



# *How to Break Free from Unhealthy Family*

Pastor Mark Driscoll

Leave & Cleave | December 6, 2023

Sermon Link: <https://realfaith.com/sermons/how-to-break-free-from-unhealthy-family/>

Pastor Mark here, a special, special, special, uh, series of conversations with my wife, grace. We've been married faithfully 31 years, and uhm in a series right now leaving Cleave on family systems and how to architect your immediate and extended family to bless your marriage and children for generations. It's basically what to do and what not to do. In addition to the sermons you can find at [realfaith.com/cleave](http://realfaith.com/cleave), I've got a special four-part series with my wife, grace, where we talk about this very practically and share from our own marriage and experience. And so I really hope you enjoy it. And again, you can find all the content including the workbook, along with the sermons, [realfaith.com/cleave](http://realfaith.com/cleave). Cleave VE Well, howdy, uh, mark and Grace Driscoll here with the, uh, real Marriage podcast. And in these series of episodes, we're gonna call them, uh, how to Leave in Cleave. That's what we'll call it. Uh, tell the backstory and then, uh, maybe you could tell 'em a little bit about our family. So, uh, put clips on the internet and every once in a while something really takes off. One really took off and it was on when you get married, uh, he doesn't join her family. She doesn't join his family. They start a brand new family. Uh, the team found various iterations of that clip and posted it. So far over 60 million people have viewed it, which is like Italy. That's crazy. Or France, which is crazy. Yeah. And so, um, apparently it's a major issue, so yeah. It Must be a new concept. Yeah, Apparently it's, it's controversial as well. So I've got a sermon series, happily, uh, never after question mark, the n in uh, parentheses. And uh, the subtitle is How To Leave in Cleave. And then if you go to [realfaith.com](http://realfaith.com), you can find the sermons and also the, uh, leave in Cleave workbook. It's for the couple and for their in-laws, even if their in-laws are acting like outlaws, maybe it could be helpful. So that's kind of the backstory and backdrop. Maybe tell them a little bit kind of about our early years of marriage and now we're in that age where we have a son-in-Law, two daughter-in-laws, two grandsons. And so we're, we used to be the young couple and and now we're the, we're the mature, uh, yes. Parents and in-laws. Yes. Yeah, I mean we, um, this probably would've been an aha statement for us as well, um, when we first got married that you don't join my family and I don't join your family, but we are supposed to be our own family and to leave and cleave we didn't do this well. And I think that's why, um, it does stand out to us with other couples when they're struggling with it. Um, we got married in college. We dated, started dating in high school, got married in college and we came from our, our parents did the best they could do. We all have flaws. We don't, we love our parents. Um, but we didn't have a good concept of what it meant to leave in Cleveland. We first got married and we understood, you know, that the Bible said that, but we didn't understand the depth of the meaning of it. And so, um, I still kinda, we'll talk about some of the terms as we go through the episodes, but I still, um, was enmeshed with my family. I was, um, I still counted on them for certain things. I still went to them first, communicated with them, um, often, more often than I when we First got married. Did you talk to your mom on the phone? Pretty much every day. That's how I remember it. Okay. I know, I know. You remember That. It wasn't, um, we went away to college and so it was expensive back then 'cause you had to pay for minutes and long distance. Um, so I didn't talk to her that, but I, I did talk to her when we would get in arguments, which is a boundary that I needed to have kept. Um, and then I would forget to tell her when we weren't arguing anymore, when we'd resolve things. So it painted a bad picture of Mark. She still adores and loves him, but, um, it just wasn't fair and it wasn't appropriate for me to do that. Um, you had more of the scenario that was different than the opposite of mine. And so I was wrestling with, I don't wanna do that, but I don't know what the other option is. And so as we talk through this, we'll, we'll tell you what the Bible says about all of this And practically how to work it out and how to have a conversation with your spouse, with your in-laws and your extended family. Mm-Hmm. Um, and so we've also got kids that are

