Why Can’t We Just Get Along?

SHELLEY HENDRIX
To the woman who has helped to shape me most

Beth Turner

You are my mom and a safe confidante in a world where trusting others can be a challenge. Thank you for cheering me on these past few years and for believing in me and the call of God on my life. I will always be in your corner. And I will always make sure to bring chocolate.

xoxo
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Foreword

By Babbie Mason

It deeply blesses and greatly impresses me when I meet young Christian women who have a passion for God’s Word and the ability to articulate that passion to communicate His message to the lost, the hurting, and the next generation. Shelley Hendrix is one of those young, passionate, articulate women who, out of the overflow of her relationship with the Lord Jesus, is pursuing God’s call on her life to teach, lead, and encourage other women. *Why Can’t We Just Get Along?* contains a powerful, insightful, and relevant message for the age in which we now live. As we navigate home life, work, play, and worship, the opportunity is great that we will encounter difficult people, even people we know, are related to, and claim to love; even people who profess to know Christ. Out of her own experience, even her own pain, Shelley Hendrix digs deep to remind us that often the roadblocks to relationships begin and end not with the other person, but with us. Shelley reminds us that God’s Word is the quintessential relationship manual. And whenever and wherever people encounter one another, there is that great possibility that disagreements will arise. In her powerful and poignant manner, Shelley helps us discover that the most powerful ingredient to any and every relationship is the power of God’s love. And through that love—the
deep, sweet, love of Christ, we can get past tolerating each other to bask in the joy of celebrating each other.

Shelley’s masterful teaching helps us to examine our own hearts and lives to begin enjoying the rich and satisfying life Jesus intended for us to live—together. Whether reading Shelley’s books or hearing her as she teaches and mentors women across the street or across the country, she is on a mission, fulfilling the Great Commission and making a difference. God is using Shelley Hendrix, and He will use this message to change your heart and life. I know—because it’s changed mine.

Babbie Mason
Award-winning singer, songwriter, and author
Introduction

“Why can’t we all just get along?!”

We’ve all asked this question and most of us have asked it more often than we can even remember. It is frustrating enough to be disrespected by some random stranger in traffic, and something completely different to be shown disrespect by a person who is a part of our everyday lives—one who should know better, someone who should be too mature to treat others the way they do.

The book you hold in your hands speaks to the topic of relationships—those we hold near and dear as well as those we would like to see disappear. It’s so important to get this right. If we can be successful in our relationships, we can be successful in life. The reverse also holds true. If we don’t learn how to be successful in relationships, we will not be successful in the other areas of our lives. Our relationships carry extreme significance!

How to use this book

Because we retain what we participate in far more than we retain what we only hear or read or see, the book you hold in your hands has been designed so that you (and hopefully a few others along with you) can take part in a journey as you reflect upon what you’ve read,
respond to the questions posed, and act upon the practical principles shared throughout the pages ahead. The questions are, for the most part, open-ended, encouraging you to spend more time in honest communication with yourself, your heavenly Father, and perhaps with a trusted friend or group of friends. Don’t worry too much over whether or not you answered the questions correctly. If you are answering honestly, then you are answering correctly.

Additionally, you will find a guide in the back of the book which is there to help you with some conversation starters as you take your journey one step further (again, hopefully with others). If you happen to read this book solo, please consider going through and completing the questions in this section of the book as well for your own added benefit. (But do consider asking someone to join you in this journey—the extras you get as a result are totally worth the effort!)

In the following pages, we will take steps together on the path to finding peace. I’ve included true stories—including several of my own—that help to illustrate the very real-life stuff we’ll talk about and face together. Other stories come from the lives of women from all over the world and from the pages of Scripture as well. Additionally, we’ll take pause from time to time to give ourselves some encouragement from the Word of God, others’ lives, and how God works in and through our everyday stuff as we learn to trust Him more and more.

