

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Mars and Venus Starting Over

John Gray

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About the Book

Everyone wants a love that will last forever ... but for many reasons relationships end. Each year millions of people break up with their long-term partner or are widowed. The healing period after such a loss can be difficult, but getting past the grief, anger and pain can be much easier with expert help from John Gray.

Starting over, we are suddenly faced with the rest of our lives, and we have no idea what to do but *Mars and Venus Starting Over* provides an abundance of insight and direction. Although the death of a loved one is very different from a painful break-up or a divorce, the process of healing our pain is the same. You will discover how to heal a broken heart regardless of what kind of loss you are suffering.

If you are newly single, *Mars and Venus Starting Over* will help you to move past the pain of being alone and to recognise when you're ready to start dating again. Packed with practical advice, *Mars and Venus Starting Over* will help you create a new life filled with love and success.

Also available in Vermilion by John Gray, Ph.D.

Mars and Venus on a Date

Mars and Venus in Love

Mars and Venus Together Forever

Mars and Venus in the Bedroom

What Your Mother Couldn't Tell You

& Your Father Didn't Know

MARS AND VENUS STARTING OVER

A Practical Guide for Finding Love Again
After a Painful Breakup, Divorce,
or the Loss of a Loved One

John Gray, Ph.D.



*This book is dedicated with deepest love and affection to
my soul mate and wife, Bonnie Gray.
Her radiant love continues to bring out the best in me.*

INTRODUCTION

WITH THE LOSS of love, our lives are immediately transformed. Starting over, we are suddenly faced with the rest of our lives, and we have no idea what to do. We are stripped of what is most familiar to us with little knowledge of what comes next. Facing this new challenge, we have practically no experience to guide us. Our minds are filled with questions and our hearts with pain. By taking this time to read *Mars and Venus Starting Over*, you will find an abundance of insight and direction. You will know exactly what you need to do and where you are going.

Facing the challenge of starting over, we have
no experience to guide us.

The insights in this book come from twenty-eight years of counseling men and women to make wise choices in the process of healing their hearts after a painful breakup, a divorce, or the loss of a loved one. Although their circumstances were unique and widely varied, the pain they felt was the same: the pain of a broken heart. Through counseling and teaching workshops, I have directly assisted thousands of people in the process of healing their hearts.

The insights and processes described in this book have worked repeatedly for them and will work for you. They have also worked for me. In my own life, I have had to start over after a divorce, and I have suffered the loss of my

father and my younger brother. I know how devastating a loss can be, and I know the many gifts that come from healing a loss.

After healing the pain from the ending of my first marriage, I was able to learn from my mistakes and go on to create a new and more successful life. Although I would never have thought it then, I am so grateful my first marriage ended. I would have never moved on to marry my wife Bonnie and create the wonderful life and family we now share.

You will look back to this painful time and be grateful for the gifts it brings.

From healing my pain, I was able to create a new life filled with love and success. As my heart opened more fully than ever before, I was able to see things much more clearly. On my healing journey, each day brought new insights and discoveries that prepared me to recognize Bonnie as my soul mate. Successfully giving and receiving love in my marriage and with the encouragement of increasing success in counseling others, I was able to develop the ideas in *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*.

Through healing my own heart, I became a much better counselor and teacher, but even more important, a better husband and father to my children. Having made the journey from personal experience, I know the incredible rewards of starting over and finding love again.

Even a painful divorce can open the door for you to experience a rich and fulfilling lifetime of love.

This process is not an easy one. To give birth to a new you, to a new life, there are labor pains. It takes hard work. Though at times painful, going through the process is also incredibly rich and fulfilling. After the initial adjustment, it will become much easier. Soon you will be looking back, and all this pain will be just a memory.

Soon all this pain will be just a memory.

Although the death of a loved one is very different from a painful breakup or a divorce, the process of healing our pain is the same. In this book, you will discover how to heal a broken heart regardless of what kind of loss you are suffering. Although you will read stories and examples that are not exactly the same as your situation, you will still probably discover some part of you that relates.

