

Leave, Cleave, Become, Believe

Credit card giant, American Express, published a survey in 2013, where it asked Americans to reveal their plans for Valentine's Day. The survey found that about six million couples were likely to get engaged to be married on February 14th, of that year. Can you imagine six million couples, gathered all over the US on Valentine's Day? Can you imagine six million potential grooms asking six million potential brides this question: "*Will you marry me?*" A bride's "yes," leads up to a marriage ceremony. Many of these marriage ceremonies will be conducted by a Christian minister using a Christian rite of marriage.

Christians believe that marriage has a divine nature. We believe marriage emanates from God's creative work. By the gift of marriage God founded the human community and ensured its growth. God described marriage in these words from the Old Testament Book of Genesis. "*So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.*" God called Adam and Eve all married couples that followed them, *to leave, to cleave, and to become.*

God calls married couples to commit to leave their parents' homes. To leave does not mean to abandon their parents. The Fourth Commandment requires children to honor their father and mother as a lifelong commitment. However, they are definitely called to leave their homes of origin. Their call is to leave their place, or role in life, so they can assume a new role.

The primary goal of married couples is give their children roots and wings. We see this so beautifully in nature. A pair of birds builds a nest, thereafter, they fill the nest with chicks. The couple works together to feed and care for the chicks, and when their wings are strong, and the time comes, the pair urge their sons and daughters to leave the nest and start their own families. God calls parents to love, nurture, care for and train their children, and to provide them with an identity, that sense of belonging to a family. God calls parents to teach their children about God, how to worship God and to live in obedience to God's will. In this way, children sink roots into a family and a community of faith. Parents are also called to give their children wings, to teach them that it is their calling to leave their home, and marry, and thereby form their own family and to encourage them to embark on this adventure. God calls sons and daughters to become husbands and wives and start new families. God declares that this can only happen if men and women leave their identity as a child, and take on the identity of spouse.

God calls the couples that leave their parents' homes to cleave to one another. The word "*cleave,*" means to stick fast to another. Cleaving means that a couple is called to stick together emotionally and physically. If a couple sticks together, they can overcome many obstacles. In the beginning, cleaving to one another emotionally and physically is easier. However, as the couple matures, when the honeymoon period is over, and they embark upon a life together, cleaving can become more of a challenge. The couple comes to understand that their actions may cause the bond between them to weaken. Thus, in order for the couple to continue to cleave, the two of you will have to ask: "Will this action I take, this word I am about to speak, this decision I am about to make, or this attitude I have,

draw us closer together or drive us apart? Will what I am about to think, say or do, build up or tear down our relationship?"

God calls a husband and a wife to commit to becoming one. The commitment to become "*one*," is a call to intimacy. God calls married couples to enjoy ever deepening physical, emotional, economic and spiritual intimacy. God calls married couples to know and to understand one another in the deepest and most profound sense; to build a life together, to build a home, fill it with children, raise them in the fear of God and provide for their education. God calls the couple to be a good example to their children; to be good stewards of the time, talents and treasures God has given them. A married couple cannot be good parents or build a good family economy unless they regularly share their joys, sorrows, goals and dreams and regularly confess their fears and sins to one another. God calls married couples to listen to one another. He calls them to serve one another by acts of sacrificial giving.

The covenants that God requires of married couples seem impossible to fulfill. When Jesus confronted both his disciples and his detractors with God's high calling in marriage, his disciples blurted out: "*If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.*" (Matthew 19:10). Jesus responded to their fears with these words. "*But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.*" (Mark 10:6-9) Jesus calls married couples to believe He is active in their marriage.

God issued a warning along with his promise to bind the couple together: "*Let not man put asunder.*" He warns all not to try to break the couple apart. God acknowledges that the couple will be assailed from within and from without and these attacks will challenge the ties that bind them. God gives them gifts which will, over time, make them one. God calls each couple, each bride and groom, to believe that He put the love they have for one another in them and He brought them together. They are called to believe that when each takes the other as spouse and responds "*I do*," to their vows, God acts. God joins them together in a process which begins that day and continues as long as they both live. God gives them the gift of faith and trust in one another and faith and trust in Him.

God the Holy Spirit, gives each Christian, *the Fruit of the Spirit*: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). God promises that these hidden gifts will blossom and grow. These gifts are like buds on a fruit tree that will erupt and bear fruit. God promises all Christians that they have the spiritual gift of, "*forbearance.*" Forbearance is defined as refraining from the enforcement of something, (as a debt, right, or obligation), that is due. To forebear is to be very patient and not collect, punish or take revenge, even though we have the right to do so. Married couples will inevitably hurt one another by what they say or do and/or by failing to speak or act when they should. The injured spouse may have every right to be angry at the offending spouse. Sometimes the injury can cut to the core of the marriage and may even justify one of the spouses leaving the marriage. It is at this critical juncture that God can act. God gives the couple the Holy Scriptures as their guide. The Scriptures call couples to see their sin, to say they are sorry, to earnestly repent and want to amend their ways and seek the forgiveness of their injured spouse. God gives the wronged spouse the gift of forbearance, the grace to forgive the other from the heart and remain in the relationship.

Perhaps you are getting ready to pop the question, and you are ready to, *leave, cleave and become*. Perhaps you are married and you are having trouble *leaving, cleaving and becoming*. God wants to know that His most passionate desire is for you to believe that He will guide you and that through Him you can, *leave, cleave and become*. The leaving, cleaving and becoming begins in His presence at the altar. You can find an altar at a church near you. At Grace we come into God's presence every Sunday, at 9:00 AM and 10:30AM. You are invited and welcome to join us.

In Christ

Pastor Ed