

PLANNING A WEDDING: THE IMPACT OF LEAVING AND CLEAVING

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In 1995 I had a banner year. As associate minister of a congregation, I was in charge of performing all wedding with the exception of a very few. As I ended the year, I realized that I had performed 67 weddings. As I looked at the numbers, I realized the year only has 52 weeks. And yes, I realized that I celebrated up to three wedding on a weekend. (our church was very popular because of its architecture, pipe organ, and majestic stained-glass windows) Great extra income, terrible as far as weekend activities with my family!

One thing that has remained constant in the issue of weddings is what does this rite of passage means? On the surface to talk about planning weddings our mind veers towards the TV shows we see about the glamorous weddings of the rich and famous or we see the awful and terrible personalities of women known as “bridezillas.” These shows show all of the things that occur prior to the ceremony. And if we were honest, we would all rather skip the preliminaries and jump right into the important thing the wedding service. Nonetheless, planning a wedding might be a necessary step in the Biblical concept of leaving and cleaving. Jesus said, *“For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?”*

Matthew 19:5 (KJV)

Planning a wedding allows for the stress of the transition of “leaving.”

Encyclopaedia Britannica has a good summary regarding this,

In addition to sharing the functional significances of other passage rites, marriage ceremonies may be seen especially to stress social bonds between husband and wife and their kin groups. In most societies and during most of human history, romantic love has not been the means by which spouses are selected. Convention, often strongly sanc-

tioned, has limited marriage to only certain classes of people. Mutual attraction between the spouses has historically been a matter of little or no importance. The importance of marriage with respect to spouses, children, other kin, and the orderly maintenance of society is readily inferable. Rites of marriage place a sanction on unions of marriage that may be very powerful and thus serve as both a means of conducting an orderly and satisfying life and also as sanctions for the orderly maintenance of society. A general correlation may be seen between the degree of elaboration of marriage rites and the social importance of enduring marriages in the society in question.

Leaving, in society's view as well as Jesus' view, entails the trauma of the transition of a couple's life. They are entering into a new reality. I would encourage couples that are planning to get married to see the negotiations, frustrations, fights, and celebrations during the process of choosing what details of the wedding are needed to see them as a testament that their relationship is unique and cannot duplicate others. As they endure the input and advise from each family as to what should be included in the celebration, they must realize that they are being tested as to see if they can differentiate themselves even when they use symbols that are part of their family's history and traditions. Both man and woman should be active in the process, otherwise, the leaving will not be uniform as they make the separation from their nuclear families to begin a new one.

Planning a wedding also begins the "cleaving" process. This concept of "permanence" means that the couple is preparing for a life-long journey.

The vows expressed at weddings are variable. Most marriage vows include the promise of a commitment, including permanency and fidelity. However, there have always been couples who create their own vows to express their individual philosophy toward marriage. Christian ceremonies emphasize marriage as a divine sacrament and call attention to the tie between the couple and God. In these cases, the marriage itself is under the jurisdiction of God (Saxton 1993). People of different ethnic, racial, and religious groups in the United States, such as Jews, Poles, Italians, Latinos, and African Ameri-

cans, sometimes develop ceremonies that feature elements from both U.S. culture and the couple's specific ancestral cultures.

In a real sense, the cleaving begins with the planning. This is where couples truly decide if this is what each person wants to do. So it is no surprise that there are men or women who even in the day of the wedding the get “cold feet” and choose to walk away. Good for them! When I counsel with couples about marriage I tell them that they have until the very moment when they are asked to say “I do” to walk away but once the “I do” is given there is no reverse in their commitment. Serious couples will understand the concept because in the end it’s not about invitations, wedding dresses, or dinner menus, it is about this wonderful journey called marriage that begins with a simple appointment with a wedding planner or pastor to say, “we want to get married.” Let the stress of the transition begin. Here’s a list of needed steps in planning a wedding that will help also in the process of leaving and cleaving:

- 1) Marriage is hard work, but it is worth it. You may not be able to see any problems in your future. But the hard times will come.**
You must stick together, and figure out how to work through these times.
- 2) You will have a lot of personal growth to go through.**
Look inward before pointing the finger.
- 3) Your spouse may not understand what you think they should.**
Learning how to communicate is key for a healthy, happy, and lasting marriage!
- 4) You are going to have to be on the same page with everything from finances to raising children to sex.**
Might as well start these conversations now!
- 5) You will both evolve as a person in your opinions, and beliefs.**
So keep the conversation going and share the experience together so you won’t grow apart.
- 6) Remember, your spouse has the best intentions for you.**
- 7) Don’t forget to keep an open mind and be flexible.**
- 8) Learn each other’s love language, and then learn to speak it. If both spouses put each other first, it’s a win win.**
- 9) Make your relationship the priority. Keep safe boundaries as a hedge around it from people, and activities that could harm it.**

10) Build your friendship, dream and have fun together. Our spouse should be our best friend.

The longer you are married, the deeper that friendship should grow.

Above all, prayerfully consider if you and your fiancée are the right match and ask God to affirm and confirm in your spirit that you were meant to be “one.”

Resources:

<http://family.jrank.org/pages/1118/Marriage-Ceremonies.html>

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/504562/rite-of-passage/66345/Marriage-rites>

<http://ourpeacefulfamily.com/preparing-for-marriage/>