THE THREE PARTS

Mars and Venus Starting Over is divided into three parts. The first part, *Mars and Venus Starting Over*, addresses the part of the healing process that is basically the same for men and women. Although the healing process is the same, men and women often have to confront different challenges. A strategy that is productive for a man is not necessarily productive for a woman, and vice versa.

The second part, *Starting Over on Venus*, addresses the particular challenges that women face in the process of starting over. The third part, *Starting Over on Mars*, addresses the unique challenges that men often face. In reading *Mars and Venus Starting Over*, a man may choose to skip part two and then come back to it after reading part three. Both parts contain vital information for both men and women, because there is always some overlap.

Although the process of healing our pain is the same, each of us has many unique challenges to face with our experience of loss. By exploring the insights required to overcome a variety of different situations, you will be able to determine clearly what approach is best for you. Not only will your choices become clearer, but you will find comfort knowing that you are not alone. Others have stood where you stand now, and they have gone forward to find relief and permanent healing.

HEALING OUR HEARTS

On my honeymoon with Bonnie, I received a call informing me of tragic news. My father had been found dead in the trunk of his car. He had been robbed by a hitchhiker and left in the trunk of his car, abandoned by the side of the highway. After a few hours under the hot Texas sun, he died of heat stroke. I, like many others who have lost a loved one, felt the almost unbearable pain and grief of loss. There was no way I could bring him back.

As I continued to grieve, I assumed that this pain could never go away. Fortunately, I was blessed with the support I needed to heal my pain. Now when I think about my father, instead of feeling pain, I feel the sweetness of my love for him and his love for me. Although I wish he were here to enjoy my achievements and to see his grandchildren, there is no pain. As I remember him now, while writing about him, it brings up warm feelings of love and some tears, tears of gratitude for the special times we did spend together.

Even the pain of a tragic loss can eventually go
away.

Two years later, I received another call with more tragic news. My younger brother Jimmy had committed suicide. This world was too cold and harsh for his sensitive soul, and he chose to take his life. Without the knowledge of how to heal his heart after an encounter with drugs and a painful breakup, his life spiraled downward. He became manic-depressive and needed to take medication just to cope. In those days, the medications were not as sophisticated as they are today. The side effects made his life unbearable.

The loss of my brother was devastating. As children, we had been very close. His death was as painful as the loss of my father, but in a different way. Besides missing him, I was so sad that I couldn't help him. I have helped many people, but I could not save him. In grieving his loss, though, I learned to forgive myself.

A big part of our grief is feeling powerless to save or bring back our loved one.

Trying to help my brother with his problems was what motivated me to study psychology in the first place. When traditional methods didn't work, I continued searching and expanding my understanding of the healing process.

In facing my feelings of guilt and shame for not saving my brother, I healed my heart once again. This time I discovered a deeper sense of innocence and worthiness. I was able to release the idea that I had to be perfect to be worthy of love. Through healing my pain, I was eventually able to distinguish clearly between feeling responsive to the needs of others and the mistake of feeling responsible for them. These are just a few examples of the gifts I have received from healing my heart after the loss of my brother.

The best gift is that I can continue to feel my love for my brother without a pain in my chest. Instead of feeling pain,

I feel grateful that he is no longer in pain. Although I was notable to save him, I have gone on to help many people save themselves. He lives on in my heart, inspiring me to make this world a better place.

MAKING YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE

Millions of people in all walks of life, rich and poor, healthy and sick, continue to suffer from the loss of love. Instead of finding love and making their dreams come true, they are just coping with life. They are trying to get through the day. In most cases, they are not even aware of what they are missing. They don't even know that they have a choice. They don't know that there is a way to heal their hearts and find love again. They don't realize that they can heal their pain.

After reading *Mars and Venus Starting Over*, you will know that you do have a choice. Although the pain of loss is an inevitable part of life, suffering is not. You can heal the pain of your past, and you can grow from this experience in a positive way. Instead of getting worse, your life can and will get better.

