



WHEN SHOULD YOU CUT OFF TOXIC FAMILY?

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Pastor Mark here, uh, special, special, special, uh, series of conversations with my wife, grace. We've been married faithfully 31 years, and I'm 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/cleve, 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/cleve CLE ave. Alright, mark and Grace Driskell here back with the, uh, real Marriage podcast and we're doing a series of episodes leave and Cleave Genesis 2 24. Those two words leave your mother and father so you can cleave with your spouse. They become your extended family and now you are a new family. So, uh, we're gonna deal with cutoff in this episode. Okay. So, uh, back to the handy dandy whiteboard. Uh, get what you pay for. This is a low tech operation. So, um, we looked at, uh, in the last episode, I probably should have you do this. You got way better pen, woman ship than I do in measurement Cutoff. Um, there's tension here and then we'll call this differentiation. We'll hit this in the last episode. So these are the three options, healthy and unhealthy. Uh, when you are going to form a family and you're newly married, or maybe you've been married for a while and you still need to do this, which is what we needed to do after, oh, I don't know, 10 years of marriage. Yeah, we got it wrong. So there's hope. We did it wrong for a long time. Let's talk about too, so enmeshment is where you don't leave your mother and father, you're too financially are emotionally or even physically. You've moved next door or you're living at their house. They're Still borrowing their faith. You're Still, yeah, still borrowing their faith, their money, their car. You're still leaning on them dependent. Don't leave your mother and father. Uh, so you can't cleave to your spouse and have a good relationship. Um, cutoff is where, so what oftentimes happens is if there's total enmeshment and you just, you can't take it anymore. You're like, they call too much. They email too much, they text too much, They ask too many questions, they Ask too many questions. They don't respect our boundaries or privacy. They're demanding to know all of our personal details. They're trying to manipulate emotionally manipulative, they're trying to control our finances. They're trying to divide us. Um, they've now brought the kids in and, and they're, they're saying stuff to the kids and and causing the kids to kind of be the hostages in the negotiation. Um, then it's like, you know what, I'm out. So some families, it's like, it's all or nothing and you do all for a while and you're like, that's it. I'm doing nothing. This is where you move to another country, you move to another state, you block them on social media, you change your cell phone number, you ghost them. You don't respond. You just kind of disappear in one way or another. And, um, and so let's talk about that. Are there times, well, I, I'd say this too. Um, America is a nation of cutoffs. Mm-Hmm. Because most of us, our families moved here and when they did, they literally didn't just leave their mother and father, they cut off everybody and everything. They moved to another nation. Mm-Hmm. And right now what we're seeing is record cutoff where people are literally moving even across the country away from their family. So it's like family dinner isn't a poss extended family dinner isn't a possibility. Getting together for birthdays isn't a possibility. 'cause now it's airplanes. Yeah. So what would be some good, healthy, um, necessary reasons to choose total cutoff and have nothing to do with that side of the family. Uh, abuse. So explain that. Any kind of physical, uh, sexual trauma that is from your previous extended family, um, it's okay to cut them off and move out of that and heal from that and want a healthy future for your husband and you or your wife or you and your kids. Some families, I turn some families, like usually it's a male tragically, but let's say in a lot of families, older male, you know,

molests the children and it's a crime. It should be reported and that person should be prosecuted and convicted. But oftentimes it becomes a coverup because it's family. And so sometimes families operate more like drug cartels and, and mafia. It's like we do evil, but we cover for each other. And if those are the rules of the family system, you're like, I can't raise my kids here. 'cause if something happens, the family won't even, the extended family won't even tell me. And I'm not putting my children in harm's way. It's Literally unsafe. It's Unsafe, yeah. But It's permitted because it's family that's not okay. No. Um, yeah, that is definitely, it's okay to cut off from that. Um, there's also like, even financially and emotionally, if there's a lot of manipulation going on, um, from the extended family and everything has a string attached to it, it's okay to take a season if you've tried to address it and they won't change or honor Yeah. Respect your, uh, boundaries or wishes, then it's okay to take a season and say, you know what, we're not feeling respected in this area and we're trying to build a healthy family. And so we're just, we're gonna take a break for a season. So, and what I'm calling that through here is a temporary timeout. And it's not like we're done forever, but we're done for a while. Mm-Hmm. And if you're not gonna respect boundaries, and this is going too much toward enmeshment and control and manipulation, it's not a healthy system, then what we're gonna do is we're gonna hit control, alt, delete. We're gonna reset the thing and we'd like to reset it as a healthy relationship. Because if we're trying to get to a healthy place, but you keep pulling us there, then we're gonna cut it all off and then take a break and then reset. And sometimes in that evaluation period, you realize you actually, there's more to the dysfunction and unhealth of the extended family that maybe you didn't even process until you took that time out. And so then you may need to actually cut off. If you realize there's not repentance, there's not any kind of acknowledgement of the harm that was done. So I did this for a season. Um, I did six months. There's no magic number. It really is between you and your husband and the Holy Spirit and the Lord directing this season. But I took this because I realized I had trauma in my past. We'd been married for, uh, you know, several years and I needed to take a time out because I couldn't think clearly. Um, I knew there was some bitterness in me. I knew there was some pain and wounding that I needed to work through. I knew there was lies, wounds, lies, vows. And But just to be clear to you, the, the trauma wasn't from your Family. It wasn't from my extended family, it was from outside of that in a previous relationship. But I needed to take time to process that. And I didn't wanna explode at my family in the process while I was, you know, dealing with my bitterness and anger and, and sadness. So I needed to take a break so we didn't, um, cut them off from the kids. 'cause we had the kids at that point. So Mark would arrange with them to have times to still engage in the lives with our kids. Um, but for me, I needed that break so that, because I was having a hard time not going back into youngest daughter, I need to fix this. I need to help with this. I needed to just have a mind space and a heart space and a spiritual space with the Lord to be able to process and fully focus on that. And how, what was it gonna look like for me to go forward as a wife that's focused on the Lord and then my husband and then my kids without trying to act this role that I had grown up in. And so for me, then I sat down with my parents. We had the discussion and I, I repented of some of the things I needed to repent of. And they talked through some of the other things and we were able to reengage differently with some healthy boundaries. But we were able to reengage with them at that point. And so for me, that was what the Lord led us to do. And it created a, a leave and cleve scenario that was way healthier for us from that point going forward. Yeah. And um, and in that too, what if, uh, on a cutoff, like you've got an extended family member that's a criminal. Mm-Hmm, Exactly. Um, you know, what about a extended family member that has an addiction and the family just sort of dysfunctionally codependently works