Like the sign that hangs on the front door of my gym says, “The first step is showing up.” Let’s get started, shall we?
Relationship Quiz

Check all that apply to determine if you are in a *Why Can’t We All Just Get Along?* relationship:

- I face family functions with trepidation based on who I’ll have to spend time with while there.
- I have a love/hate relationship with women at church. I love to go to church, but I hate the pressure I feel to measure up to certain women.
- I no longer attend church because of the experiences I had with women there.
- I love Jesus. It’s His children I’m not too fond of.
- I tend to keep most women at arm’s length because I’ve seen that women can be untrustworthy.
- I share little of my life, emotions, and opinions with most women because it just isn’t worth it.
- I have a lot of acquaintances but almost no real friends.
- It is difficult for me to be around people who are not like me.
- It is challenging for me to be around people who have opposing beliefs.
- I am so tired of feeling pressure when I’m around other women.
- I feel judged and criticized by other women.
I feel pressured to be someone I’m not with certain people.

I often “get back” at other women in my mind rather than confronting them in person.

If I had known that my marriage would include his family, I might have run the other way.

I think my children/parents/in-laws/step-family plot against me when I’m not around.

It is very difficult for me to trust other women.

I would like to have closer relationships with women, but I honestly don’t think it’s possible.

Can’t we just keep pretending everything is okay?

I have good news. If you checked any or even all of the above, you are going to get a lot out of the pages to follow!
Part One

Let’s Be Honest: Relationships Are Tough!

Here we are: at the starting line. But this isn’t a race to see which one of us is a faster runner and this isn’t about getting ahead of one another. This is more like a journey that must be taken together—step by step. If at any point you get stuck, discouraged, or afraid, I want to encourage you to invite someone into your struggle. Let someone know what is going on with you (preferably someone who is taking this same journey with you), and let that person’s strength and courage carry you for a little while. You never know, she just might need you around the next bend.
It’s Not You. It’s Me.

The two women exchanged the kind of glance women use when no knife is handy.
Ellery Queen

I could not believe it!
I could not even believe she did what she did. It didn’t seem to matter what I did or how hard I tried to be friendly and supportive, she insisted on insulting me every chance she got. And it wasn’t like we were kids or even teenagers—we were both grown women! It seemed that every time we were in the same place at the same time she found ways to insult and injure me. I tried to give her the benefit of the doubt each time: *Maybe she doesn’t mean anything by this. Maybe I’m just being too sensitive. Maybe it’s that time of the month…*

But this…This took the cake! We had already known each other in our tight girlfriend group for years. And because we have mutual relationships with others, we all happened to be at the same place at the same time for a dinner together. Again. I could tell when I was also invited to this meal that it made her uncomfortable—even unhappy.

As we all sat together sharing conversation, I thought I tasted something in the main dish she had brought. Something serious. Something
I cannot eat. Something that everyone knew from a previous episode that I absolutely could not eat!

I decided that as much as she might not like me, she would not go so far as to put something in the food that she knew would make me sick. Would she? I convinced myself that I was mistaken and that no adult would do something like that to another adult. And certainly not a Christian adult. Right? While I was mulling those thoughts over in my mind, one of the other ladies who was sitting with us looked at her and said, “This isn’t a secret ingredient. It’s…”

I realized suddenly that she had purposely added the unnecessary ingredient. The one she knew I couldn’t eat. She hadn’t warned me about it. But apparently she had told at least one other person at the dinner that she had added a “secret ingredient” and decided it was information not worth passing along to Yours Truly. To top it off, it seemed that she even thought this was funny! I’ve never asked people to make special concessions for me based on what I’m able to eat and not eat, and had she mentioned it I would have gladly chosen to enjoy the other side dishes. I was caught completely off guard. I didn’t know what to do or how to respond. Stunned, I thought to myself, Is this really happening?

It seemed like a weird alternate reality had taken over. The clock stood still as I tried to make sense of a senseless situation. It felt like everyone was watching me, waiting to see how I would react.

In my passive insecurity, wanting everyone to like me and not wanting to rock the boat, I said nothing. Nothing! But on the inside, I was about to explode. I stopped eating the dish she’d prepared and discreetly covered what was left with my napkin. I excused myself to go to the restroom so that I could have a few minutes alone to deal with what I knew was a really unpleasant expression. I prayed. Hard. And then I returned to the table. Again, I said nothing. Later that night, I was sick and miserable. But more than that, I was so hurt and confused…and yes, very angry!

