

LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BLENDED FAMILIES IN CONFLICT:
ESSENTIALS A PASTOR MUST KNOW

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ABSTRACT

BLENDED FAMILY IN CONFLICT: ESSENTIALS A PASTOR MUST KNOW

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Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013

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The rise of blended families is becoming a prevalent dynamic in our society. According to the United States Census Bureau: American Community Survey, 2009 report, the U.S. is approaching a fifty percent divorce rate. Fifty percent will remarry within three and half years of their divorce. Of these, sixty-five percent will have children from their previous marriage. The church needs to learn to effectively minister to this ever-growing population of blended families. The purpose of this thesis project is to review the issues facing the pastor in ministering to blended families. This study will be completed through research, surveys with blended family members and interviews with the pastors ministering to these families. This thesis project will provide information on the role of the parents; the birth order; co-parenting and the dynamics within the blended family. The information within this project will assist the pastor in counseling and ministering more effectively to such a large population.

Abstract length: 155 words

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As a Youth Pastor, the author noticed that the family structure was changing. The youth were required to write their parents' names on a permission slip. The teens seemed confused whose name to place on the form. As years went by, the words were changed on the form from "parents" to "guardian." The family was no longer just a child and parents but a child and dual-parents. The majority of the children no longer lived in one house but dual houses. This change in the family rapidly changed over time. In the post-war era, public opinion started to change and state legislatures started relaxing the divorce laws. Divorce began to increase in the 1960s, continued in the 1970s and resulted in fifty percent of all marriages ending in divorce in the 1980s.¹ "Divorce became a transitional not a terminal mark in the family cycle."² The following statistics shows that over seventy-five percent that divorced, remarried. Fifty percent of them remarried within three and half years.³

The US Bureau of Census relates:

1300 new stepfamilies are forming every day.

Over 50% of US families are remarried or re-coupled.

The average marriage in America lasts only seven years.

One out of two marriages end in divorce.

75% remarry

66% of those living together or remarried break up, when children are involved

80% of remarried, or re-coupled, partners with children both have careers.

50% of the 60 million children under the age of 13 are currently living with one biological parent and that parent's current partner.

The 1990 US Census stated there would be more stepfamilies than original families by the year 2000

¹ Susan Lanford, *The Church Ministering to Remarried Couples and Blended Families*, *Journal of Family Ministry* 4, no. 2 (1990): 12.

² Ibid.

³ www.stepfamilies.info/stepfamily-fact-sheet.php National stepfamily Resource Center, (accessed April 8, 2013).

The 2000 US Census did not mention stepfamilies. According to the Stepfamily Foundation's estimates more than fifty percent of divorced fathers children visit their children. These children do not legally "reside" with their fathers. So, neither government nor academic research includes these fathers and their children as stepfamilies. They are completely ignored and uncounted. Thus, boosting the numbers to well over fifty percent of US families.

Eighty percent of married women have careers and women are less dependent on the support of the male partner.

Over eighty percent of women who enter into stepfamilies are career women. These women do not have to endure the unexpected rigors of remarriage.

Men who choose to end a marriage also know that career women cost less to divorce.⁴

One of the struggles facing churches today is the fact that the divorce rate in churches is almost the same as society. This means that half of the church membership could be divorced and seventy-five of them could be remarried. Kevin Leman in his book, *Living in a Stepfamily Without Getting Stepped On* writes; "According to the Stepfamily Association of America, about forty-three percent of all marriages now are remarriages for at least one of the adults. About sixty-five percent of remarriages involve children from previous marriages, and thus form stepfamilies. An estimated 15-20 million stepfamilies existed in 1998, and it was projected that one out of every three children in the U.S. will live in a stepfamily before they reach eighteen."⁵

Pastors must learn how to effectively minister to this growing population of blended families in the churches. Being in the ministry for over twenty years, the author has seen this become a great issue in the church. If the church would be honest with itself, many church members are uncomfortable with the blended family. Many Christians look at the blended family as being born, not so much of loss, but of sin – the sin of divorce.⁶ This perception must change if the church is ever to minister properly to the blended family. The blended family is

⁴ Jeannette Lofas, Ph.D. Stepfamily Foundation, <http://www.stepfamily.org/statistics.html#sthash.HdLWMBAB.dpuf> (accessed October 16, 2013).

⁵ Kevin Leman, *Living in a Stepfamily Without Getting Stepped On* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 9.

⁶ Susan Lanford, 14.

still a family and God's grace still applies. The purpose of this thesis project is to educate the pastor about the growing number of blended families in the church and offer some advice on how best to minister to these blended families.

Marriage is understood to be between two people. This may be obvious at first but the more you look at a marriage, more you see it is not a private matter. A marriage is made by God for a man and woman to enjoy. These two individuals come from families, so each family is involved in the marriage. The families make up a community so a community is also affected by the marriage. As the marriage is not just between two people, neither is divorce; it also affects the whole family. If all these people are involved in the marriage, it is critical that the two who came together at first know God originated marriage and clearly understand their role in the marriage.

God is the source of the marriage relationship. He created man and woman to be together.⁷ It is important that couples understand their role in fulfilling this unique relationship that God has ordained from the beginning of time (Genesis 2:18-25). According to the United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009 report, the U.S. is approaching a fifty percent divorce rate.⁸ The church needs to learn to effectively minister to this ever-growing population. The answer for the divorce rate today is found in the covenant relationship between Adam and Eve that was formed by God in Genesis. People want to fall in love with each other but not with God. In order for two people to have the relationship God has intended for them to have, they must include Him in that relationship.

⁷ Genesis 1:27 (All Scripture in this thesis project will be New Kings James Version).

⁸ Diana, Elliot, Tavia Simmons, 2011. *Marital Events of America: 2009, American Community Survey Reports*, AC-13. US Census Bureau, Washington, DC Available at: www.Census.gov/acs/www/downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2009.pdf (accessed July 22, 2013).

