

THE FAITHFUL BLENDED FAMILY

Families come in all shapes and sizes. In many families, a parent's relationship with their children predates their relationship with their spouse. This presents unique opportunities and challenges for the Believing home to navigate. The dynamic roles of spouses, parents, children and siblings can present themselves in a number of ways. We want to take a moment and introduce you to some concepts that have faithfully guided many blended families through seasons of life, joy, love and faithfulness.

Recognize a Higher Calling

It's easy to see the responsibilities inherent to turning two homes into one: blending traditions, expectations, long and short term plans, thoughts and feelings under one roof. The joyful challenge of learning to function as husband and wife is exponentially increased (in both joy and challenge) by the additional responsibility of children navigating the same bond. In this challenge, however, the key to success is understanding what is at the core of a successful family dynamic: Christ. Jesus' example of laying down your life for others serves as the framework for building one family from what was previously two:

"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

Focus on the Children (After Your Spouse)

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. It's important, here, to understand the difference between priority and urgency. Whereas the marriage-relationship takes priority in a family setting, the children are often the more urgent need, as their reasoning/understanding powers are not yet fully mature. They will require more guidance and care through such an experience as the blending of two families.

Children need parents to exercise legitimate authority over them. Unfortunately, children often have a difficult time accepting the authority exercised by

non-biological parents. When this becomes evident, stepparents may be tempted to either bulldoze their way to authority or just leave most of the work to the biological parent. Either option often leads to stress, anxiety and undue trauma for the children and marriage relationship. Grace and patience are key at this moment. We must be willing to take the time to earn the respect of our step-children, just as we did our biological children. It didn't happen overnight and we aren't starting from the first day of their lives, but we can start now.

We must ask the Lord to give us additional measures of patience, grace and humility. The pain of divorcing parents can bring an additional level of trauma to these precious little souls that can feel like we're walking through mud. Walk faithfully. They're worth it.

Allow God to Redeem Your Story

In Joel 2:25, God says, "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten." Every blended family brings with it the hope for a redeemed life story - the hope that difficult chapters of the past can be followed by better days. Blended families 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 able to make all things new.

GOING FURTHER - Resources

Church Counsel: We have Pastors and Counselors on Church Staff, some of them with blended families of their own, that would love to speak with you, your children, or your entire family to help through this process. Please don't hesitate to reach out so we can serve you through this joyful and challenging experience.

Recommended Books: *Shepherding a Child's Heart* - Tedd Tripp
The Smart Step-Family - Ron Deal