

Session #6 – Preparing to Leave: Learning to Release & Influence

Genesis 2:24 *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

Introduction: In 2002 a little known writer named Nia Vardalos somehow got her screenplay noticed and turned it into a movie. On a \$5 million budget, *“My Big Fat Greek Wedding”* turned into a monumental hit at the time grossing over \$368 million dollars at the box office and infusing, at least for a time, phrases into our cultural nomenclature (“The Greek word for that is....” “Put some Windex on it”). The story struck home with many as it chronicled the growing up and moving out of a shy daughter in a culturally closed family, with the expectation of her meeting a good Greek boy, living close, and working in the family restaurant always hanging over her head. Instead, she meets a non-Greek man, falls in love with him, and has the audacity to think about moving out and moving on. It also unfolds the journey of a proud papa who is dealing with change (think “Fiddler on the Roof”), and ends with acceptance and seeking to understand each other, culminating in the father purchasing a new home for the young couple, signaling that full approval has been given. However, my favorite part is that fact that the last scene of the movie, taking place **6 years later**, reveals that the house purchased was right next door to mom and dad, where they could still infuse control over their daughter and new non-Greek son in law and granddaughter.

In some ways, every parent has a dream or expectation that their child or children will grow up, have a family, produce grandkids, have financial means, and **for sure, LIVE CLOSE BY!** Perhaps these sentiments are not expressed as overtly as the culture in this movie and are more indirectly understood, but if we are honest, most would have some version of this outcome lurking in the back of their mind. And, to be fair, **there is nothing inherently wrong with this!** We love our kids (praise the Lord) and WANT to be close with them. However, this desire can override a greater truth and reality that God has built into the fabric of the **nuclear family from the beginning of creation:**

Genesis 2:24 – *“Therefore a man shall **leave** his father and his mother and **hold fast** to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

A few things to consider in this statement:

- 1) This is a timeless command since it took place BEFORE the Fall and BEFORE children were a thing – meaning this was NOT just for Israel or the OT, but for all time.
- 2) Leaving a parent and holding fast to a wife is both a **promise & a picture:**

Ephesians 5:29-32 *“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 **This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.**”*

Marriage is an ultimate picture of Christ’s love for His Bride, the unity they share, and covenantal commitment they make. This is one reason why marriage is momentary (no marriage in heaven – Matthew 22:30) and not eternal. We WILL be married to Christ, since He is the One relationship that rules them all, and the central figure in all eternity, past, present, and future.

- 3) The word for “**leave**” here means: The verb translated “leave” (עָזַב, ‘*azab*) normally means “to **abandon, to forsake, to leave behind, to discard,**” when used with human subject and object (see Josh 22:3; 1 Sam 30:13; Ps 27:10; Prov 2:17; Isa 54:6; 60:15; 62:4; Jer 49:11). (According to The NET Bible). This does NOT mean that it necessarily has to involve emotional or geographical abandonment, but it does speak to mindset and goal.
- 4) The word “**Hold Fast**”: The verb is traditionally translated “**cleaves** [to]”; it has the basic idea of “stick with/to” (e.g., it is used of Ruth resolutely staying with her mother-in-law in Ruth 1:14). In this passage it describes the **inseparable relationship** between the man and the woman in marriage as God intended it.¹
- 5) **One Flesh** – This refers BOTH to the physical union of marriage, an ongoing sign of unity within marriage, while also signaling a NEW FAMILY UNIT being produced, not merely an extension of an old one.

Why is this an important starting place to talk about the goal of releasing our children into adulthood? The reason is a goal is put our children in a place that they can secure an **independence from us and a robust dependency on their God, while also clinging to a new family where they can continue to live out the truth and love they experienced growing up.** To say it another way: *we raise our kids to leave, and our job is to prepare them to do just that.*

As a quick caveat, does this mean MARRIAGE is the sole goal? Not necessarily, since Paul praises singleness in 1 Corinthians 7 and cautions that marriage creates a burden of “earth-boundedness” (1 Cor. 7:32-34), while the goal of all people, married or single, was to “**secure undivided devotion to the LORD**” (7:35). The whole of DISCIPLESHIP in Scripture is one of **Birth – maturity/growth – leaving – reproducing.** We see this process vividly with Jesus and His disciples, who after 3 years did not want Jesus to go, to Paul and Timothy, whom Paul trained up WITH him and sent him to continue what was started with him (2 Tim. 1:2; 1:12-14; 2:1-3; 3:10, 14).

So, our starting point of parenting is **preparing for our kids to leave, so that they can pursue Christ fully and completely, becoming dependent on Him.** This has consequence not just WHEN our kids get married, but also in all the years leading up, and how we think about the years after they leave. So that will shape the next set of principles to think through.

Training our Children to Leave

Overarching Principle: Move our kids toward **dependent Independence**

Operating Process:

- We do not give our kids everything they *want*, but teach them that **waiting is good** (Isa. 40:30-31) and we are NOT entitled to our desires

¹ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

- We teach them about delayed enjoyment gratification by exercising wisdom in what we purchase, provide, and give.
- We allow our kids to **experience failure, since this helps them learn, grow, and mature.**

See: Jesus' interaction with Peter in anticipating failure (Luke 22:31-33) and restoring him AFTER failure (John 21:15-23)

When they are young, we allow them room to get hurt physically and even emotionally in relationships, and we are there to comfort, bind up wounds, and provide shoulders to cry on

- We give a proper view of **family, church, sex/marriage**

Life in the church must be priority in word and deed, or children begin to think it is marginal in life

Family is important, but NOT the most important thing. Our children who leave the house will need to be shown how to **prioritize life**, balancing school, work, friends, responsibilities, and how that all fits together with the Body of Christ.

