

## God's Plan for Blended Families

by Moe & Paige Becnel

If you are in a stepfamily (also termed “blended family”) or are related to one, you know that living in that environment can be a bumpy road in life! In fact, a close friend of mine defined his experience as a “roller coaster ride.” The process of blending two families into one is often extremely challenging. There were times when the Becnel’s felt that their family would never function as a real family. As we began the process of blending our new family of 7 people when we married in 1989, we were blind-sided by issues that threatened the future of our new family. The issues we faced were new to us, as they did not exist in our first-time marriages.

When two people marry, they always hope to live happily ever after. For 1st time marriages (nuclear families), the success rate is near 50%. However, when people with children marry a 2nd or 3rd time, or when a person marries a spouse with children, the statistics change significantly. In an article titled, “Getting in Step” in the New Orleans Times Picayune on February 12, 2001, an organization called SAA Families of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century states that the divorce rate of 2nd and 3rd time marriages exceeds 60%.

The high divorce rate in the world in the last several years has led to a very high number of stepfamilies, and the number grows each day.

Why is the divorce rate higher in stepfamilies? A marriage that creates a stepfamily has more dynamics to deal with than a first-time marriage. These dynamics include such things as children from one or both spouses, possible rejection of the step-parent by the children, interference from former spouses, two sets of rules, two types of discipline, many personalities, possible custody or child-support court dates, juggling of children between the natural parents for visitation, and overcoming the “stepmother” syndrome.

Though the statistics were not in our favor, the Becnel family truly blended into a loving family. We have been married for 14 years, and our family members love each other very much, respect each other, honor each other, go to church together, vacation together every chance we get, and enjoy family time together. In fact, we find that we function more as a loving family unit than many nuclear families do.

It was through our prayer time with God that we started to understand the dynamics in our family and the changes that needed to take place to make our family blend. The first thing we needed to understand was that God was on our side. He had completely forgiven us from our past failed relationships, and He wanted to restore our lives and give us (and our children) a loving family environment. From our positive experience, we have written a book entitled, “God Breathes on Blended Families.”

Through our prayer time, we began to realize that our family was divided. There were areas where we were fighting each other rather than working together. Matthew 12:25 describes the shortcomings in families today.

*“Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, ‘every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.’”*

We needed to start identifying the areas of division in our hearts and home. Here are some symptoms of potential divisions in blended families:

- “You discipline yours and I’ll discipline mine” are common statements.
- You only talk prideful of your children, while your spouse only talks prideful of his or her children.
- You have high grace toward your children, but low grace toward your spouse’s children.
- Two sets of expectations, rules and/ or discipline exist in the home.
- You and your spouse cannot come to agreement on one set of rules and discipline.
- Children call the stepparent by Mr. or Mrs. “name”.
- Your one-on-one time with children is only spent with your natural children.
- The term “step” is used in the home (stepfather, stepmother, stepsister, stepbrother).

- You feel like you are raising someone else's children.
- You do not love your new children as your own, nor do you think you can.
- "They have other parents" is your excuse to not treat your new children as your own.
- You think, "My spouse's children do not want me in their life."
- Your grown children are not a vital part of your new marriage.
- Your spouse has grown children, and you do not consider them a part of your life.
- You do not consider your spouse's grandchildren as your grandchildren.

As we began to address the divisions and found agreement, our family began the blending process.

All families can blend, but it takes commitment, love, grace, sacrifice and time. Here are some suggestions discussed in our book that will give hope to stepfamilies:

- ✓ Your family will blend only when you start believing that it can. If you think it will not, it will not.
- ✓ Your family will blend when you highly respect your spouse, stand up for your spouse and "demand" that your children respect your spouse.
- ✓ Your family will blend when the stepparent chooses to love the children as his or her own. When a man or woman marries a person with a child, they are marrying that child too. A parent and child cannot be separated, though many stepparents try ---- and fail.
- ✓ Your family will blend when you avoid using the prefix, "step-". Using this term puts people in a lower category than their natural parent, child or sibling.
- ✓ Your family will blend when stepparents "date" their stepchildren. Just as you spent one-on-one time building a loving relationship with your spouse (their natural parent), begin to build a loving relationship with your stepchildren by spending one-on-one time with them.
- ✓ Your family will blend when you do not try to discipline your stepchildren until you love them as your own. Trying to discipline without love will only lead to resentment and disrespect, which in turn leads to more chaos in the home.
- ✓ Your family will blend when you stop allowing the children's other parent to control or manipulate what goes on in your home. Defend your family against outside interference.
- ✓ Your family will blend when you do not give up trying.
- ✓ Your family will blend when you realize that God is a good God, and is on your side. After all, He wrote "the book" on relationships (The Holy Bible)!

In our book, "God Breathes on Blended Families," we share our heart, our struggles, our failures and our successes with you. We tell you now that blending a family is not easy, and it doesn't happen quickly.

It requires sacrifice. Ouch! We all hate that word.

It requires patience --- Another tough one.

It requires considering all those around you, even children, as more important than yourself.

It requires extending grace --- treating others as God treats you.

It requires setting goals and guidelines for you and your family.

It requires an "adoptive" spirit, which God will provide when you ask.

It requires a positive attitude. Do not expect other's attitudes to change until yours does.

It requires faith that God will breathe on your blended family, just like He did the Becnel family.

It requires prayer. God's breath and voice comes as we spend time communicating with Him.

Becoming a solid blended family requires much from you, Mom and Dad. You must take the lead. It is an investment into your future and your children's future, and the dividends are great!

*Moe and Paige Becnel*

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