The problem in many marriage relationships today is the lack of involving God in the marriage and the role He has in the marriage relationship. Today's society is becoming like the generation that wandered in the wilderness. For forty years they wandered in the wilderness because they did not follow God's word. In Joshua 1:8, God made it plain to Joshua that he must keep the word in front of him daily as he lead them into the promised land. Couples today choose not to take a stance for God because many do not see God as relevant in the relationship. When the Bible is not the standard for the marriage many base their marriage on how they feel about the marriage. If they do not feel like being married then why not get divorced and try again. The Bible speaks out against adultery but if the Bible is not the standard than adultery may not be seen as a problem in a marriage.⁹

A dual career couple has little time to work on their marriage. As a result, many couples compromise their beliefs to fit their lifestyle. Problems arise that when it is time to stand on issues that matter in a marriage, and there is no foundation to stand on. If a couple is to have a growing relationship with God then the Word must not be compromised in the relationship. This notion of the necessity of standing on strong beliefs is really apparent when a family is involved. How can a father who is involved in Internet porn say no to his children about pornography when he is surfing the Internet himself? How can a wife tell the children to listen to their father when she is seeing another man outside of the marriage? Compromising the Word only leads to further destruction of the marriage.¹⁰ How can a father in a blended family teach the child to be true to his commitment, when this same father did not keep his commitment in his previous marriage?

⁹ Dennis Rainey, *One Home at a Time* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, 1997), 150.

¹⁰ Rainey, *One Home at a Time*, 151.

In order to have a strong belief in their marriage, couples must be able to communicate Biblical truths with each other. It is sometimes difficult to accomplish this if one is a Christian and the other is not. The scripture is clear that it is hard for a person to understand spiritual things without the Spirit.¹¹ The foundation for godly communication is having a godly heart. Our society has strayed far from this standard. Marriage is trying to survive in a fallen world. In order for Christian couples to stand by their beliefs, they must find ways to communicate these truths to each other and learn to live by them.

What is a family? According to Genesis, a family starts with a husband and wife. This union has been established from the very beginning of time. Adam and Eve were created to be together in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:22b). God declared that it was not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18) so He made Adam a helpmate. From Adam's side, Eve was made (Genesis 2:22a). This union between man and woman was to be followed for all generations to come. God declares in Genesis 2:24 that a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one. Today, a man is to leave his father and mother. He is to cleave to his wife.¹² He is then to weave his life into her life and become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

God also establishes the order of the family. The woman is to bear children, and the pain of childbearing was the result of Eve's sin (Genesis 3:16). Her desire is for her husband, and her husband is to rule over her (Genesis 3:16b). Adam was to be the provider, yet by the sweat of his face he was to work for this provision (Genesis 3:17). Prior to Adam's sin, God's provisions were his for the taking. From the union of Adam and Eve, Cain was born and the family was established (Genesis 4:1). It did not take long for trouble to enter the family when Cain killed

¹¹1 Corinthians 2:14; "*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" (NKJV).

¹² Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect* (Colorado Springs: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 125.

Abel (Genesis 4:8). This trouble did not stop the family, for as Adam knew Eve, Seth was born (Genesis 4:26). The Scripture says that man called on the name of the Lord again after Seth (Genesis 4:26). The purpose of the family (husband, wife and child) is to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26b).

In order for the family to fulfill this purpose, the roles of each member must be understood. The father is to be the head of the home and the wife the helpmate (Genesis 2:18). The child is to be the obedient heir to the parents of the family. In Ephesians 6:1-2, Paul makes it clear that a child is to honor their father and mother. The problem in a blended family is the child has to learn this principle from two sources. Once the family is together, no one is to separate this union (Mark 10:1-12). This “no one” includes the husband and wife. The two that separated themselves from their first union must now try and create a second union for the family. The greatest danger of the marriage is not intrusion from without but destruction from within.¹³ Trouble in the marriage does not mean that the union was a mistake; it just means that the husband and wife must obey God’s command to “cleave and weave” (Genesis 2:24). In the blended family these roles are still as important yet the implementation of the roles seem to become more difficult to implement. Not only are the roles changed but also the natural birth order is sometimes changed among the children of the blended family.

“The birth order can be defined as the science of understanding your place in the family line”.¹⁴ Each birth order has some personal traits. The first-born is known to be a perfectionist, reliable, conscientious, a list maker, well organized, hard driving, a natural leader, critical,

¹³ Eggerichs, *Love & Respect*, 14.

¹⁴ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order* (Grand Rapids: Fleming Revell, 1998), 14.

serious, scholarly, logical, someone who does not like surprise and loves computers.¹⁵ The second-born or middle child is known to be a mediator, someone who is compromising, diplomatic, avoids conflict, independent, loyal to peers, has many friends, is a maverick, secretive, and is unspoiled.¹⁶ The last-born of the family is known to be manipulative, charming, tends to blame others, is an attention seeker, tenacious, a people person, a natural salesperson, precocious, engaging, affectionate, and loves surprises.¹⁷ The only child is known to be very thorough, deliberate, a high achiever, self-motivated, fearful, cautious, a voracious reader, a black-or-white thinker, uses words like “very”, “extremely”, “exactly” a lot, can’t bear to fail, has very high expectations for him or herself and is more comfortable with people who are older or younger.¹⁸ When looking at birth order, there are many variables to take into consideration. Understanding the birth order may be a science but not an exact science. Some variables include spacing, which deals with the number of years between children. The sex of each child determines if it is not only first-born but also first-born boy or girl. So the family can have two first-borns, a first-born male and a first-born female. A blended family may not change the birth order but how a parent interacts with the new blended family among the birth order is important. From the parents surveyed, 70.6 percent responded that the change in the birth order affected the way they parented (figure 1).

¹⁵ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 15.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

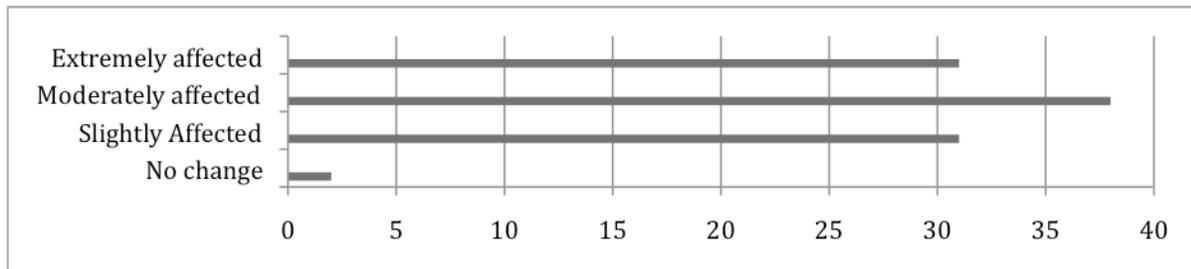


Figure 1. Change in the Birth Order and Parenting

The blended family will be more successful if it has a better understanding of the dynamics of the stepfamily. The surveys revealed that forty percent of the parents found it difficult to communicate issues facing the blended family with their pastor. Another forty percent found it comfortable to communicate and twenty percent found it neither difficult nor comfortable (figure 2). The good news is that sixty percent of the parents found the pastor knowledgeable of the dynamics in the blended family (figure 3).