Our kids will get a POSITIVE or NEGATIVE view of family, marriage, conflict, and proper physical interaction from their parents. The best pre-marital counseling we give our kids does not come from a book but from watching their parents. The world is teaching our kids about sex and relationships, so we must be active in informing and providing a truthful counterpart to the barrage of concepts they hear from the world.

A word about dating: *Do we allow our kids to date? Should we?* A few things to keep in mind. We are called to help our kids to guard their hearts, for from them flow the springs of life (Prov. 4:23) and not to awaken romantic desire too early (Song of Solomon 8:4). Only **three things can come out of ANY dating relationship**: 1) *Broken Heart*; 2) *Broken Purity*; 3) *Marriage* - The Bible is EXPLICIT about sexual immorality, and tells us exactly what the will of God is:

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 *"For this is **the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality**; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles **who do not know God**; 6 that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because **the Lord is an avenger in all these things**, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you."*

We must help our children know that every relationship is a risk, but we DO NOT WANT TO SET THEM UP FOR FAILURE. Each relationship is built and designed to grow – *spiritually, emotionally, socially, mentally, AND PHYSICALLY*. There is a pull of each area on the other, and when we allow our kids to interact with the opposite sex in a growing way in the **first four, we should not be surprised when the physical pull heightens. So we MUST BE CAUTIOUS, warning and talking with our kids about dating, and not unleashing these desires until marriage is close and reasonable.**

So we compel our kids to WAIT, to become men and women of developed character, to pursue those who are people of character, and engage when we are ready to do so in purity, to the glory of God. Then, we also are ready to restore and forgive when they fall short.

- **Charge our children when they are ready to leave –**

1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 *“For you know how, like a father with his children, 12 we **exhorted** each one of you and **encouraged** you and **charged** you to **walk in a manner worthy of God**, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory”*

A powerful tool we have as parents is *commissioning our kids*, especially when we give them the freedom to be released from our direct care. I still remember my dad sitting down when I left for college at 18 years old, telling me I was representing Christ and the Bakker family name, which gave me the challenge to live up to both. The words Paul gave the Thessalonian church meant that he *implored them, comforted them, but also “insisted, ordered, charged, or sent them”* to walk in a manner worthy of God. There comes a time when giving our kids to freedom to move forward with clarity allows them to know that its ok to leave. They are ALWAYS welcomed back, and God can bring them back to closer proximity, but knowing that YOU are ok with them pursuing whatever God desires for them gives them an opportunity to live out His will, not yours.

Training our Parents when Our Kids Actually Do Leave

We cover *“interacting with parents and in-laws”* in our pre-marital counseling, but I’ve always thought that it’d be wise to teach a class for **parents** on how to interact with your grown children. As children leave, get married, become independent adults, the goal is to move from **direct oversight to INFLUENCE, from having control to giving COUNSEL, from being in the game to COACHING**. If we see our role at this level, we not only will maintain HEALTHY relationships, we will have HELPFUL ones as well.

- **CREATE REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS of Interaction** – There are three main sticking points for those who are newly married: money, sex, and in-laws. Often there is too little of the first two and too much of the latter. Young couples need to be proactive in their pursuit of their family, but not to the neglect of pursuing life in Christ outside. Parents need to realize the complexities now involved, with other families, responsibilities, and church family that vie for time, which requires much by way of **communication and giving freedom to your kids TO BRANCH OUT FROM NORMAL TRADITIONS AND INTERACTIONS**. Guilt-tripping kids into coming home is an effective tool but a terrible habit.
- **Make sure your helping does not stunt or hurt** – Helping our kids when they are adults is a joy and a blessing, from baby-sitting to advice to financial gifts. In fact, there are not too many big decisions in my life that I wouldn’t ask my dad’s counsel. However, there should be a **good tension** between helping and letting kids struggle. When we start out with little, we learn to work hard, defer gratification, pull together, create plans, and trust the Lord. When mom and dad step in to bail out or stop the struggle, we can in an unintended way, shortcut their growth and health in their marriage/life. This demands continual evaluation, assessing of motives, and a willingness to say no. Erin and I had the advantage of NOT having parents around, so we HAD to lean on the church in these areas. We want to help our kids out, but not create ways that they do not learn on their own.

- **Give one of the greatest gift to your kids --- at their birth and in leaving** – One of the best gifts we give our kids is that their **mom and dad have a vibrant, loving, caring relationship OUTSIDE of the children.** This starts BEFORE you have kids and is revealed when the kids leave. One of the most sad and disheartening things is watching people who have been married for 30+ years, have raised their kids who are thriving, but it is revealed they do not like each other in their empty nesting state. Or parents will simply follow their kids wherever they go, not having relationships outside of family. This demands that parents **1) pursue one another MORE or PRIMARILY besides caring for children; 2) Must have lives with people and ministry OUTSIDE of their kids.** This not only gives the children a robust expectation, but creates the right kind of separation as they pursue their own families.

Lord willing our little children will become our brothers and sisters in Christ, moving from caring for their lives as they are dependent to having influence as they move toward independence. We take up a role as counselor, coach, and encourager rather than provider and protector. Our children are a **gift** but are not intended to be an **idol or replacement for God in our lives.** We have a responsibility to raise them, release them, and walk beside them. But in the midst of all of this, we continue to pursue Christ and our spouse, knowing that these are primary calls. We must have a life and identity in Christ and His church BEYOND our kids, because those will transcend the time when we'll be primary caretakers of them. In doing this, we will be able to perpetuate the Biblical model of discipleship and family, growing not only healthy families but effective churches.

QUESTIONS!