married maybe about divulging too much. It's their, you know, life. We don't wanna violate the privacy, but just kind of where we're at and where our kids are at right now. Yeah. We have three that are married and we've had to walk through this very practically with them. And as a mom, um, there is a part that we've talked about from mom that, you know, I'm with them 24 7 raising them with you, but with Them, you're the primary Caregiver. I'm the primary caregiver for 18 plus years, then they move out, go to college, get married. Well, it's this process for me. I'm super proud of all my kids. They're doing incredible walking with Jesus and serving in ministry. I mean, I couldn't ask for any better, but for a mom there is a grieving process of release because you're so used to being in their lives 24 7. And so as they get older and want to differentiate and, and become adults, which is a healthy thing, there is a grieving process in that. But for me, my temptation was to enmesh with them like I had done Over mother Over mother. And so you had to step in at times to help me understand. And we didn't always do that perfectly either. Help me understand. No, they need to learn to grow up, especially The boys. And so I over-served my kids. They didn't know how to do some very practical things when they left home. Um, we've worked through that since then. But, but for the married ones, helping them understand that just a, a really simple concept that we say, if you want us to come over to your house, you can invite us. But we're never just gonna assume and stop by without being invited. They can come to our house anytime they want and they don't have to be invited, but we're gonna give them a boundary. We're gonna allow them to have a boundary with us so that we have to be invited. And we don't take that personally. That's a, an appropriate, healthy way to help them differentiate as their own family and learn the things that took us too long to learn. Well, and it's not just the mom that struggles at releasing, like, I love being a dad. Mm-Hmm. I love everything about being a dad. I, I love each season. The older they got to me, the funner it got. 'cause now they can, you know, feed themselves and go to the bathroom and tell you what they want and jump in the truck and go hang out with dad. I mean, I love all of that. And you know, for me, like growing up with our oldest daughter, um, I adore her and I was the number one man in her life. Mm-Hmm. And then she got married and I became the number two man in her life. And now she's got a beautiful little boy. Um, our grandson, their son. And now I'm the number three man in her life. So I keep getting demoted is what it feels like. And all of a sudden it's like, oh, I used to take her on dates. Now I don't. And I used to, you know, get special time with her and I don't, and I used to get to hang out with her, you know, at night, at home. And now I don't. And so there's a, there's a grief for dad as well. 'cause if you really do enjoy your kids when they leave, yeah, it's a little hard. So the leave cleave comes out of Genesis 2 24. It's something that Jesus quotes, I think in the gospel of Matthew and Mark. And then Paul also quotes in Romans five. So if Moses, Jesus, and Paul say it, yeah, it's you, better we need to do it. Dial it up to a 10. And it's the foundation for marriage. And, uh, leave is pretty obvious. It's emotionally, physically, spiritually, leaving your mother and father, becoming an adult, making your own decisions, paying your own bills. And then Cleve is a little less familiar word. Uh, this is from the King James version. But it means to pursue, to prioritize vigorously. It means I if, if all my energy is I'm, I'm trying to love and be connected to my family, then when I get married I need to reorient and I need to leave my mother and father and clea to my wife. Take all that energy and that passion and that, uh, priority and put it toward the marriage. And that isn't a rejection of your family, but what we say is that now becomes your extended family. Right. And your marriage becomes your immediate family. So even in our culture, we're like, well, that's my family. That's your extended family. This is our immediate family. And I remember we had, uh, we had some conflicts early on in marriage and I kept telling you like, we're a family. I'm your family. Mm-