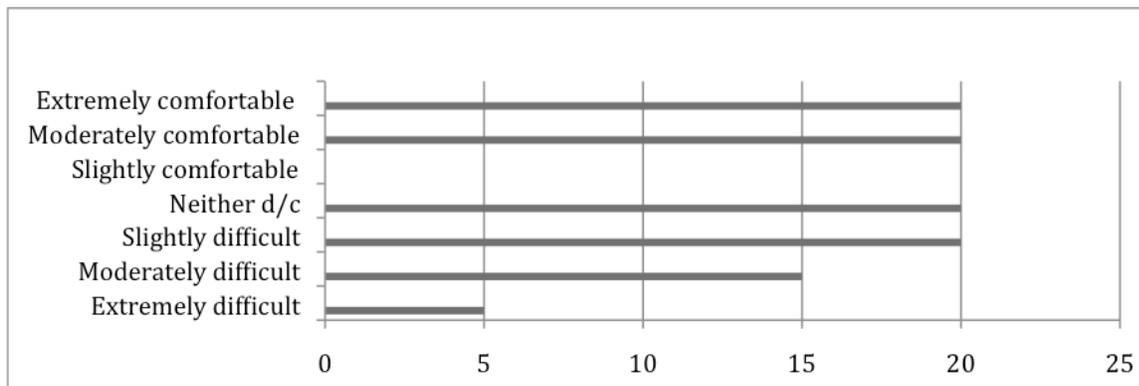


Figure 2. Difficulty communication issues to the pastor

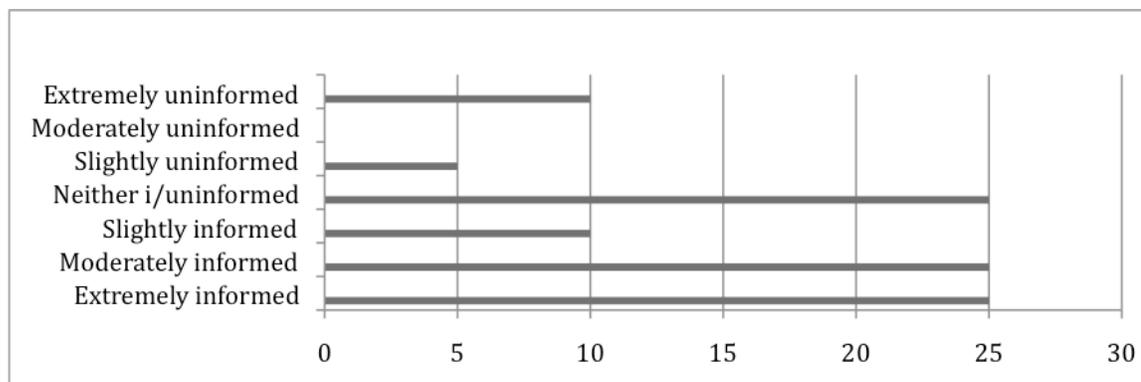


Figure 3. Pastor's knowledge on blended families

When the child is not your birth child in the blended family, conflict will occur. The parent in the blended family may not be the father or mother but they are still the parent in the family. Parenting takes on four basic styles: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and neglectful parenting.¹⁹ An authoritarian parent is a parent who is disengaged with a child. This form of parenting is more of a dictatorship style: “my way or the highway.”²⁰ Authoritative parenting leads the family by using encouragement, give-and-take, and explains reasons for demands and discipline. This form of parenting is more of a benevolent dictatorship.²¹ The permissive parent is enmeshed with the child. This style of parenting “gives in” to the children to meet their needs.²² The authoritarian and permissive parenting styles have consistently been shown to produce children who lack self-control, have poor decision-making abilities, and who struggle with value-centered living.²³ The final parenting style is neglectful parenting, which is being completely uninvolved with kids. Parents who use this style hope that their child turns out

¹⁹ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 111.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

²² *Ibid.*, 112.

²³ Ron Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily: Seven Steps to a Healthy Family* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2006), 147.

for the best. These parents do not have any type of game plan for the family.²⁴ No matter the style used, parenting is a biblical mandate according to Proverbs 22:6 and James 1:5. The goal is for the parents to be on the same page. This can be difficult at times, especially when the husband and wife have come from previous marriages with different ideas on raising children. The common ground approach provides the secure base that is needed for the blended family to flourish. Co-parenting in the blended family is difficult. Of the parents surveyed, 66.7 percent said that co-parenting is difficult, twenty percent said it is neither difficult nor easy and 13.3 percent said co-parenting was slightly-to-extremely easy (figure 4).

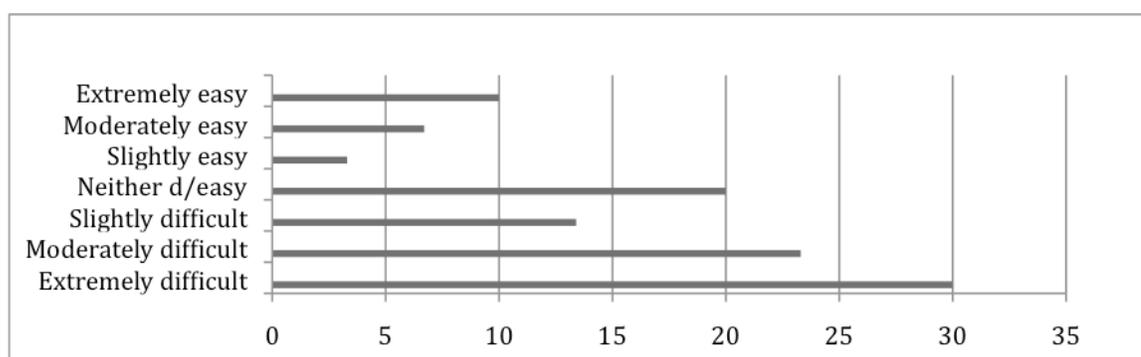


Figure 4. Parenting in a blended family

The Smart Stepfamily by Ron Deal reveals seven steps to a healthy family. He explains that in the seven steps, he takes the reader on a journey to the Promised Land. As Israel had problems and fears along the way, so will the stepfamily. As the Israelites sought to discover who they were, so the stepfamily searches for their family identity in their journey of becoming a