For me, this was the final confirmation that for whatever reason this woman just did not like me. But it was worse than that. It was more like she wanted to make sure I knew she didn’t like me and that I was
not welcome in her life. She was always competing, always putting me in my place. Not liking me I could deal with. It was her unrelenting antagonism that was getting to me, especially since we were around each other so much.

I stayed up through the night dealing with very uncomfortable physical symptoms (I'll spare you the details) and crying out to God. As my mind played the same mental motion picture over and over again, rehashing all the times she had insulted me, my children, my opinions, and my choices, I didn't know who to turn to. No one could handle my anger and confusion—no one except my heavenly Father. I was at a loss. This relationship had gone from cool, to cold, to downright ugly. And I had no idea why. A hundred thoughts ran through my mind:

We don't have to be best friends outside of this group, but why can't she just be nicer at these gatherings? Why does she have to even be here? Should I just have it out with her in a knock-down-drag-out right here and now? Or is there a better way to handle this than wishful thinking or complete avoidance? What should I do about this? What awful thing have I done to deserve this kind of mistreatment? Why does she insist on hurting me so intentionally and at every opportunity? Am I so unlikeable that someone would be so antagonistic so often? Maybe it's me? Is there something wrong with me?

Why?

It has been said that our greatest wounds come through our relationships. I don't know about you, but in my experience the biggest challenges I have faced haven't been financial, physical, or circumstantial—although I've experienced all of these. What has kept me awake at night and has most occupied my thoughts during the day are messy relationships. More than any other challenges, broken relationships and dealing with difficult people (or even dealing with great people in difficult circumstances) have the power to throw my world out of whack.

Some of these people have been authority figures, some coworkers, some relatives. Some have been people I could avoid for the most part, and others were those I couldn't avoid at all. Some of these wounds
came through words said; some came through words left unspoken that I longed to hear. Some wounds came through physical acts against me and some were the result of nothing more than a simple misunderstanding.

It was one thing to deal with this issue in childhood. Kids are still figuring out how to work and play with each other, and we expect a certain amount of immaturity in their relationships. I was one of those girls who always got along better with boys…and I knew why. Girls were mean. But aren’t adults supposed to know better? Weren’t we supposed to figure out how to play nice back in preschool?

And here’s the real kicker: The majority of my most challenging relationships were with those inside the church. I wish it weren’t true, but my most pain-inducing, heartbreaking, gut-wrenching relationship struggles have been with others who claim the Name of Christ just as I do. After a while it just got to be too much for me to be around those individuals or groups when weighed down by the pressure I felt in their presence. Pressure to measure up, pressure to walk on eggshells because I didn’t know how they’d react to what I might say, pressure to please so that I could avoid their criticism or condescending remarks. As a grown woman and, more importantly, as a child of God, I knew He wanted something better for His girls.

Through these experiences, I got to a point where, in my exasperation, I finally threw my hands in the air and cried, “Why can’t we all just get along?” I was tired of trying so hard to make peace with others who seemed to have zero interest in pursuing peace with me, and I was sick of the pressure I felt around my sisters in Christ. I tried a lot of different tactics to make peace. For a while, I even tried to pretend I didn’t care.

It didn’t work.

Eventually, in my desperation, and as I cried out for the umpteenth time to my heavenly Father, I began to hear His voice leading me and guiding me to His path of peace—peace that is not on offer in the magazines at the grocery store checkout line or on any of the social network sites. I was desperate for help and my heavenly Father was gracious to
offer it. As I asked the Lord over and over what I should do about all the broken relationships I was seeing, God used the words of the apostle Paul found in Romans 12 to radically and forever change my approach to handling difficult relationships—and the people who don't seem to care whether or not we get along with one another. I was desperate for help, desperate for answers, and you know what? I found what I was looking for!

