "loneliness and isolation . . . increase the likelihood of disease and premature death *from all causes* by 200 to 500 percent or more. . . . In short, *anything that promotes a sense of isolation often leads to illness and suffering. Anything that promotes a sense of love and intimacy, connection and community, is healing.*"<sup>5</sup>

## 2. YOU ARE MADE WITH THE CAPACITY TO CHOOSE

Not only are we hardwired for relationships, but we're also created by God with the capacity to choose. We can't always choose our relationships, of course—we didn't choose our parents or our siblings or our children—but we *can* choose how we will act in those relationships. So when it comes to how we will respond in a relationship that has hit some rough water, we must never tell ourselves, "I have no choice!" That's a lie. The truth is, we *do* have a choice. Lots of choices.



- Will you choose to stay stuck in a relationship—or will you determine to work through the problem areas?
- Will you choose to hold on to your resentment—or will you choose to face that resentment and find freedom from it?
- Will you choose to hurt the other person when he or she hurts you—or will you choose to look beyond the hurt to the deeper problem—possibly one in yourself?
- Will you choose to run when a relationship gets sticky—or will you choose to honor the relationship by facing the problem?
- Will you choose to look at yourself through a distorted lens—or will you choose to see yourself as God sees you?

In counseling people from across the country, I am constantly amazed at how powerful it is when a person makes a choice. I guess I am amazed because I am aware of how hard it is for people to change.

This is another profound truth: *Choice equals change*. Making a choice is often difficult because it requires change. And that change can be threatening. But sometimes it just comes down to making a decision. You have to take control of your life, stop being a victim of your past, and start moving on to something new. You have to make a choice. You have to change. Even when the change is scary.

## CHOICE EQUALS CHANGE. ←

The mistake so many of us make in our relationships is to think that if we just let things stay as they are, if we can postpone making a choice, making a change, then we can get through a difficult experience. We fail to understand that by not making critical choices we *are* choosing. By not doing anything, we force change to be done to us.

*What will you choose?* You will hear that question throughout this book as a reminder of the second strand in the DNA of relationships. The big question remains in the spotlight: Will you choose to act in ways that hinder or enhance your relationships? The choice you make will affect everything about your life.

I think that the most exciting part of knowing I am made with the capacity to choose is that all of my *thoughts* determine all of my *actions* and *emotions*. It doesn't matter what others do to me or what cir-

cumstances I face every day, I determine all of my feelings, sad or happy, by what I *choose* to think and how I *choose* to react to what happens to me. I love that freedom. When you get to chapter 3, you'll see that your daily thoughts determine everything about you.

### 3. YOU ARE MADE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOURSELF

As we said before, the story of Adam and Eve is the story of us all. They were created to take responsibility for themselves. But when they chose to disregard God's instructions, they also violated their relational DNA. When faced with the consequences of their choices, neither Adam nor Eve was willing to take responsibility. Each pointed the finger and blamed someone else. We're like that, too. When we find ourselves in a relational difficulty, we point the finger at the other person. It's *him*. It's *her*. *If he or she would just change, I could finally be happy.*

One of the key messages throughout this book is our need to take personal responsibility for our actions and choices. Unfortunately, it's a message that is new for many people. It's far too easy for us to slip into the pattern set way back in the Garden of Eden: blame the other person.

When couples visit our Marriage Institute, it usually doesn't take long before they both realize that they are blaming each other instead of looking at their own actions and words. During the marriage intensives, we stop couples from even thinking about focusing on the other person. When we challenge people to see themselves as part of the problem and concentrate only on their own part, they begin to take responsibility for their actions and attitudes, and for their words.

People who have a healthy relationship with themselves—who take responsibility and take care of themselves—are better positioned to deal with relationship problems because they can see themselves objectively. When you learn and master the skill of “putting yourself in the picture,” you will have a fresh perspective on yourself with others. You can see the consequence of your own actions and the effect they have on the feelings of your friends and family. And you can adjust your thoughts, words, and behaviors accordingly.

Later in this book we will talk more about personal responsibility, about communication in relationships, and about creating win-



win situations. But it all starts with understanding the DNA of relationships.

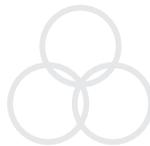
### **LIFE IS RELATIONSHIPS; THE REST IS JUST DETAILS.**

God made you for relationships. You can't change that. You can work either with or against this DNA, but you can't choose whether it exists. The only choice you have is whether you will work to make those relationships great or allow them to cause you—and others—great pain.

So choose wisely. Choose life. And be prepared to take personal responsibility to make the decisions—even the hard ones—that can keep joy, peace, and satisfaction flowing into your relationships.

In the next chapter we'll show you the definable pattern that appears almost every time you have a conflict with others. It's a unique relationship dance we all do, and when you recognize it and avoid it, you'll see less and less conflict in all of your relationships. I guarantee that understanding your relationship dance will change your life.

When you understand the DNA of relationships, identify the pattern of your own unique relationship dance, and learn five effective “dance steps” for building healthy relationships, you will find that all your relationships can be transformed. Not only that, but as you join me in this delightful adventure of discovery, you'll experience God's love and power in fresh and exciting ways.



LIFE IS RELATIONSHIPS;  
THE REST IS JUST DETAILS.

# ONE-MINUTE REVIEW

## A RELATIONSHIP REVOLUTION

### I. The DNA of Relationships:

- ***You are made for relationships.*** Relationships are part of the creation design. You are created to need relationships.
  - ***You are made with the capacity to choose.*** You can't always choose your relationships, but you can choose how you will act in those relationships.
  - ***You are made to take responsibility for yourself.*** You are responsible for your choices and actions. You cannot change the other person, but you can take responsibility for your own behavior.
2. **Conflict is never just about the other person.** The problem you have with another person is often a problem you have with yourself.
  3. **Put yourself in the picture.** When you see yourself in the same “frame” as the other person, you begin to see yourself as part of the problem as well as part of the solution.
  4. **Get God’s lens for a healthy view of your relationships.** Only when you see your relationships through an accurate lens—God’s lens—can you see others as he sees them and see yourself as he sees you. That lens is the basis for healthy relationships.
  5. **Choice equals change.** All relationships involve choice. When you choose to work toward healthy relationships, you often find things need to change. You must choose to change, even when the change is scary.
  6. **Not choosing is itself a choice.** If you postpone making a choice, making a change, then you are choosing. By not doing anything, you force change to be done to you.