Hmm. Um, and so one of the ways we dealt with this with our own kids, uh, we, we had, uh, the first couple getting married and I just pulled out a big sheet of paper. I think it was in our dining room. Yeah. Um, I class is always in session with me. There's always a lesson. And I was trying to explain, you know, now that you're getting married, and this was our oldest daughter and now we've had the same conversation with the other kids, and I'll show you what it is. Um, and so usually in a family system, um, let's say there's the husband, I'll do it this way, and then there's the wife. Okay? And now, um, he's got his family. She's got her family. So for me, this would be my mom and dad who are still married more than 50 years and love Jesus and, uh, love them. And then I've got, uh, there's five kids in our family. So then they're married and they've got kids, and now the family's growing. And so this would be, um, maybe my mom and dad are here. And then, um, you know, grace and I are here with our kids and then all of my siblings with their kids. And as the generations grow, if everything is just one family, the point is how do you maintain order and harmony? How do you do the holidays? I mean, all of this becomes a lot of pressure because now the, the newer generations in the family are feeling multi-generational pressure, uh, to keep the family together to do what maybe grandma and grandpa want. And this puts a lot of pain and pressure on a family. And if there's any unhealthy people in that system, it gets oriented around that unhealthy person. 'cause you're tiptoeing and walking on eggshells and trying to manage. And So you bring up a great point, babe. So we're verbal processing this, you get as as it comes. So, um, in the series I'm using, uh, something called the Bowen Family System. And um, there are parts of it I'm not using, but they say that there are three parts to a healthy, this would be my summary, healthy family, there's your individual house. So me walking with Jesus, you walk in with Jesus, both of us having a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. And then there's our interpersonal relationship. But then the third level is the system, the family system. And if the family system is broken, it's hard to have a healthy relationship and it's hard to be a healthy person. And this is a broken, dysfunctional family system. And what this is, this is like people say, uh, we're so glad that you're marrying into our family or the family. And this is where like the, the man's side is like, we're so glad that we're adding a daughter or the wife's side is like, we're so glad we're adding a son. Mm-Hmm. And what that means is there's gonna be people, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews as the family grows, the extended family that are not healthy people. Yeah. There's gonna be some non-Christians, maybe some addicts, maybe some people with trauma or emotional, mental issues. Mm-Hmm. And if you have to do everything with them, it becomes a lot of pressure on all of the families. And it creates a lot of tension. And a lot of that manifests itself with the holidays. Mm-Hmm. Christmas comes, it's like, okay, here's what we're doing. You're like, that's not what we want to do. Birthdays or vacations or birthdays or vacations or what are called nodal events. And so in the family systems theory, nodal events are major events that cause shockwaves for generations. Uh, a nodal event would be adding somebody to the family. You get married or have a baby, it would be removing someone from the family. There's a death or a divorce. A nodal event would be somebody gets cancer and may die or does die, or there is a complete crisis. Or, um, let's say a child, um, becomes a, a very rebellious wayward prodigal. Those are nodal events. And the definition of a family, it's an emotional system, um, that transfers emotions and shares emotions between one another and kind of live under the same skin. And a family is a group of people that spend enough time together that they bond as a unit and they share emotion. So in a dysfunctional family system, it would be impossible if we were just every, you know, Christmas telling all of our children and eventually grandchildren and their spouses, here's what you're doing. 'cause our family, you and me, according to the Bible, I'm the head. Mm-Hmm. Our

daughter and her husband, he's the head of that family. Our son and his wife. He's the head of that family, our other son and his wife. He's the head of that family. Now what I'm doing, I'm, I'm, I'm cutting the men off at the knees 'cause they can't be the leaders and heads of their home and family. Instead there's only one head and it's me. And it's like, no, that's not how this works. So then on your family, you've got your mom and dad, your dad's passed away, and then it would be you and I and then you've got two sisters as well. And so here's what happens. Um, here's the newly married couple, um, newly married couple right here. We'll just make the new newly married couple. So here's the, the hubby and the wife. Here they are, let's say they just got back from their honeymoon. If this side of the family is saying, you're joining our family and this side of the family is saying you're join, you join our family, it puts this couple, this new family in an impossible lose lose situation. And counselors will talk about a double bind. And a double bind is a relational point where you're like, I have two choices. And both of them are a lose. There's no win. This is a broken family system model and it is a lose lose because the poor couple can't join this family and that family. And B, a healthy family. And you also have a role growing up in a family, there's birth order, but there's also a role that you each play growing up. And if you are trying to continue to play that role and be a new wife or a new husband, you can't do all of it. It's not possible. Plus all those people that you would put up even in our family and some families are smaller, some are bigger, but there's over 30 people to try and navigate relationships with, which takes the focus away from a new husband and wife working on what God has for them and their new life together as a family because they're so worried about trying to maintain, Manage the fa extended family, Extended family. And so it doesn't make sense that God would set it up that we don't leave in cleave because then we don't have permission to actually have a new life and a new marriage together and a new family and a new legacy. Especially if there's unhealth in the extended family. So it does make sense that he says to leave, leave your father and mother and leave as one. And so you're becoming one as husband and wife and you can't do that when you're trying to become, when you're trying to manage, you know, 30 other relationships. Yeah. And so we're verbal processing today. We'll hope more in the next episode, but the leave and cleave, the Genesis 2 24 looks like this. Sorry for the penmanship. She's gotta leave and he's gotta leave so that they can cleave. That's what's gotta happen. Yep. So we'll talk about that in the next episode. Thanks babe.