Mars and Venus Starting Over is a labor of love. It is my gift to the world and the result of twenty-eight years of serving others like you. I hope it serves you as well during this dark night of the soul. Let it be a little candle in the darkness of your despair. A wise teacher to guide you on your way. An understanding friend to soothe your loneliness. Let it be your companion during this most painful time. Read it again and again and remember you are not alone. Others have been down this road, and they have survived. They have lived to love again. And you will too!

PART ONE

MARS AND VENUS STARTING OVER

1

MARS AND VENUS STARTING OVER

WHEN SINGLE AGAIN, men and women face different challenges. Just as we think, feel, and communicate differently, we also respond differently to the loss of love. During a crisis of the heart, a woman's instinctive and automatic reactions are not the same as a man's. Her issues are different as well as her mistakes. What is good for her is not necessarily good for him. In a variety of ways, their needs are worlds apart. It is as if men were from Mars and women were from Venus.

Although we cope differently, both men and women can experience equally agonizing feelings. Starting over after a divorce, a painful breakup, or the death of a loved one can be the most challenging experience of a lifetime. For most people devastated by the loss of love, it is beyond anything we could have expected, predicted, or imagined.

Starting over after a divorce, a painful breakup,
or the death of a loved one can be the most
challenging experience of a lifetime.

Our hearts ache as they cry out in loneliness and confusion. We are stunned by our helplessness. We fight

inside with our inability to change what has happened. We become distraught as we sink into the depths of despair and hopelessness. We feel lost and abandoned in a sea of emptiness and darkness. Time slows down and the passing of each moment seems like eternity.

After a loss, we fight inside ourselves with our inability to change what has happened.

It is a struggle simply to fill each empty moment and get through the day. At times the bittersweet pain of loss is replaced by a dull numbness, but then something reminds us of our loss, and once again we long to feel and love again. Never before have we experienced our need for love and connection so agonizingly. As we are forced to face and feel the raw pain in our hearts, we realize our lives will never again be the same.

Eventually, when the healing process is complete, we fully let go. In our minds and hearts, we surrender and accept that we can't change what has happened. Being single again, we start to rebuild our lives. Once more, we begin to reach out to give and receive love. Although we could not have imagined it, our lives come back to a sense of normalcy. After the darkness of despair, the warm, comforting, and soothing sunshine of love reveals itself once again. Although this happy ending is possible, it is not guaranteed.

UNDERSTANDING THE HEALING PROCESS

To heal a broken heart, we must be able to complete the healing process. This requires new insight and understanding, but most people are not aware of what is necessary. We are not taught how to heal a broken heart in school, nor is it something with which we have a lot of

practice. Being in the dark and vulnerable, we either blindly follow the advice of friends and family, or we simply follow our own instincts. We make decisions and choices that may sound reasonable but quite often are counterproductive. Though we find temporary relief, in the long run we do not nurture or complete the healing process.

We are not taught how to heal a broken heart in school.

After the loss of love, some people do thrive again. Many are not so successful. After spiraling down to the depths of despair, they never make it out to the other side. To various degrees and in different ways, they continue to suffer their loss. Aware of the pain of losing love, they hold back from fully opening their hearts again.

Others, who appear to have let go, sometimes really haven't. They believe they have successfully moved on, but have done so at the cost of closing the door to their hearts. To avoid feeling their pain, they have moved on too quickly. As a result they have numbed their ability to fully feel. Without realizing it or recognizing how they did it, they have closed up. They carry on in their lives unable to feel the love in their hearts. Their ability to grow in love and happiness is stunted.

Becoming single again is definitely a crisis. Like any crisis, it is a time of danger and a time of opportunity. The opportunity is the possibility of healing and strengthening your heart and mind so that you will move on healthy and whole. The danger is that you do not complete the healing process. Time alone does not heal all wounds. How we cope with the loss of love determines the rest of our lives.

HOW THE HEART HEALS

To ensure that we complete the healing process, it is important that we understand the basics of how the heart heals. This process is most easily understood and visualized by considering how a broken bone heals. An emotional wound is abstract, but a broken bone is very tangible and concrete. Recognizing the various steps in healing a broken bone can assist us in acknowledging and respecting the needs of our broken heart.

