

Successfully Blending Families

by Kurt Bruner, *The Center for Strong Families*

“Did you ever notice how *The Brady Bunch* got just about all their stepfamily challenges worked out in the first episode?” asks Ron Deal of *Successful Stepfamilies*. Ron works alongside a growing number of ministries coaching people to use biblical principles to overcome the challenges of blending their families. Any home in which at least one spouse brings children from a prior relationship knows that it is much harder in real life than it was for the Brady family. That’s why blended families need to add an extra measure of intentionality, including several important steps.

STEP ONE: Recognize a Higher Calling

Even though blended families are becoming a more common family structure, making them work well remains a real challenge due to the extra logistics and emotional landmines that are part of merging two homes into one. The additional challenges you face in building a strong marriage and family make following Jesus’ example of laying down your life for others even more essential. That calling is clear in the letter Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness (Philippians 2:4-7).

Regardless of your circumstances—whether your new family was the result of a death, divorce, or some painful choices—you are called to lay aside your own interests in order to serve those God has placed in your home (Matthew 16:24-25).

STEP TWO: Focus on the Children

Various family experts stress that strong families start with strong marriages—as the relational health of the couple goes, so goes that of the children. That’s not necessarily the priority, however, with blended families. Ron Deal has found that couples must first invest in the children they’ve brought together in order to be able to experience a growing marriage. This is especially true in the

area of establishing authority. Children need parents to exercise legitimate authority over them. Unfortunately, children often see the authority exercised by non-biological parents as illegitimate. When this becomes evident, stepparents are tempted to either bulldoze their way to authority or just leave most of the work to the biological parent. Either of these options leads to greater stress. Non-biological parents still need to exercise an appropriate measure of authority, but they do need to earn respect and not demand it. Ask the Lord to give you an extra measure of patience and humility in dealing with stepchildren—especially when you know they have experienced the pain of divorcing parents or the grief of a deceased mom or dad which can cause long-term emotional trauma.

STEP THREE: Allow God to redeem your story

In Joel 2:25, God says, “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten.” Every stepfamily brings with it the hope for a redeemed life story—the hope that difficult chapters of the past can be followed by better days. Stepfamilies quickly learn that better days don’t appear magically. As they submit to God’s calling and trust His ability to write their stories, however, they find He is still able to make all things new.

GOING FURTHER - Resources

Recommended Books: These two books together provide a solid Biblical framework and practical guidance for helping stepfamilies work to honor God:

The Smart Step-Family by Ron Deal

The Stepfamily Survival Guide by Natalie Gillespie (out of print, but used copies available from Amazon.com)

Recommended Website:

SuccessfulStepfamilies.com offers an exhaustive collection of resources and recommendations as well as an opportunity to sign up for an encouraging complimentary e-magazine.

GOING FURTHER – Church Support

Visit Bellevue's website @ www.bellevue.org for maps which will help you locate this class:

Life Groups – Sunday, 9:30 a.m.

30s-early 40s Couples Blended Families (Osborne) - E373

Bellevue's Care Groups offer support and guidance to those facing life challenges. Over 20 different groups are offered each semester to address many of the issues that face individuals, couples, and families. There is no fee to attend. Some groups have optional curriculum materials available for purchase. Childcare is provided for groups that meet on Wednesday evenings. You do not have to be a Bellevue member to attend. For more information about Care Groups, call (901)347-5830.

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