As I bawled my eyes out to God, Romans 12:18 came to mind: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” This verse of Scripture played over and over in my mind like a song on repeat, and it sounded good. It sounded really good. And for about five minutes, I felt the weight on my shoulders lift a bit. I took in a deep, calming breath. *If it is possible…as far as it depends on me…* But then, as I played those words over in my mind once more, I began to wonder, *Lord, just what is up to me? What am I supposed to be doing? What haven’t I tried? Isn’t this supposed to be about the other person changing her ways?* As I opened God’s Word to the surrounding portions of that same verse in Romans, I knew I was on to something that would change everything. Romans 12:18 reminded me that God’s Word really does speak to every situation we face and that we can get the best strategy for successful living if we’ll allow His Word to do its job in our lives.

In my dealings with the woman at the beginning of this chapter, I had been trying for years to either get her to like me—or, failing that, to put her in her place so she’d stop putting me down. I just wanted to end the drama between us and I wanted to know how to do it. As I began to apply to my own life what I learned in God’s Word over those next few weeks and months, I was actually surprised to find that these principles were working. I was feeling greater peace and less pressure even though nothing in the relationship had changed…at least as far as the other woman was concerned. I then took what I was learning and tried it out on the women who attend Church 4 Chicks. I knew this stuff was good—even life-changing—but I had no idea how much it would impact women as they heard and then applied these principles.

It is now my privilege and delight to journey with you through the
six principles I learned. I’ve never been a good salesperson. If you want me to sell something just to sell it, I’m not going to put much effort or passion behind it. But when I believe in something because I’ve tried it out myself and found it to be the real deal, it becomes natural for me to want to get others in on the good thing I’ve found. When I witness its power in the lives of others, my loyalty to it is only solidified!

This is such a treasure. God’s Word is powerful and alive and it is still changing lives after all these thousands of years. I’m full of hope and expectation as you read and apply what you learn and watch your relationships be transformed.

It is true that our greatest wounds come through relationships. But it is also true that our greatest healing comes from the same place. So maybe, when there doesn’t seem to be a way forward, the answer isn’t cutting off contact and removing yourself from a relationship (although at times that is a necessary option). Maybe God wants to do something even better!

What have you tried in the past to help you in these types of relationship struggles?

How successful have you been as you’ve tried these solutions?

When You Know Who You Are,
You’ll Know What to Do

Several years ago one of my favorite people passed away. Her name was Audrey, but no one called her that. She was just “Honey” —Aunt Honey to me, as she was my grandmother’s sister.

Aunt Honey told the best stories. One of my favorites was the story
of one of her brothers who, as a young man, served his country in World War II. He was wounded in battle and lost his dog tags—along with his memory. He didn’t remember who he was and had no idea where he was from.

No one knew exactly what to do with him. He spent about a year recovering in an army hospital in Idaho without any clue as to his true identity. His family assumed he had died along with the rest of the platoon. Without dog tags, he was just another John Doe.

Can you imagine the uncertainty? The fear for the future? His inability to go forward? Can you imagine the effect on the family? The grief, trauma, and confusion that comes when a son and brother is declared missing-in-action?

Thankfully, another soldier from back home recognized my great-uncle and helped reunite him with his family. When my uncle didn’t know who he was, he was lost. He didn’t know what to do. He didn’t have any direction in his life. Until someone else was able to reveal his name and his true identity, he was limited in what he could do, where he could go, and what decisions he could make. The best part of Aunt Honey’s story was when she told of the reunion. After the long months of silence, he strolled up the street to his home and his family’s warm embrace. He was lost no longer. He had a name, and he could begin to live out of that reality.

Before we get too far into this book, it’s vital that we build our strategy for peace upon the most solid foundation. My hope is that this book will be like that soldier in the army hospital, revealing who you are according to what God says and thereby giving you the confidence to live out of who God says you are. When you know who you are, you’ll know what to do. Conversely, when we don’t know who we are we won’t know how to respond when faced with both challenges and opportunities.

**WWJD?**

I was in my teens when the WWJD craze hit. Even people who didn’t follow the Christian faith were wearing the WWJD bracelets. *What would Jesus do?* The question was everywhere. How would Jesus handle this situation? How would He respond? How would He act?
You see, everything Jesus did was based on who He *was*. Jesus was God’s Son—the One in whom the Father delighted. But Jesus wasn’t just God’s Son—no, it gets even better than that! According to the Scriptures, Jesus was and is *God*. When we read stories about Jesus, we are reading about God Himself—and we discover that at His core, He is love (1 John 4:8). Love isn’t merely an attribute of God’s character. God *equals* love!

