



Leaving and Cleaving

Throughout Scripture, God often utilizes marriage as a metaphor to convey His love toward His chosen people (*Isaiah 62:5b*) and Christ's love for the church (*Ephesians 5:25*). The relationship we have with Jesus provides essential principles that are helpful to consider as we seek to nurture and grow our marriage. One important principle for married couples to consider is the union God wants us to have with Him.

Deuteronomy 13:4 "Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him."

God's desire is for us to "cleave unto him." In order for the process of cleaving to take place, there first must be a leaving of the things, which are not of Him. This means we leave other gods, whatever form they may take, and join to Him alone as our God. Next, we cleave to His authority, His Word, and seek to follow our Savior's example. As we follow Him, we find instruction for those called to marriage to "leave" father and mother and "cleave" unto our spouse (*Genesis 2:24*). It is beneficial for couples to consider this process not only as it relates to parents, but also other aspects of life. Keep in mind that what works for some couples does not always work for others.

The Process of Leaving

The Hebrew meaning of the word "leave" in *Genesis 2:24* is to "leave behind," "depart from," or "let loose." In other words, letting loose is the releasing of something that once was tied. Consider a horse tied to a post or fence; to release it would be to untie the rope holding the horse and let it go without expecting to tie it up again. This is the process God calls couples into when they commit to marriage.

The family you grew up in is your family of origin. Many perceptions are shaped by your family of origin including how you see God, yourself, and others. In addition, your unique family structure, daily routines, and early childhood experiences form your relating patterns and beliefs about how life and relationships work. These developmental years mold our answers to crucial questions such as: Am I loved for who I am or for what I do? Is God present or distant? Can I make a mistake and still experience being valued? The answers to such questions influence your temperament and insecurities as well as how you experience love, approach life, and view relationships.

God designed marriage in part to confront and address early messages, beliefs and patterns of relating which we then carry to adult life. God calls us to leave our family of origin regardless of whether it was fantastic, okay, or horrible. This does not mean turning your back on your parents or blaming them for all your struggles. Rather, leaving is about respectfully transferring loyalties by becoming aware of and naming your family's influence on you, challenging these influences where needed, and, with God's help, shaping something new.

Leaving father and mother involves a complex process of both maintaining ties and responsibilities toward the previous generation, while shifting loyalties to a primary covenantal marriage relationship. This can bring up difficult feelings of loss and requires a redefinition in aspects of family roles, membership, and boundaries. Who comes first, parent or spouse? The "leaving" process also extends beyond parents. Each spouse has a primary

loyalty commitment to the other that cannot be divided by children, parents, grandparents, employers, friends or other influences outside the marriage relationship. Jesus taught us nothing is to come between husband and wife (*Matthew 19:6*). It is important to be sensitive to your spouse's feelings when talking about the past and past relationships.

A number of things can inhibit the leaving process. Consider the following:

- Unresolved issues or conflict from family of origin or the past.
- Excessively looking for approval, encouragement, and support from parents, instead of spouse.
- Intrusive parents not respecting a newly married couple's boundaries.
- Relying too heavily on parents for decision-making thus leaving the other spouse feeling insignificant.
- Revealing details of marital conflict with parents thus leaving the other spouse feeling betrayed.
- One or both individuals in a couple maintaining a mindset of singleness or allegiance to their friends over their marriage union.

A healthy leaving process requires changes in both the parents and the child leaving the family. *Genesis 2:24* is as much a command to parents as it is to the couple getting married. It is wise for parents to understand the dynamics a young couple experiences as they try to forge the identity of a new marriage in the midst of two competing families. It is also helpful to remember the responsibility is on the husband and wife to make the break from home, not on the parents to force out their children.

The Process of Cleaving

Appropriate leaving means you are more concerned about your spouse's ideas, opinions and directives than you are your parents, friends, or other extended family. This type of leaving facilitates appropriate cleaving to one another. The Hebrew meaning of the word "*cleave*" is "to cling" or "keep close." The modern Hebrew use gives the sense of "to stick to, adhere to." Consider the image of gluing two objects together or getting super glue stuck to your fingers. It is impossible to pull the objects or fingers apart without some kind of damage. The "glue" brings the objects or fingers together as one, and so it is in the marriage relationship.

The cleaving process creates a deep connection that does not allow children to come between parents and play one parent against another, nor friends to disturb the marriage union. In addition, the newly formed couple will seek to solve problems on their own, allowing their parents to be parents and not gatekeepers. This does not mean they do not seek advice or input from parents, but in the end, they realize the decision is between the couple.

There are a number of things to consider as you seek to facilitate the cleaving process:

- Consider how to limit the involvement of and set boundaries with individuals outside the marriage relationship (parents, extended family, friends, or co-workers).
- Seek to keep personal issues between you and your spouse.
- Learn to say no to excessive demands outside of the marriage relationship.
- Develop your own social circle and calendar of events.
- Seek ways to grow spiritually together (prayer, Bible reading, and worship).
- Respect your spouse's wishes over your parent's wishes.
- Seek to function as a financially independent unit from your parents.
- Develop and establish traditions for your new family.

- Appropriately grieve the loss of traditions, habits, or gatherings that your family of origin may continue without you and focus on what you are gaining in your new family unit.

Genesis 2:24 calls husband and wife to “cleave” to one another in affection and loyalty. As a couple leaves their family of origin, they cleave to one another and form a new, unique marriage and family unit, not just an extension of either family. This new couple creation “cleaves” to one another by sharing life experiences, feelings, thoughts, ideas, spiritual beliefs, and their bodies together. The sharing of such intimate details in the marriage union weaves a couple together in a deep and meaningful way (“*threefold cord*”) so that the couple becomes one. This provides an environment where physical and emotional safety can flourish, love and commitment can grow, friendship can be nurtured, and a couple can create a legacy of blessing for future generations.

Conclusion

Scripture provides the blueprint for a marriage relationship that involves the process of leaving, cleaving, and weaving together to become one. Other expectations a husband and wife may bring to the marriage relationship lead to tension and fail to cultivate oneness in marriage as God designed. It can be helpful for couples to reflect on areas where they may be following this blueprint and areas where they may need to make adjustments to nurture and grow their relationship in Him.

It is helpful to remember that forming a new marriage relationship will inherently create a tension between either upsetting your husband (wife) or disappointing your parent. This is a tension to manage appropriately and not a problem which can necessarily be solved. It is a process to continue to work through and not a one-time event. The leave, cleave, and weave pattern for marriage outlined in *Genesis 2:24* is a process that continues through the course of our marriage and life. Thus, it may be helpful to ask frequently the question, “to whom or what am I most loyal today, this month, past year?” As couples richly grow together, they will be a blessing to parents, children, the church and the surrounding community as they intentionally live out the biblical principle of Leaving and Cleaving.

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