When a bone breaks, our body already contains the natural healing power to correct the problem. It hurts, but eventually the pain goes away. As long as we don't interfere, the body heals itself automatically, in a predictable time period. When this automatic healing process is allowed and nurtured, the bone will actually grow back stronger than before. In a similar way, if you are able to nurture the healing of a broken heart, it also will grow back stronger. The pain and despair will pass, and you will find love and joy again.

When a broken heart heals it actually grows
back stronger.

When a bone is broken, it must be reset and then be protected in a cast to allow the body's automatic and natural healing processes to occur. If the bone is not reset straight, then it will grow back crooked. If it is not given enough time to rest, protected in a cast, it will remain weak. Likewise, if the protective cast is never taken off, the bone will never fully become strong again. Similar warnings apply to the process of healing a broken heart.

When our hearts are broken, it is not enough simply to assume that we will get over it. Although the healing is automatic, without an understanding of the complete process it is quite possible and even common to interfere and obstruct the healing unknowingly. Using the analogy of

healing a broken bone, we can begin to recognize and appreciate the three essential steps to healing a broken heart.

The three steps for healing a broken bone are: getting help, resetting the bone, and then giving it time to heal by protecting the bone in a cast. In a similar way, the three steps for healing the heart are:

- Step One:** Getting help
- Step Two:** Grieving the loss
- Step Three:** Becoming whole before getting involved again

Let's explore this analogy in greater depth.

THE THREE STEPS FOR HEALING THE HEART

Step One: Getting Help

After breaking a bone, the first step is to get help. When you are wounded, you require the support of others. Even if you were an expert in setting bones, you would still find another expert to assist you. Likewise, when your heart is broken, the first and most important step is to get help. This is not the time to be stoic and push away your feelings of hurt and loss. Men can speed up their healing process by hearing from others who are in pain, while women particularly benefit from being heard. Sharing your feelings and spending time with people who know what you are going through is not only comforting but is essential to the healing process.

Men can speed up their healing process by hearing from others who are in pain, while women particularly benefit from being heard.

Although reading this book is definitely a good beginning, it still does not replace your need for support from people who are experiencing a similar loss or have already been through it. If you were ever to take a workshop, join a support group, or seek help from a counselor, this would be the best time. The support of others who have healed emotional wounds and the assistance of a trained expert can ensure that you have the opportunity to heal completely. During a healing crisis, you are actually most receptive to what a counselor, support group, or workshop can offer you.

Throughout *Mars and Venus Starting Over*, we will explore the various ways men and women unknowingly push away the very love and support that is required to complete the healing process. In addition, we will focus on practical strategies for getting the support you need. Although there is no immediate way to take away the pain, you *can* get the necessary support to make it bearable. With the right help and at the right time, you will release your pain and experience the joy and peace of an open heart once again.

Step Two: Grieving the Loss

In the second step, after seeking help, the bone must be put back the way it was before the break. By resetting the bone, it then has the opportunity to grow back straight. Likewise, when your heart is broken, it must be put back the way it was before. In this second stage, we must take time to grieve the loss by remembering the person and what happened in the relationship.

After the loss of a loved one, remembering your past together brings up painful feelings, but it also evokes the love you shared. Reexperiencing this love helps you to heal. This love soothes and heals the pain of loss.

By feeling gratitude for the good times and forgiveness for the mistakes, the heart is filled with the love it needs to heal itself.

If you are healing from a painful breakup or a divorce and you feel rejected and betrayed, then it may, at first, be hard to grieve the loss or feel the love. You may be too angry. In this case, the challenge of “resetting the heart” is to find forgiveness. Then you will be able to grieve fully.

Even when you are glad and relieved to end a relationship that was abusive, your challenge is to go back to remember your initial hopes and dreams, and then to grieve that disappointment. After parting ways, in order to reset your heart, you must seek to appreciate what was good and to forgive the mistakes. This process sets you free to move on with an open heart to find true and lasting love.