²⁴ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 110.

new family. They must learn to relate to each other, what to expect and how the roles change in the stepfamily.²⁵

Step one is to “Step Up!” In this very important step, the stepfamily must realize that God is a God of second chances.²⁶ Step two is to “Step Down.” Deal encourages the reader to not expect the stepfamily to become a family overnight. It takes several years to form a stepfamily identity.²⁷ Step three is the “Two Step.” The relationship between the husband and wife is the most important relationship in the marriage. This is true in the stepfamily, too. The problem arises when the new couple places the stepchildren before their relationship.²⁸ Step four is “Step in Line.” This step deals with the development of parents working together as a team. The separated parents must move from their previous marital relationship while still maintaining a parental relationship.²⁹ Step five is “Side Step.” This step deals with the common issues facing a stepfamily. In the stepfamily, there is lose of the presence of a dad or mom or some tradition that is no longer followed to deal with. Deal recommends that people wait at least three years before remarrying to deal with the grief that is associated with these losses.³⁰ Step six is “Step Through.” The “Promised Land” takes time to get to, but by building trust in each other, the goal is attainable. When the stepfamily is determined to bring the family together over time, this goal will be accomplished. The family must remember that this will take time and the

²⁵ Ron Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily*, 25.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

celebration may come later in the marriage, as it did with Israel after the wilderness experience.³¹ The final step is “Step Over.” The book ends with stories of successful stepfamilies. Just as God encouraged Joshua to be strong as he enters into the Promised Land, Deal shares stories of those who have made it, so others can know it is possible.³²

The Statement of the Problem

The church today seems to turn a blind eye to dealing with blended families, whose members are sometimes treated as “second-class” citizens. The traditional marriage is between two families. When a divorce happens and the two spouses re-marry, the family ratio doubles. The blended family consists of ex-husbands, ex-wives, and ex-family members. These ex-family relationships become complicated in the blended family. If a person did not follow the Biblical standards in their first marriage, this standard does not change because they re-marry. Once a person is re-married he or she is held to the same standard to make the second marriage work. God is the God of second chances so the new couple needs to seek out spiritual counseling to make their new marriage work. The abandonment of biblical standards has proven to be the downfall of marriages in and out of the church. The pastor must be willing to address this growing issue in the church and this thesis project gives some insight for the pastor who seeks to encourage a re-married couple.

Parenting is also a problem to be addressed in the blended family. Parenting is difficult in a traditional marriage. When you add a blended family into the equation, parenting becomes more difficult. The adults in the blended family not only find themselves in a new relationship with each other but also living different roles as parents. The wife becomes a stepmother to

³¹ Ron Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily*, 93.

³² *Ibid.*, 214.

children that are not her children. The husband must fulfill the role of a father to a child who is not his. The hope is that everyone will get along, yet in reality these new relationships take time. Most of the time a child will have difficulty adjusting to a new set of parents. A stepparent must realize that the child in a blended family is still sensing the absence of his or her first parent relationship. The stepparents must give the child time to adjust. It would be wise for the stepparent to assure the stepchild that no one is trying to take the place of his or her biological parent. The truth is, a stepparent can never take the place of a biological parent because no matter how hard they try, they will never be the mother or father of the child. At best they will become a loving stepmother or stepfather. The blended family also brings with it the adjustment of stepsiblings. Disciplining another person's child is difficult. It is difficult enough in a traditional marriage between the parents and their own children. When you add two additional sets of parents and two sets of children the problem compounds itself. The thesis project will review four types of parental discipline styles. The goal is for both stepparents to be on the same page when it comes to disciplining the children in the blended family. It is natural for a father or mother to show favoritism for his or her child, but in a blended family this can cause major problems.

Another issue to address is the natural order of the family birth order. When two families come together in a remarriage, the whole family is put through the "birth order blender."³³ This not only affects the children but also the parents. An adult who was married to a first-born in the first marriage now must learn to live with a new spouse who might be the last-born of the family. As different as this may be, the child will also be faced with the same problems. The problem arises because the birth order does not change just because two families blend together in

³³ Leman, *The New Birth Order Book*, 17-18.

remarriage.³⁴ The challenge for the blended family is to learn to communicate with each other in the new family while encouraging each other in their natural birth order traits. The birth order of the first-born, middle child and the last-born of the family will be addressed in this thesis project to give the pastor some understanding when ministering to the blended family.

The final question that will be addressed is the role of dual parenting in a blended family. There is the problem of the remarried couple placing the stepchildren before their own relationship. The remarried couple tries to make the stepchildren happier, and in the process make themselves unhappy. Another trap that is found in a blended family is the new parent trying to rush the development of the new family. The development of the stepfamily takes time. It would benefit the new remarried couple to discuss how they will work together to raise and discipline each other's children. If developing a stepfamily takes time then the new couple must learn to span the bridge of time. This thesis project will attempt to give insight to the pastor in helping build these new relationships.

The Statement of Limitation

This thesis is limited to a blended family defined as a couple that remarries and has minor children from a previous marriage. The study is limited to the middle-aged couple with children eighteen years old or younger. There are other blended families that do not fit this definition.

There is the blended family of a different race. This study will not be addressing the issues facing interracial marriages. Another blended family not addressed is the remarriages that involve older adults with adult children. The surprising issue with older children is the conflict they have with their older parent remarrying. This problem will have to be addressed by a different study.

³⁴ Leman, *The New Birth Order Book*, 66-67.

The Theoretical Basis for the Project

Not only is the traditional marriage between a man and woman being challenged today, marriage itself is being challenged. According to the United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009 report, the U.S. is approaching a fifty percent divorce rate.³⁵ Ron Deal reports that over sixty percent of marriages today end in divorce.³⁶ The divorce rate is as high in the church as it is outside the church. The theoretical basis for this study is that the church is already having a hard time addressing marriage in general. When you add the increasing presence of the blended family, the mission of the church becomes more complicated. There are many churches offering marriage classes yet very few if any are offering anything for the remarried couples. The issues within the blended family are not being address in the local church.

One of the main issues in the family is the discipline of the children. The problem is compounded in the blended family. The parent in a blended family has to know how to address the discipline and how to discipline a child that is not his/her own. With the divorce rate on the rise, the issue the blended family faces is that the children need to learn how to adjust to a new family. Since God is a God of second chances, it is important that the church offers blended families a second chance. Within the blended family the children have dual parents. They have two sets of everything. There are two sets of rules, two houses, and two biological parents that no longer live together. Many times the child will experience confusion and frustration as he or she is moved from house to house and parent to parent. The church must come alongside the blended family to offer common ground where the blended family can exist.