Everything Jesus did on Earth flowed out of that love. He performed miracles, told parables, confronted religious leaders, hung out with society’s rejects, fed thousands, faced His own death, died, and rose again because of His love—because of *who He was!* Because He knew who He was, He knew what to do.

When we believe that we are responsible for living in a way that will please people, we will never be at peace. There will always be pressure—pressure to do more, be more, strive harder. When we don’t measure up or reach that goal, we’ll decide it just isn’t worth it. We’ll give up. Stop trying. Avoid the challenges that will make us grow. We’re acting not out of love, but out of fear. Doesn’t sound like something Jesus would do, does it?

How can you identify with the pressures to strive harder and the pressures to give up?

Not only do we need to know who we are in order to know what to do, but we also need to know what’s already been done for us so that we don’t spend our lives spinning our wheels, desperately trying to achieve something that has already been accomplished by Someone else. We’ll get to that in a bit. Hang tight.
Out of Sight, Out of Mind?

The relationship I shared at the beginning of this chapter was one that I couldn't avoid completely. Truth is, I didn't want to avoid it—at least at first. I wanted to find peace, experience restoration, and even enjoy the times we were together. This was the relationship that I kept grieving over and struggling with—the one that kept me wondering, “Why can’t we just get along?” Eventually, I gave up and quit the pursuit for peace with her. It was time for a break, and I knew I was driving my husband absolutely crazy as I wrestled with it over and over and over again with him as my sole audience. Since I knew I didn’t need to gossip about this woman to others, I bounced my questions, ideas, and tears off of my wonderful husband, who, I’m thankful to say, survived the whole experience with me. (And in spite of me!)

For a while, giving up felt good. Pretending was less painful than acknowledging the hurt. But the peace didn’t last very long.

We can’t escape this completely.

We all have someone in our life who is hard to get along with. It could be someone you work with or attend church or school with. It could be that one family member who makes family get-togethers seem totally not worth attending…or at the very least, makes you fabricate an excuse to leave as soon as you can. It could be your boss or teacher or neighbor.

Why do some people just have to be so difficult to get along with?

Who comes to mind right now as you read this? Put her initials or some other identifiable, but discreet, indicator here:

Some of us will need to take an honest look in the mirror, because there is a good chance that although we can all name at least one difficult person in our lives, we’ve all been that person at some point along the way. Sure, we can blame the devil, or our hormones, or that other person, or unlikeable circumstances, but in the end we have to take responsibility for our part of the problem.

Ever heard the line The devil made me do it? It was an expression popularized by Flip Wilson in the 1970s. And, although Flip was
being…well…flip about the whole “devil made me do it” thing, we can all relate to some degree. We’ve all made decisions that seem counterproductive and foolish. But when we know who we are, we know what to do. We know what our responsibility is and what isn’t. We know that no one—not even the devil himself—can make us do anything we don’t want to do. When we don’t know who we are, we spend our time, energy, and resources trying to “fix” the people and circumstances in our lives. We shift blame, we manipulate, we pout, we make concessions. Knowing who we are frees us from this damaging cycle and frees us to be fulfilled and active participants in the Body of Christ.

**Personal Response**

In light of what you’ve read in this chapter, jot down some of your initial thoughts about your relationships and what God might be teaching you through them.

In your experience with difficult people, jot down some of the solutions you’ve tried and how effective they were.

As you read God’s Word, what is the Holy Spirit revealing to you about difficult people in your life?
Dear heavenly Father, as we take our first steps on this journey towards finding peace in our relationships I ask that Your Holy Spirit be completely free to do His work in our hearts and lives. Give us the grace to take an honest look in our own mirrors so that we’ll see ourselves and others more clearly. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Check out more from Shelley at
www.shelleyhendrix.org/2012/07/sometimes-you-hurt-my-feelings.html