

# How Do You Leave and Cleave?

**Dr. Greg & Michael Smalley, M.A.**

There are many ways to cleave to one another – physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. Let's take a look at some of these individually.

In the process remember that what works for some people doesn't always work for others. However we surveyed hundreds of couples and came up with the following techniques that seemed to rank among the most popular ways to cleave in those early days and weeks of marriage.

## **Physical Distance**

We asked couples what helped them physically cleave to one another after getting married. The top response was geographical distance between the couple and extended family.

For some people this was merely a matter of doing what we've already talked about – taking time away from extended family in order to strengthen the brand new marital bond between the two of you. Physical distance from extended family during this initial stage of marriage causes the following benefits, all of which help develop the cleaving time.

- You will need one another for daily support
- Neither of you can go to your former home, even if you want to.
- Privacy
- Knowing that when you get back together with extended family you can share experiences and bond over again to reconnect.
- You will be forced to depend on each other.
- You won't rely on parents to solve problems.

It was a wonderful time of developing our own lifestyle as well as dependence on each other.

## **Establish Boundaries**

On an emotional level, the cleaving period is when you will share your feelings and heart's desires with your husband or wife rather than your parents. Of course you will have discussed many of these feelings during this, the engagement period. But situations will come up that can only take place once you are sharing a home together.

We recommend that you use this time to set limits on the involvement of outsiders, whether from extended family or friends or co-workers. Spend as much time as possible talking together, getting to know each other as husband and wife. This is the beauty of cleaving.

The following are some of the benefits that come from this type of emotional cleaving:

- You will learn to keep personal issues between you and your spouse.
- You will learn to say no to excessive demands outside the marriage relationship. Husband's wisdom help protect from interference.
- You will feel committed to holding your spouse first in important decision-making and points of change in your life.

### **Leaving Past Behind**

It is crucial that this cleaving period involve the fact that your spouse is now your central relationship. Perhaps you had a serious relationship prior to getting married. That is fine and probably has contributed greatly to the getting-to-know-each-other period that leads up to engagement.

Now, however, it is time to put the past behind you and press on to what is ahead. And that means your relationship with your spouse. If you always remembered your old girlfriend's birthday with a dozen roses – stop the flower delivery immediately. Nothing is more damaging to the cleaving period than making your spouse believe they are not – after God – first place in your heart.

The following is a list of things that might be involved in letting past relationships go as you cleave to the single most important relationship you will have in your life from this point on.

- Get rid of old letters and pictures of past relationships.
- If a possession was from a former relationship, perhaps sell it or give it away.
- Be sensitive to your spouse's feelings when talking about the past and past relationships.
- If necessary, attend counseling together to work through issues that might have come up as a result of past relationships.

### **Depending on Your Spouse Spiritually**

Spirituality is a very important part of your impending marriage. If you are not both believers, now is the best time to talk through those issues. There is nothing more heartbreaking than believing ahead of time that you will be likeminded spiritually only to find out that after the wedding vows one spouse has a completely different viewpoint than the other.

Talk through all issues of spirituality now. Include traditions, biblical interpretations, biblical translations, church attendance habits, prayer habits, Bible study habits, and any other issue important to you.

We knew one couple wherein the husband would not allow the wife to talk about God or put Scripture verses in any visible place in their home. We asked if they'd discussed spiritual matters ahead of time, and the wife shrugged.

"I told him I couldn't marry him unless he believed in the Lord like I did." She glanced at her husband. "And I told her I believed."

We looked at him, confusion clearly written across our faces. "But you don't believe in God, isn't that right?"

The man nodded. "Yes."

We were beginning to wonder if we'd stumbled onto the set of a Candid Camera shoot.

"Okay, then why'd you tell her you believed back when you were dating." The man frowned. "That was the only way she'd marry me."

Whatever you do, don't lie to your fiancé this way. Issues can be talked through, differences can be examined. But a lie can only cause irreparable harm.

Once you think alike when it comes to matters of God, realize that this will be the holy cement that will truly bind you together during this cleaving period. The following is a list of things that will help you cleave spiritually:

- Prayer for each other.
- Prayer together.
- Church attendance together.
- Serving in some type of church or mission service together.
- Bible reading together.
- Scripture memorization together.

We know one couple who memorized Scriptures together and then played a game whenever they were in the car. One at a time they would recite a verse until one of them was stumped. They spent hours this way, laughing, memorizing God's word, and having fun at the same time.

This is a perfect example of spiritual cleaving.

**Find this article at:** <http://www.crosswalk.com/marriage/677998/>