³⁵ Diana, Elliot & Tavia Simmons, 2011. *Marital Events of America: 2009, American Community Survey Reports*, AC-13. US Census Bureau, Washington, DC

³⁶ Ron Deal, Focus on the Family, 2013. Available at <http://www.troubledwith.com> (Accessed March 11, 2013).

The challenge of this thesis project is to encourage the church and pastors to minister more effectively to the blended family. The church cannot abandon the cause to save marriage as God has attained it to be yet it must step up the cause in ministering to the blended family. The Bible is clear on the definition of a biblical marriage (Ephesians 6:22-33). This stance must continue but the outreach to the blended family must also be a major concern for the church.

The Statement of Methodology

The church can learn how to reach out to the blended families better by studying how Jesus reached out to those who were perceived as outcasts in society. Jesus was always reaching out to those that society ignored. He reached out to the leper even when the law declared him unclean (Matthew 8:2-3). He spoke to the woman at the well, even when a Jewish man was not to speak to a woman - and a Gentile woman at that (John 4:8). Jesus was found speaking to a woman who had many husbands in the past and was living with another man at the time (John 4:17-18). Due to Jesus' compassion for this woman, she told the townspeople everything that Jesus said to her. What if Jesus had walked away from this woman? Maybe the town would have missed hearing about Him. Jesus was not as interested about her past as He was about her future. This is a great lesson the church could learn in relation to remarried couples. The church must stop treating divorced and blended families as social misfits in the church. The blended family may not be a normal traditional family but it is a family nonetheless. The biblical standard holds true for the blended family and traditional family. Once the blended family is formed the biblical principles of the family can still be applied. The blended family is not an abnormal family but a family, and God can still be glorified.

Chapter two addresses the biblical standard of the roles in a marriage. It is critical that a couple planning to remarry consider their thoughts about the biblical role of the marriage partner. “Marriage sounds great so let’s try it.” The problem with this statement is that many people try marriage without understanding what it is really all about. A person would not get in a car and start driving it unless he or she had received training about how to drive a car. What is the best resource for understanding what a biblical marriage looks like but the Bible? The Bible will help keep the couple focused on what is important in the relationship. There are many worldviews about marriage. If a couple focuses on the biblical view, they will have a better understanding how God views marriage. Many are making a wreck out of marriage because society does not understand what marriage is. It is hard to have a conventional marriage based on a world system as unstable as ours.³⁷ The first marriage ceremony was recorded in Genesis 2. It is here that one finds the divine origin of marriage. Since marriage has a divine origin, it is not a contract between two people but a covenant between a couple and God.³⁸ It is a solemn pledge between two people and before God that affects a whole community.

One of the main responsibilities of the husband in a marriage is to love his wife, as Christ loved the church.³⁹ A husband must be willing to lay down his life for his wife. The issue is that men have a distorted view of the headship in the home. The husband is the leader of the home but he is not the dictator. The man does not deserve any more blessings than the woman. He has no more honor than his wife. Both are sinners and need a Savior (Romans 3:23). God shows no

³⁷ Jimmy & Karen Evans, *Marriage on the Rock* (Ventura: Regal, 2006), 30.

³⁸ Malachi 2:14; “... yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (NKJV)

³⁹ Ephesians 5:25; “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” (NKJV)

partiality (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11). The husband is to live with his wife with understanding.⁴⁰ The man does not have to become an expert on women, just one woman, his wife. The biggest issue for the man who remarries is showing his new wife that he wants a second chance. When children are involved, the man does not have the time he had in the first marriage to develop this bond. In the second marriage he must grow and mature in the blended family, while at the same time parenting.

When a wife knows that her husband is also looking at the marriage as permanent, she feels secure. This is sometimes hard for a man to understand and/or recognize in the marriage setting. When a man is at work and his boss is generous and selfless, he feels secure in his employment. If his boss is overly demanding or selfish, he will lose a sense of security and joy. The husband is not the boss of his wife but the sense of security works the same way. The wife would love to know that her husband cares for her and wants to make sure her needs are being met. She wants to know that her needs are important to her husband. And as a man works harder when he knows that his employer appreciates his work, so will a woman work harder who knows that her husband appreciates what she brings to the marriage.⁴¹ The wife not only wants to know that her husband appreciates her, she also wants him to communicate this to her.

One of the biggest complaints in a marriage is that couples do not communicate with each other. Many times the man is unwilling to listen and stonewalls the woman.⁴² When this happens, the woman feels detached, judged or that her partner is disapproving of her. The stonewaller thinks he is being “neutral,” not negative. He wants to disengage, calm down or

⁴⁰ 1 Peter 3:7; “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding...” (NKJV)

⁴¹ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 129.

⁴² John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1994), 94.

maybe run away.⁴³ When dealing with problems, it is essential to focus on the problem and not the person. When you focus on the person, they become defensive about what you are saying. Defensiveness is almost always a two-way street.⁴⁴

Chapter three is about the birth order within the family. The birth order can be impacted in the making of a stepfamily. The changes may not be extreme but the parents would do well for the family by at least recognizing the shift in the children's role and position within a blended family. When a last-born of the family is "displaced" by a new last-born of the blended family, this can be a dramatic change.⁴⁵ Birth order traits in a blended family do not change because a new order is formed. The first-born will be a first-born, middle will be a middle child and the last-born will still act like the last-born. In the stepfamily it is critical that the parents do not try to make the children into something that they are not. The children in a stepfamily may need to play different roles from time to time, but will still have the traits of their birth order.⁴⁶ This study will provide characteristics of each birth order to help the parent and pastor to better understand how to bring the family together. The study will also give some advice about each birth order and the importance of acceptance of each other's traits.

Chapter four will deal with parenting and discipline within the blended family. *The Smart Stepfamily* by Ron Deal provides seven steps to a healthy family. Each one of these steps will be explored in this chapter. This chapter will also review three styles of parenting: instrumental, socioemotional and biblical parenting.⁴⁷ It is through examining these different

⁴³ John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 168.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 167.

⁴⁵ Ron Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily*, 182-183.

⁴⁶ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 61-62.

