

THE CLING THING - COUPLES UNITE!

Marriage Mandate – PART 2

By: Dr. Kevin Downing

'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the will become one flesh.' Genesis 2:24-25

Years ago as a seminary student, I had a roommate who, for all practical purposes, couldn't spell or write. Now mind you I grew up with a host of learning difficulties myself, but Scott surpassed them all. I'd try to proof his papers, but I really couldn't help. How do you edit something that doesn't make a lick of sense?

You may think I was critical of Scott but the truth was, I had great admiration for him. You see, Scott just wouldn't give up. Failing seminary was not a possibility for him. He studied long hours, re-took classes – whatever was required Scott did it.

In a word Scott had amazing – perseverance. Nothing discouraged him, not failing assignments or flunking classes or smarter classmates, Scott was unwilling to stop.

What does a single seminary student have to do with Marriage Mandate #2?

Let's review our first marriage mandate and then we can answer this question.

The first marriage mandate is to leave your father and mother. In our last article we explored how this leaving included making your mate #1 in your life above your parents, as well as leaving old dysfunctional family patterns behind (among other things). This mandate sets us up nicely to be able to deliver the second mandate...

Unite with your wife

The Hebrew word in Genesis used here 'be united' (or you may remember some translations read 'cleave or cling to your wife') is the word – Dabaq (pronounced daw-bak'). This word means the following:

- Cling
- Stick
- Stay close
- Cleave
- Keep close
- Stick to
- Stick with
- Follow closely
- Join to
- Overtake
- Catch

The husband is to catch, hold and bond to his wife and she is to do the same – the result will be that the two shall become one. (We will discuss this 'oneness' in our next article).

Pursuing Your Mate with Passion

Pursue your mate? This may seem like a foreign concept, but do you remember when you were first dating?

I bring couples back to this place frequently in marriage counseling. Broken, hurt and distant, I'll ask these couples, "Was your marriage ever in a good place?" The answer is often, "Yes, when we were first dating."

You may remember what it was like when you had to pry the phone off the side of your head because it had been glued there for the last four hours. Lost in conversation with your love one, you had lost all track of time. Is that a great memory? If so, do it again. You may argue – "We just don't have that kind of energy or passion – we don't have that much to talk about." OK – so go away together for four hours or for a couple of days on an overnighter at a hotel!

I have heard many a marriage therapists declare that if couples will do the things they did when they first fell in love the feelings of love will return. I have to agree. I have seen this happen over and over again.

Pursuing Your Mate with Perseverance

From time to time people will come up to my wife and say, "You guys have a really great marriage." I have never heard her respond with saying "thank you". Instead she says, "We work really hard at it." I appreciate her honesty. What we do have together didn't happen by chance. We have what we have because we are very intentional about our marriage. Marriage is a marathon. We are in it for the long haul.

This makes me reflect back on my roommate in seminary, Scott. I'm sure he has a good marriage today if he applies the same amount of perseverance to his marriage that he did to graduate school.

I had a wise professor who once said, "The dip stick of any marriage is commitment."

Perseverance and commitment are not forms of suffering for suffering's sake. They ideally are your applied focus and determination to growth and to make things better. Here are some important ideas for pro-active action in your marriage.

Close the Exits and Take off the Fig Leaves

If you are not clinging to and perusing your mate, you are probably distancing yourself. You may be using some exit doors to run from or avoid the emotional and spiritual intimacy in your marriage. It doesn't take much to get the ball rolling. How about a little...

- Resentment
- Hurt
- Disappointment
- Being Offended
- Ignored

Before long you may be exiting from the closeness you had with your mate through...

- TV
- The computer
- Focusing on the kids
- Focusing on church and ministry activities
- Eating
- Hobbies
- Over working and fatigue
- Working on your house
- Arguing over non-issues
- Avoiding feelings
- Avoiding prayer and devotion time together
- 'Planned chaos' (which is choosing not to plan time with each other)
- Reading (even good reading)
- Not saying "I love you" and a host of other terms of endearment
- Never asking about "Us"
- ...and a 1,000 more!

You can see that I have only listed a few here, but without a whole lot of thought you can more than likely identify your exits from your marriage.

I – Thou (i.e. How Are We Doing? You and Me Dear...)

The word Meta-Communication refers to being able to not only communicate, but to talk about how you are communicating. An evaluation assessment on the quality of communication at your work might be a form of Meta-Communication.

In perusing your mate you need to talk about your relationship. I know it sounds funny, but so many married people never or rarely talk about their marriage relationship, the I-Thou, the me and you. It sounds like this...

1. We have been married for ___ years now (get this number correct guys!). How are you feeling about us and our marriage?
2. How do you feel we are doing as a couple? Do you like our relationship?
3. In your opinion, how do you feel about our marriage?

Of course, I can hear many of you saying now, "I would never ask those questions. I'd just be opening Pandora's Box. It would start a fight!"

If this is you, you may need some help in how to respond to and deal with criticism. We have dealt with this in other articles, but in a nut shell, we respond to criticism asking, "What do you want." We want to convert criticism into requests and we want requests to be observable and measurable.

And yes, my roommate from seminary graduated with passing grades, though it took him an extra year to do so.)

Dr. Downing is available to see clients at the Fullerton office. Call 1-800-998-6329 today to schedule an appointment! We have over 40 locations in southern California.

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