around it. Um, I know families that did that and they would even bring addicts into their home with daughters in their home. And it was just a dangerous place for the daughters to be raised. They were trying to help the addicts, but that's not appropriate. There's, there needs, there has to be boundaries for safety, let alone emotional wellbeing. Um, not just physical but emotional. And, and some of those families as well. Like, they didn't under, they didn't train the kids how to have appropriate boundaries with anyone. And so then they thought that somehow they were supposed to just do that with people. And You bring something up, honey. So sometimes when you're a, a married couple pre-children, you endure more in meme 'cause you're adults and you have a higher pain tolerance. You start adding children and you're like, no. Yeah. Christmas Uncle Tony always shows up drunk. We're not, we don't allow alcoholics to spend Christmas with our kids. Right. Well, he's the uncle. I don't care. Mm-Hmm. He's not safe. He's not healthy. That's right. And this is not what the environment we want for our kids. Um, you know, this couple shows up and they just have a head-on collision marriage where they're always biting and devouring and attacking and criticizing and snide commenting. Critical scare. And it creates an anxious environment. And then, you know, it's just like when they're in the room, nobody wants to be in the room. Like, well, you gotta do Thanksgiving with them 'cause they're family. No, they're extended family. And I don't wanna spend my Thanksgiving with people that just make me miserable. That's ministry outside of spending time with family. And I don't want my kids to be sitting there thinking that this is acceptable behavior. Um, and so sometimes the cutoff is literally for the wellbeing of the marriage. Sometimes the cutoff is for just the protection and the safety and or just the discipleship of the children. Yes. And the issue is, if these are people that you would not allow into your home or into your holidays, uh, based on their character, why do you make an exception? Because they're a biological relative. And I, I mean, Jesus did this well, and he did it multiple times throughout the New Testament where he would cut people. I mean, think of even how he treated the Pharisees. He would rebuke them and they would walk away. He wouldn't go chase after them. He didn't tolerate their attitude and their critical spirit. And sometimes their demonic spirit. There was other people where he would walk away from them 'cause they weren't teachable and they weren't wanting to accept him. Yeah. So I think you're talking there, isn't it Gary Thomas' book, when to Walk Away. Walk Away. It's a good book. And he talks about, um, I think it's at least 24 times. Yeah. Two dozen times in the gospels where Jesus either walked away from someone forever or let them walk away and didn't pursue them. Like Judas, he let 'em go. Yep. The rich young ruler, he let 'em go. Other people, religious leaders, enemies, critics, he literally walked away. He cut them off. He didn't, uh, meet with them. He didn't tolerate them, he didn't engage them. And sometimes he can think, well, as a Christian, we just need to, we need to never lose a relationship. No. Well, I think we say love is only trying to help someone. Sometimes love is backing away from someone so that they can look at themselves in the mirror and say, I love you, but I'm not gonna tolerate that behavior in front of our family. Yeah. That is the best way to love that person sometimes. And so as Christians, we need to ask God, who is love? How do we love this person? Sometimes it's engaging, sometimes it's disengaging. Well, and it's not just loving the person. Like our priorities are God, spouse, kids, and then extended family. And if somebody in the extended family jumps to jumps to first or second position, you're like, well, I'm loving my relatives, but you're hurting our marriage. Mm-Hmm. And you are harming Yeah. Or weakening our family. Yeah. For your extended family. That's the leave and cleave. It's the reshifting of priorities. Um, another good reason for a cutoff is conversion. Sometimes you get saved and your family is just very opposed to your faith. Yep. And at that point, it's like, if all you're gonna do is attack or critique or you're