⁴⁷ Jack & Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 108.

parenting styles that the parents of blended families will gain a better understanding of discipline. The responsibility falls on the parents to raise the children in the ways of the Lord. In understanding the roles of the home, the father, as the head of the household, must take the lead in discipline (Ephesians 5:22; 6:4). This becomes difficult in the blended family because the parents are disciplining children that are not their own. The challenge is learning to co-parent with an ex-spouse who no longer lives in the same house or does not follow the same rules in disciplining. This study will focus on the styles of discipline that will help in both families.

A Review of the Literature

The review of literature finds the lack of information in regards to the blended family in the United States. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, divorce was on a raise but people did not want to talk about the problem. As the turn of the century, the family structure changed. There are more blended families with divorce over fifty percent. Since there are few books written on the subject of the blended family the Internet becomes a good resource. The church focused so much on saving the marriage; they forgot to deal with the growing issue of the blended family. With today's technology, the Internet provides numerous websites with information about blended families. These websites provide thousands of articles and news releases dealing with the blended family. One of the best resources found on the Internet was Ron Deal's website, www.smartstepfamilies.com. His site provides practical articles, videos, and web links dealing with the blended family. His website is one of the largest resource for stepfamilies and stepfamily ministries. This website also provides stepfamily training from organizations like Focus on the Family, FamilyLife, the Association of Marriage & Family Ministries. Here are a few other websites that the author found helpful in writing this thesis project:

1. www.helpguide.org

This website deals with mental health, healthy lifestyles, children and family, and senior and aging topics. The children and family topics included autism, divorce and remarriage, grandparenting, learning disabilities, parenting and attachment issues. The divorce and remarriage section deals with topics coping with a breakup or divorce; children and divorce; tips for divorced parents; and guide to step-parenting and blended families. Some supporting articles found in these sites dealt with adjustment challenges such as: separation anxiety in children, supporting a grieving person, and grandparents raising grandchildren.

2. www.stepfamily.orcasinc.com

This is a great site for articles and interactive videos on developing skills for stepfamilies. It offers practical solutions to stepfamily challenges. It consists of three categories: Family Challenges, a Couples' Corner and a Topic Finder. Family Challenges use interactive video dramas of common challenges faced by families with children ages 11-15. Couple's Corner consists of articles and activity sheets to help build a stronger parenting team. Topic Finder helps in organizing the search for relevant topics in the program.

3. www.smartstepfamilies.com

This website is hosted by Ron Deal author, speaker, and therapist. Ron Deal is known as a remarriage and blended family expert. This website is full of articles written by Ron Deal on the blended family.

4. www.focusonthefamily.com

James Dobson focus is mainly for the family but it also includes some issues dealing with the blended family and divorce.

5. www.instepministries.com

InStep Ministries is a non-profit organization that provides practical biblical resources, support and counsel to single, divorced and remarried individuals, their families and the churches who minister to them.

6. www.stepfamilies.info

Myths are beliefs that strongly influence the way a stepfamily adjusts in the newly formed family. This site lists eight myths that can be stumbling blocks for the stepfamily.

Myth #1 – Love occurs instantly between the child and the stepparent

Myth #2 – Children of divorce and remarriage are forever damaged

Myth #3 – Stepmothers are wicked

Myth #4 – Adjustment to stepfamily life occurs quickly

Myth #5 – Children adjust to divorce and remarriage more easily if biological fathers (or mothers) withdraw

Myth #6 – Stepfamilies formed after a parent dies are easier

Myth #7 – Part-time stepfamilies are easier

Myth #8 – There is only one kind of family

Books on the Blended Family

In review of the literature, the author found it important to have books dealing with the marriage and blended family. Since the blended family is still a family, the review of literature included books like, *The Case for Marriage*. This book is not about blended family but gives great insight on the family and the importance of staying together. Since one of the myths in a blended family is that it will be better than the first, this book reveals that this myth is not necessarily true. One of the best books found on the stepfamily is Ron Deal's book, *The Smart Stepfamily*. This is a must read for anyone counseling the blended family. Dr. Leman has written several books on the birth order and would be a great resource when trying to counsel the parent and the child. His book *First Born Advantage*, gives a very clear picture of the characteristic of the firstborn. Here are books recommended by the author:

1. *The Case for Marriage* by Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher

There is a price to pay for marriage. If the couple decides to live on one income, then one is dependent on the other. If the marriage fails, then one partner will be more financially vulnerable. This fear causes many to have two career marriages. The problem with this is that the two spouses may become more focused on the safety net than the marriage. The reality is if there is a divorce, the standard of living of the family drops by about twenty-five percent. If there are children involved then the marriage is no longer between two people but a family. A divorce becomes more than a financial matter, it greatly affects the children. What about the kids and when should a couple get a divorce? According to this book, it is not unreasonable for two people to stay together for the sake of the children. If they brought the children into the world, then is it not worth staying together one-third of their life for benefit of the

children? Statistics show that eighty-six percent of unhappily married people who stay married will learn after five years to be happier in their marriage. Permanent marital unhappiness is surprisingly rare among the couples that stick it out.

2. *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* by John Gottman

Dr. Gottman reveals the emotional currents in a marriage and how to detect them. The book highlights the emotional profile of a marriage so you can work on various ways to improve your marriage. The book was written to give the reader a better understanding of how to strengthen a marriage, no matter how bad it seems. It does not say that couples never fight in a marriage relationship, but discusses how they can fight and learn to work out their differences. The way couples fight can be broken down into three basic styles: validation, volatile, or avoidance.

3. *The Smart Stepfamily: Seven Steps to a Healthy Family* by Ron Deal

Ron Deal's purpose for writing this book was to give the reader a healthy picture of a successful Christian stepfamily based on God's instruction manual. He challenges the reader to work smarter and harder at achieving this goal. He believes people can work harder by having a better understanding of the dynamics of the stepfamily, and they can work smarter by making better decisions about how to grow together as a stepfamily. The book lists seven steps to a healthy family. As he explains the seven steps, he takes the reader on a journey to the Promised Land. As Israel had problems and fears along the way so will the stepfamily. As Israelites sought to discover who they were, so the stepfamily searches for their family identity in their journey of becoming a new family. They must learn to relate to each other, what to expect and how the roles change in the stepfamily. In chapter two, Deal gives seven

characteristics that are vital to complete this journey: spiritual integrity, listening and understanding, perseverance, commitment, patience, flexibility and humor.

4. *Preparing for Marriage* by David Boehl et al

The authors of this book give good insight on marriage, whether it is a first marriage or a remarriage. It covers the roles of the husband and wife, and it addresses the issue of personal history, which is very important in a remarriage.

