

Leave Your Father and Mother

Marriage Mandate - Part 1

By: Dr. Kevin Downing

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

Several years ago I counseled a man who explained to me his terrible dilemma. He said, “My mother is in a nursing home about three hours away. I don’t go see her. I feel awful about it because I know that I should honor my parents. When I used to go see her she would criticize me and say horrible things about my wife and kids for hours. She has always resented my wife and has told me repeatedly that I married the wrong person. I can’t handle her stress. I just haven’t gone to see her in the last couple of years.”

After I gathered some more information from this man and his wife regarding the situation I told him the following. “It sounds like you only have two options. The first is to go talk to your mother and she beats you to death with her tongue. The second option is to never see her. But what if there was an option C..?” He and his wife looked at each other and asked me what that could be.

I told them that option C could be the following. “What if you drove the entire three hours to go see her mother but only visited with her for about five or ten minutes? Then walk out of the nursing station and let the nursing staff know that you are checking up on your mother. (Accountability can really go a long way in getting better care for a loved one in these situations). Then go and do the same thing with the administrative staff. I’d want answers to questions like...”

1. Is she being well taken care of?
2. Does she have bedsores or show other signs of neglect?
3. Does she have enough social interaction with other people?
4. What does she says about her care?

Next, you can write her a card at Christmas, Easter and her birthday and a few other days. You want to acknowledge that she's alive. At the same time you understand that you have a highly edited relationship with your mother. That means you don't have an epic long movie with your mother you just have a little two-minute short story.

For this man to be criticized and told that he has married the wrong person for hours on end is not a way of honoring his mother. He was simply allowing himself to be a target of her abuse. He had never thought of option C, but he loved the idea and followed through on it.

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So often we hear stories of how parents are too intrusive into a couple's life and how we as adult children are just not able to say "No" to the intrusions. In this example the husband was saying "No", but he went to the extreme of cutting her out of his life. It wasn't necessary in this case and he was very happy to have another option. In the end he was able to protect his wife and children (and even himself) and still did a world of good for his mother.

The Marriage Fence – Numero Uno

So, it's very important to establish a strong fence around your marriage. Call it a boundary. In order to have a happy and functional marriage it's imperative that we leave our parents. But how are we to leave? Should we leave physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually or financially? The Bible does not elaborate in great detail about what it means to leave. In nomadic tribe cultures (the context in which Genesis was written), leaving physically could threaten a family's survival and safety. Financial separation can be difficult when it comes to family-owned businesses. But the spirit of the message seems to indicate the protection of the covenant relationship of marriage. It ensures that the newly married couple has their own space and financial freedom.

Without a doubt one of the greatest desires of wives (in particular) I hear is – I want to know that I'm number one in my husband's life. During the course of marriage there are times every husband needs to go his parent's way or his wife's way. Need I say it – Go with your wife! (Wither your parents understand it or not.) This will save you a world of grief.

Is This Your Bag? – Maybe Yes, Maybe No

There also needs to be a leaving of ancestral baggage. (I.e. family rules and traditions). We all needed time to assess which bags we want to keep and which bags we want to throw away. Did your family teach you or show you how to:

- ❖ Deal with conflict
- ❖ Manage your anger
- ❖ Share your most intimate thoughts and feelings with safe people
- ❖ Express affection
- ❖ Follow your dreams
- ❖ Value yourself and others around you as precious creations of God
- ❖ Endure hard times
- ❖ Honor your wedding vows
- ❖ Deal with life's realities without escaping through drugs, alcohol, or other medications
- ❖ Enjoy your faith with the other family members
- ❖ Work with excellence
- ❖ Have fun and laugh out loud

And the list goes on and on

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Intercept the Ball... and Run the Other Way!

It's obvious to see that abuse and addictions and other family dysfunctions travel from one generation to the next. It's the desire of so many to be a pivotal generation. A pivotal generation is the family that turns things around. We learn to communicate, to face our fears, to get transparent and honest with our mate. We face the conflicts head-on and dream and organize those dreams into action. We bring clarity to our mission and seek to do things that our parents never did. And all the while we say "this feels really weird". And indeed doing things that our parents never modeled for us usually does feel really weird.