gonna, so like, uh, I know of one situation early in ministry, uh, someone I knew came from a devout kind of radical Hindu family got saved, met Jesus. Mm-Hmm. And told their family, I'm a Christian and I'm getting baptized. And the family said, if you get baptized and make a public declaration, we are going to hold a funeral. Mm-Hmm. And the family, the extended family, we'll consider you dead. Mm-Hmm. You're out of the inheritance. You're not welcome at anything. We will never meet your children, our grandchildren. And so they, they dropped it and at that point you have no choice. It's like, well, then I'm going to be cut off. That's right. Because though I love my extended family, my first loyalty is to the Lord Jesus. Mm-Hmm. And, uh, and sometimes too, this is sometimes necessary, um, when you have kids, if you have extended family members that are actively seeking to undermine, um, the evangelism of your own children. Yeah. Like, if you've got some grandpa who's a hardcore atheist, and every time the kids get with 'em, he's trying to attack and deconstruct their faith. It's like, no, you can't grandpa, you, you can love him. You can't do that if you're gonna do that. You can't, you can't, you can't have a relationship with him. Mm-Hmm. Or, um, I know one family, um, it was generations involved in witchcraft and the black arts among the women, uh, one generation gets saved and then the mom and the grandma, when the granddaughter is born, start, uh, grandma starts talking to the granddaughter about witchcraft and spells and, and then starts, you know, sort of putting spells on the family and it's like, no, we're out. Mm-Hmm. You can't put a demonic spirit on the grandchild because you're into the black arts. Like at that point we have to go up. And so, you know, cutoff is something that is very difficult and it has generational implications, but pretty much every family has experienced cutoff because every extended family, there's the family tree and then there's branches that literally got cut off and you're like, we don't know those people. Yeah. Like who's that? Like every family, there's some people you're like, that branch got cut off. We don't know who that is. Oh, just start asking your parents about family history. They'll tell you about some people that you didn't even know were a part of the extended family. So within that, if you're thinking about cutoff, how should you proceed and not proceed to make this kind of a big decision? Well, it's between you and your husband and you need to come to agreement with the Lord about what that, if that is appropriate for this situation. Because if you do cut off, they're gonna try and get one of you to surrender. That's right. They're gonna divide you. Divide you. Yeah. Mm-Hmm. Um, and if you feel like this is what the Lord is asking and you need to keep praying together, that you'd be strong enough to stand firm in that decision and be obedient to that and ask the Lord to continue to show you the fruit of that decision because he will honor it. We've watched it over and over in our own lives and so many marriages that we've worked with through the years. And when they honor what God is asking them so that they can have a healthy marriage, the fruit that comes out of that, and sometimes even the family is led to work on their stuff and they start getting healthy and then years to come, they can start interacting again. There are those scenarios that's Not Yeah. It could be a temporary timeout. Mm-Hmm. If they change repent. Yeah. Reset boundaries. Yep. Or willing to renegotiate kind of the system of the relationship. But you can't cut somebody off just 'cause you're angry. Mm-Hmm. You can't do it out of bitterness or vengeance or haste. And it's such a big decision. Like I said, you gotta take time and pray and seek wise counsel, a pastor, a godly, older, you know, mentor that isn't going to just take your side, a Christian counselor that's filled with the spirit and understands the clinical. And You need to pray against bitterness because you cannot make that decision out of bitterness. That doesn't help them. It doesn't help you. And it's the enemy. He'll get a foothold. Yeah. And that doesn't make you one that makes you divide. And it really does need to be like, if it's my family or family, I need to really come to grips with God is asking me

to do this and it's hard, but if it's the right thing to do, God's gonna honor it. And so I need to be, if it's, you know, my family or if it's the wife's family or the husband's family, you need to be fully on that page because there'll be temptation that comes like a financial difficulty or something happens with the kids and you'll be tempted to go back and Well, can I just, it's just this one time and then you're back into the enmeshment. Well, and then a nodal event. So grandpa dies. Mm-Hmm. Or there's a wedding or a funeral or somebody's in the hospital or a baby is born. You, you've really gotta navigate those. Is there a way off my stool? Is there a way, um, welcome to 53. Um, I think it's funny that you think I almost got hurt. Um, our next episode no fall. Empathy, compassion. No. I, so, um, but within that, you know, all of a sudden it's like, well, did we re-engage? Well, but it, if you re-engage, are you, are you reentering into a relationship that's unhealthy or unsafe? And so those quote unquote nodal events, those big life events, those are very difficult times where you're, you're, you're wondering like, do we maintain this boundary? Right? Do we temporarily move it right? If we move it, are we right back to where we were? It meshed it in a healthy place. So we'll talk about differentiation in the next episode. Now we'll try not to fool off, fall off the stool.