5. *The First-Born Advantage* by Dr. Kevin Leman

Dr. Leman takes an in depth look of the qualities of a first-born. Once a first-born comes to understand his or her personality, they can move forward with confidence to use their first-born skills to their advantage at home, school, work, and in relationships.

6. *Love & Respect* by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs

Dr. Eggerichs offers two acrostics to help understand how a husband and wife show love to each other. For the husband it is COUPLE and for the wife it is CHAIRS.

A husband or wife, no matter if they are in a blended family or not, would do well to follow these simple acrostics.

How does a husband love his wife?

Closeness – Am I always remembering to move toward her and accept her need to talk and connect with me, so as to be reassured of my love?

Openness – Do I share my thoughts with her, and am I sure I'm not resisting her efforts to draw me out?

Understanding – Am I careful not to try to “fix” her every time she talks about one of her concerns or problems? Am I remembering that she is an integrated personality and whatever happens affects all of her, especially her emotions?

Peacemaking – Am I always willing to resolve issues, and am I careful to never say, “Let’s just drop it and move on?”

Loyalty – Do I constantly look for ways to tell her that I will be loyal to her forever – that she’s the one love of my life, the only woman for me?

Esteem – Do I always let her know that I treasure her and put highest value on her as a person? Do I let her know that what she does and thinks are important to me? Does she know I couldn’t possibly do without her?

How does a wife show respect for her husband?

Conquest – Am I always standing behind him and letting him know I support him in his work and endeavors in his field?

Hierarchy – Do I let him know I respect and appreciate his desire to protect and provide for the family and me? What have I said recently to communicate this?

Authority – Have I gone on record that, because he has the primary responsibility for me, I recognize him as having the primary authority? Do I let him be the leader?

Insight – Do I trust his ability to analyze things and offer solutions and not just depend on my “intuition?”

Relationship – Do I spend shoulder-to-shoulder time with him whenever I can? Do I let him know that I am his friend as well as his love?

Sexuality – Do I honor his need for sexual release even when I don't feel like it? ⁴⁸

7. *The Pastoral Counseling Handbook* by Ruth Hetzendorfer

Chapter seventeen deals with the common problems of stepparenting. The author gives steps the pastor can use to assist the parents and children.

The following steps are for the couple as parents:

1. Are the parents aware of what they are saying in front of the children?
Parents must realize that they need to keep adult conversation available only to adult ears. This helps to build unity between the parents and to diminish stress for the children.
2. Evaluate the family dynamic. Help the family set goals for their family dynamic.
3. Identify unforgiving feelings and bitterness the stepparent might have toward the child. This will help promote unity within the family.
4. Make clear distinctions between roles of the parents.
5. Help parents identify a united discipline and guidance system as a couple.
6. Help parents set goals to institute consistency and security for the children.
7. Address the lie that the stepfamily will someday function as a natural family.
8. Insure that the stepparent cannot take the place of a biological parent.⁴⁹

Steps for the Children

1. Determine what areas of unforgiving feelings lay in the way of unity.

⁴⁸ Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect*, 260-261.

⁴⁹ Ruth Hetzendorfer, *The Pastoral Counseling Handbook: A Guide to Helping the Hurting* (Nashville: Beacon Hill, 2009), 218.

2. Look for any area of rejection. Children almost always feel rejected by the parent that left the home.
3. Focus on the children's self-esteem.
4. Evaluate the children's expectations, as realistic and unrealistic. Are the expectations appropriate and attainable?
5. Help the children see the stepparent as an authority figure, not as one who is trying to take the place of their biological parent.
6. Help the child realize that it will take time to accept their life as it is – with a stepparent.⁵⁰

8. *Raising Children in Blended Families* by Maxine Marsolini

This book is written in two parts. The first part takes the reader behind the doors of twelve families. The second part is comprised of articles dealing with the serious issues of childhood grief and abuse, that chips away at the life of the family.

Marsolini lists ten guidelines for smart step parenting:

1. Don't try to be the super parent.
2. Respect the child's other parent, the one who doesn't live at your house. You are not a replacement parent.
3. Don't insist on being called "Dad" or "Mom."
4. The stepparent's role is to come alongside of the birth parent.
5. Don't be selfish with your new partner's time. Parent-child bonding was in place long before the re-marriage.
6. Smart stepparents defer to, not take over, a birth parent's position as primary disciplinarian in their child's life.

⁵⁰ Ruth Hetzendorfer, *The Pastoral Counseling Handbook*, 219.

7. Keep regular date nights on the calendar in your marriage.
8. Do not favor your child over your stepchild.
9. Be willing to talk out family problems with others.
10. Plan fun time for the complete family. A regular dose of good times helps bring balance to the seriousness of the blended family.⁵¹

9. *Christian Counseling* by Gary Collins, Ph.D.

Dr. Collins deals with the Bible and family problems in chapter twenty-nine. In this chapter he reviews four causes of family problems:

1. Lack of interpersonal and coping skills. He labels the lack of these skills as “snag points.” A snag point is when stepfamilies do not know how to share feelings clearly. Another snag point is when families have little closeness. Another snag point is when the rules are unwritten and often unspoken. Another snag point happens when the family history is not spoken or addressed.
2. Lack of commitment to the family. Some career-motivated family member has no problem committing to a company but does not give the same commitment to building the family.
3. Lack of role clarity. The family roles are changing. The old model of one woman married for a lifetime to the same man is an increasingly rare family picture in our culture. Marital instability leads to divorce, remarriage and formation of stepfamilies. It also leads to parent-child role reversals where the child adopts parental behaviors such as caretaking and the parent seeks to please the child or gain the child’s approval. When the roles change and no

⁵¹ Maxine Marsolini, *Raising Children in Blended Families* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 25.

one is addressing the issue, it is hardly surprising that nobody knows what to do.

4. Lack of environmental stability. The problem of the family also comes from outside the home. Society is painting a family in crisis mode. Television and technology have replaced togetherness. These same programs have portrayed a negative view of the family.⁵²

10. *Understanding Stepfamilies* editor, Debra K. Huntley

Kay Pasley, Ed.D. & David Dollahite, Ph.D. writes about the nine R's of Stepparenting Adolescents: Research-Based Recommendations for Clinicians. The nine R's are: Relationships, Resources, Routines, Rituals, Resolution of Conflict, Roles, Rules, Responsibilities, and Reframing.

