

# BLENDING 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 FamilyLife Blended®.*

Ron works alongside a growing number of ministries coaching families on 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 Both Your Marriage and the Children**

In blended families, parent-child relationships predate the new marriage and are bonded by blood, history, and family identity. As a result, couples often find their marriage is secondary. Long-term family success, however, requires that they make it primary. At the very same time, says stepfamily author and therapist Ron Deal, children need to be reassured of their biological parent’s love and presence as the family begins. Time with each child (or as a sibling group) can help with the transition to having a stepparent (and perhaps, stepsiblings) take their parent’s time and energy. Finding the balance in moving toward children emotionally while at the same time moving toward a new spouse is difficult.

But here's what's most important: While adopting this "both/and" posture, the biological parent must also shift their heart allegiance to their spouse. The couple's relationship must be strong and committed, *till death do them part*, because the marriage must carry the weight of the family integration process. If the family remains child-centric, family members will not become cohesive, and conflict will continue. Putting the marriage at the center of the family also helps position the stepparent to be an added authority in the home (much like a coach or babysitter) who works in cooperation with the biological parent while forming a bond with the children. Stepparents should *connect before they correct* in order to foster trust and respect with children slowly over time.

### **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.

#### **Resources**

- ⇒ ***The Smart Step-Family: The Seven Steps to a Healthy Family*** by Ron Deal  
Provides a solid Biblical framework and practical guidance for helping stepfamilies work to honor God.
- ⇒ ***Saving Your Second Marriage Before It Starts*** by Les & Leslie Parrott  
Prepares couples for what lies ahead and enables them to tackle the challenges with faith, perseverance, and hope.
- ⇒ ***Familylife.com/blended***  
Provides biblically based resources that help prevent re-divorce, strengthen stepfamilies, and help break the generational cycle of divorce.

#### **Watermark Support**

- ⇒ Blended Families – helping connect, encourage, and strengthen blended families as they navigate the unique joys, complex challenges, and new roles as spouse, stepparent, or stepchild. Visit [watermark.org/blended](http://watermark.org/blended)
- ⇒ reengage – offers hope to marriages by helping couples move toward oneness through stories of grace, teaching, and small groups. Visit [watermark.org/reengage](http://watermark.org/reengage)
- ⇒ Divorce Care and Recovery (for adults, children, and teens) – safe, grace-filled environments for individuals and families who have experienced hurt as a result of divorce or separation. Visit [watermark.org/divorcecare](http://watermark.org/divorcecare)