It is impossible for your heart to open fully to another when it is completely closed to someone in your past.

As a result of resetting our hearts by fully grieving, we are once again able to feel the tender, innocent, and delicate desire in our hearts to care for another and to trust another’s love. Without this healing, we may become too jaded to care or to trust once more.

Until the healing process is complete, men tend to stop caring as much, while women have problems with trusting again. As a result, men may get involved right away, but they have trouble committing. On the other hand, women will tend to avoid getting hurt again by not getting involved.

Until the healing process is complete, men have trouble making a commitment and women have problems with trusting again.

In subsequent chapters, we will explore in great detail how to grieve a loss successfully and to feel our emptiness fully, so that we can fill up with love. Just as light follows the darkness of the night, the fullness of love rushes in to fill us up when we fully experience our inner emptiness.

Step Three: Becoming Whole

In the third step of healing a broken bone, after resetting the bone, we must then protect it in a cast and give it time to heal. Once it is strong again, it is time to take off the cast. In a similar way, in the process of healing the heart, we must take time to become whole before getting involved intimately. Before we can successfully share with another, we must heal our neediness and have a strong sense of self. The best time to get involved again is when you feel as if you don't have to. Ideally, we must be generally fulfilled and complete before entering into another intimate relationship.

The best time to get involved again is when you feel as if you don't have to.

Men commonly get involved too soon, while women will unknowingly push away love. Unless we take the necessary time before getting involved again, men will be restricted in their ability to give of themselves, while women are restricted in their ability to receive love. In later chapters, we will explore in great detail how men and women unknowingly sabotage this third stage and will examine

practical suggestions for making sure you get involved again at the right time.

STARTING OVER

Being single again, our lives are suddenly transformed. It is as though we are suddenly faced with the rest of our lives and have no idea what to do. We are stripped of what is most familiar to us and often have no idea what to do. By taking this time to read *Mars and Venus Starting Over*, you will find that insight and direction.

2

WHY DOES IT HURT SO MUCH?

OF ALL LOSSES, the loss of love is most painful. When we suffer other disappointments and injustices, it is love that comforts the soul and makes our pain bearable. In our daily lives, when we experience loss, rejection, or failure, our minds automatically protect us by remembering that at home we are loved. But when love is lost, there is no way to find relief; there is no comfort or protection. Most often we are not aware of how much we rely on this support until it is taken away.

When we suffer disappointments and injustices,
it is love that comforts the soul and makes our
pain bearable.

When we lose a primary source of love, we are suddenly stripped of all our defenses and forced to experience the raw pain of loss, the hurt of deprivation, and the sadness of loneliness. At this point, we not only mourn the loss of our loved one, but we pray for relief and ask, "Why does it hurt so much?"

There is no way we could ever anticipate the agonizing pain and emptiness following the loss of love. Whether we have experienced a painful breakup, a divorce, or the tragic death of a loved one, the result is a broken heart. At first

we are stunned. We feel a sudden numbness. Every cell in our body exclaims, "No! It can't be. I won't let it. This is not happening." As we cry out to God, we refuse to accept the loss.

We hope that we can wake up the next day and everything will be back to normal. If only it could be a bad dream. Soon, we realize it *has* happened, and we can't go back to change it. When we accept our helplessness, reality sets in, and we begin to feel alone. Looking out at the horizon of our life, it is cold and barren. As our numbness gradually thaws, we realize that we are in pain, and it hurts a lot.

It is not easy to let go or to say good-bye to someone we love; we are too attached. To find relief and heal our broken heart, we must first understand the nature of love, dependence, and attachment.

LOVE, DEPENDENCE, AND ATTACHMENT

When there is someone to greet us at the end of the day, someone to appreciate what we do, someone who recognizes our worth and benefits from our existence, it gives our life meaning and purpose. We are happiest when someone cares for us, makes us feel special and important, understands our sorrows, and celebrates our successes. As we grow in love, we naturally become more dependent on our partner for love.