Blame Game

One of the great hallmarks of leaving your mother and father is to stop blaming and start taking responsibility for your own life. Blamers stay connected to those who've hurt them. (If you are going to stay a victim you need an abuser/bad guy.) Blame is their ticket to avoid personal responsibility. There's a saying in the business world and it goes like this: THE FISH STINKS FROM THE HEAD DOWN. In my business life I sometimes ask myself – who is in charge of this place? The answer is -- oh it's me. The same question applies to all of us married people who have a family to run. If you don't like your marriage and you don't like the way your kids behave, then ask yourself - who is in charge? Of course it's you. Responsible people understand this concept. Blamers say that change is impossible. They see themselves as a victim of circumstances and others.

Who's Your Mama?...and Daddy?

At one time Jesus was told "*your mother and brother and sisters are here waiting outside*". Jesus' response was, "*who are My mother and brothers? Whoever does God's will is My brother and sister and mother.*" (Mark 3: 33-35). Jesus established the priority of the spiritual family over the biological family. In doing so He did not undermine the biological family but instead strengthen it. This means that your mate is first your brother is or sister in Christ before he or she is your husband or your wife. They are first God's child and secondly your mate.

But this also means that we have a many mothers and fathers. I gratefully have a long list of many spiritual fathers in my life. These are men who helped shape and mentor me in ways that no one person could ever do. The scriptures say that God will be a "*Father to the fatherless*" (Psalm 68:5) and this is certainly one of the ways that He does it.

I counseled a woman one time that never had a father. I eventually told her about the kind relationship I had with my daughter Kallie. Sometime later she told how much she had been wishing that week that she had Kallie's father. And then in the next moment she realized - I do have Kallie's Dad. I was definitely a

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Dad to her in many ways – I was even able to attend her wedding where she married a wonderful man who loved her like no one had before. (I'd like to think that in a small way I helped lay the ground work for that!)

So, who are your spiritual mentors, mothers, and fathers? Is now the time to find a new one – or - is it time to re-connect with one you already have? Having a rich spiritual family is key to being a pivotal generation and leaving your mother and father.

I Want to Please You... and I Haven't Gotten There Yet

The desire to win our parents approval is some of the toughest glue to break free from. This freedom is at the heart of leaving your mother and father. It seems to be a universal desire that we desperately want to win our parents favor, understanding, and acceptance. If you have unconditional acceptance from your parents, consider yourself very fortunate and blessed. It seems to be a rare thing.

Perhaps you've never won your parents approval because:

- ❖ They had and still have unrealistic expectations of you
- ❖ They're not approving of anybody - you're just another one on the list
- ❖ They don't like your values and faith
- ❖ You made mistakes that have never been forgiven or reconciled
- ❖ They don't like your line of work, or worse yet, your mate and children
- ❖ You've never been as good as one of your siblings (The mom always liked you best syndrome.)
- ❖ They don't know how to be close to their children
- ❖ You have resentments towards them, and they do approve of you, you just don't accept it
- ❖ They do approve of you more than you realize, you just don't talk about it

Nothing you do or say will ever win their approval, they either can't or won't accept you

I'm Taller than You – Just a Fact...

It is God's will that we outgrow our parents. And many parents approve of this. I want my children to grow beyond me. But this means we are out front, making a way into the jungle, doing things and discovering things no one has before us. It's kind of a lonely feeling. Outgrowing our parents means there's things that they don't understand, get, or appreciate.

My father once told me, "When we were growing up we were just worried about survival. We had the Depression to overcome, and at one time it look like Hitler would take over the world. But you kids, you have to figure out the meaning to life." Both surviving and thriving are difficult – but I'm glad my parents laid the ground work for me to be a thriver. My faith has brought me yet another step.

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The Apostle Paul said it this way... *“Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness.”*

Next he explains the cost of being a pivotal generation... *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”* Hebrews 12: 10-11 (This is one of my favorite passages of scriptures.)

Final Thought

Leave your parents and unite with your mate. **Show your husband or wife that they are number one above all others.** The pain of leaving old patterns and habits, and becoming a disciple – a disciplined one – will be over shadowed by a deep abiding peace in your soul and a harvest of integrity and joy in your marriage.

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