Even if we are not always getting what we want and need, the hope of getting what we need and the effort to make a relationship work will also increase our dependence. Even if the love we share is not always idyllic, the hope of being loved will still buffer us from the cold, uncaring, indifferent world outside the relationship. In a multitude of ways, when we love someone, we depend more and more on his or her presence.

As this dependence grows, an important change takes place. Over time, we stop feeling our basic need to love and be loved; instead we begin to feel a more specific need—the need to love and be loved by *our partner*. We stop feeling our general need for love, but feel a new need: our partner’s love. No one else will do. This shift is called *attachment*. From depending on our partners for love, we gradually become attached to *their* love.

In a love relationship, we replace our need for love with the need for our partner’s love.

When we are attached to a spouse, it is not enough to be appreciated by others. For appreciation to be most meaningful, it must be from our partner. It does not carry the same weight when someone else gives us a compliment or listens to our problems. Throughout the day, we give and receive in a variety of ways, but the exchanges don’t provide the same degree of fulfillment as when our partner is involved.

When we lose a loved one, to the degree that we are attached, we are emotionally convinced that we will never love again. We feel that without our spouse’s love, we cannot get what we need to be happy and for our lives to be meaningful. This sense of hopelessness magnifies the pain of our loss a hundred times. It is one thing to feel that you will have to go without food for a day, but it is completely different to believe that you will never eat again. When we lose something that seems irreplaceable, it is a devastating experience.

Attachment magnifies our pain a hundred times.

To heal our broken heart, we must release our attachment and open ourselves to giving and receiving love with others. If we do not take the risk to open our heart again, we will either stay stuck in our pain or remain emotionally numb. The process of letting go of our attachment allows us to reset our heart and move on.

Resetting our heart allows us to feel our basic need for love once again. Instead of specifically needing our partner's love, we begin to feel our general need for love. By letting go, we can gradually reexperience the openness we felt before we became attached. We are no longer dependent on our partner's love, but open to other sources of love and support.

Contained within this unattached openness is the intuitive knowledge of where we can find love. By letting go of the attached desire for our partner's love and feeling our soul's need to love and be loved, we discover that within the awareness of our need is the unfolding knowledge and power to find its fulfillment. Until we are able to let go of our attachment, we are not able to tap into this innate ability to find love.

Contained within the awareness of our soul's need for love is the intuitive knowledge and power to find its fulfillment.

Letting go of a partner is difficult to the degree that we are dependent on him. As we are able to get what we need from our family and friends, our dependence on our partner lessens. As we gradually fill up with love without depending on our partner, we are able to release our pain *completely*.

In other words, by opening ourselves to giving and receiving without depending on our partner, we can eventually let go. As we fill up with new love and share that love, the emptiness disappears. Although the love we give

and receive is certainly not the same, our new love gradually becomes equally fulfilling.

THE ART OF LETTING GO

Starting over requires developing the skill of letting go. To move on, we must once again feel our innate need for love without our partner to fulfill that need. To accomplish this end, we must be very skillful, otherwise, instead of letting go, we may unknowingly increase our attachment.

If I am holding onto something, and you try to pull it away, my tendency is to fight and struggle. I will hold on even tighter than before. This is what happens when we are attached. We don't want to let go, and as a result we hold on even more tightly.

The secret for letting go of an attachment is to go with the flow. Don't try to let go. Instead, keep holding on. Remember how much you love your partner, feel how much you want your partner, feel how much you need your partner, feel your gratitude for all the gifts your partner has given you, feel how much you wish you could bring back your partner.

The secret for letting go of an attachment is to go with the flow. Don't try to let go.

By remembering your partner in this way, you are grieving properly. This is how the healing takes place. In the beginning, by remembering your partner, you will feel the loss even more intensely. You may experience a variety of painful feelings: anger, sadness, fear, and sorrow. Feeling these different painful emotions is actually how we release an attachment. This pain is temporary.

Eventually, after releasing your attachment, you may still feel some sorrow when you remember your partner.