11. *Blended Families* by Maxine Marsolini

The blended family is not simply ordinary families times two; it is a special kind of family with special needs. This book is written from different families' viewpoints. It is a journey of unconditional love and forgiveness, learning to become one in marriage, and understanding birth order among children. Each chapter ends with questions to apply to the blended family. It challenges the reader to keep a journal of the goals achieved as the family journeys through the book.

⁵² Gary Collins, Ph.D. *Christian Counseling: A comprehensive Guide* (United States: W Publishing Group, 1988), 442.

Scriptural references:

When Satan tempted Jesus, Jesus used scripture to answer his assault (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Satan is against all that God stands for or creates. Since the family was ordained from the beginning of creation, Satan has been trying to destroy it. (Genesis 3:4). We battle Satan daily (1 Thessalonians 2:18). Paul addresses this in Ephesians 6:12-13 when he writes, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

The following scripture list is not a complete list dealing with the family but it will give the pastor a starting point of reference. All scriptures are from the New King James Version:

1. Genesis 2:18, 22 – “And the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” “Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.”
2. Malachi 2:14 – “Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”
3. Matthew 1:25 – “And did not know her till she had brought forth her first-born Son. And he called His name Jesus.”
4. Proverbs 2:17 – “Who forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God?”
5. Genesis 1:27 – “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

6. Genesis 1:31 – “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.”
7. Ephesians 5:33 – “Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”
8. Colossians 3:18 – “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”
9. Colossians 3:19 – “Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.”
10. Colossians 3:20 – “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.”
11. 1 Peter 3:1-6 – “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they without a word may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.”
12. Titus 2:4-5 – “That they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.”
13. Ephesians 5:22-23 – “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.”
14. Ephesians 5:25 – “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.”
15. Proverbs 15:1 – “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”
16. Deuteronomy 6:7 – “You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the day, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

17. Ephesians 6:2 – “Honor your father and mother.”
18. Philippians 2:3 – “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”
19. 1 Peter 3:7 – “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding...”
20. Ephesians 4:26 – “Be angry, and do not sin do not let the sun go down on your wrath.”

CHAPTER TWO

Blended Family

Marriage on the Rock by Jimmy and Karen Evans gives four foundational laws of marriage: the law of priority, the law of pursuit, the law of possession, and the law of purity.¹ God designed the marriage covenant with the intent that this special commitment between a man and a woman would be more important than any other human relationship.² When God said to man to leave his father and mother when he married, this meant that man was to relinquish the commitment to the parents in order focus his commitment to his wife. In leaving the parent the man still honors his parents but his wife becomes first priority in his life. The man is no longer subservient to his parents but is always honoring them.

Marriage is like a house. If it is to last, it needs a solid foundation. The bedrock upon which the foundation of marriage must rest is an unconditional, mutual covenant that allows no external or internal circumstances to ‘put asunder’ the marital union that god himself has established. Covenant is not just an abstract biblical truth; it is the only secure foundation upon which a happy, fulfilling, and permanent marriage can be built. There is no other way to enter into the joy of Christian marriage than by assuming its covenantal obligations. When we commit ourselves to honor our marriage covenants of mutual faithfulness ‘till death do us part,’ then we experience how God is able to unite two lives into one flesh. When a man takes a wife into the covenant of marriage with him, whatever he is, he is wholly hers; he gives himself and that which he has to her.³

God declared that it was not good for man to be alone even in the sinless state of the garden (Genesis 2:18). Marriage is a covenantal promise designed to meet the basic need of companionship.⁴

¹ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, table of content.

² *Ibid.*, 36.

³ Dr. Fred Lowery, *Covenant Marriage: Staying Together for Life* (West Monroe: Howard Publishing, 2002), 61.

⁴ Genesis 2:18; “*And the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”* (NKJV).

The second foundational law of marriage, the law of pursuit, focuses on cleaving to one another. To hold fast to your mate is to communicate the idea of loyalty. The translation of the Hebrew word “*cleave*” means “to pursue with great energy and to cling to something zealously.”⁵ This pursuit takes work. The day you stop working on your marriage is the day your marriage stops working. Marriage is not made during the honeymoon but over a lifetime together. It is not the sexual action that consummates the marriage, but the covenant made between two people. Joseph was married to Mary, yet they did not have sexual relations before Jesus was born.⁶ It is not enough to exist in the same house or share the same checkbook. Marriage can be compared to our own bodies: the muscles in our body grow as we exercise daily. However, when we sit around and do not exercise, our muscles become weak. If the spouse works on loving the other on a daily basis, the relationship will stand a better chance of improving.⁷ As you work on your marriage, it would do the marriage good to remember neither spouse is perfect. We are all a profoundly fallen people who live in a profoundly fallen world.⁸ For the remarried couple, one if not both partners have stopped pursuing their previous spouse.

Since we are fallen, we should show grace when our spouse fails in the marriage. Over the years, a married couple will at times not feel like being married. It is good to remember that the marriage is not based on feelings but rather a covenant. It is through this commitment to the covenant that couples can get through the leaner times of the marriage. It is through the tougher times that the husband and wife are to learn to cleave to each other. When one does wrong, the

⁵ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 48.

⁶ Matthew 1:25; “*and did not know her till she had brought forth her first-born Son. And he called His name Jesus.*” (NKJV).

⁷ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 51.

⁸ Dr. Hawkins, COUN 852 liberty class lecture, 2012.

partner should be quick to repent and forgive. As each learns to forgive and repent, each will be more willing to continue loving and serving each other as they did when they first married. If you commit to pursue your spouse, you will quickly find it is a labor of love that will become more deeply rewarding and not hard, grueling work.⁹ In the blended family, this type of relationship many times involves a former spouse. A remarried person who shares parenting tasks with an ex-spouse has to figure out how to have a working relationship as a co-parent, yet not let the ex-spouse intrude on the relationship of the remarriage.¹⁰ Couple bonding in stepfamilies is different than in a first marriage, as there is a third party involved in the blended family. The first marriage started with just two people developing a relationship. In a blended family, the remarried couple starts with children demanding their attention. These third parties may even be interested in dissolving the bonds between the remarried couple.¹¹

The law of possession is the key to establishing trust and intimacy in the marriage.¹² Genesis 2:24 speak of “two becoming one flesh.” We have learned that the husband and wife are to leave, cleave and ultimately weave to each other. The word “weaves” means to have oneness or intimacy with each other. The marriage is weaved together in that everything that was managed individually is now managed jointly.¹³ Becoming one flesh involves far more than sex. The spouse is to put the interest of the other over his or her own.¹⁴ Today’s society tries to

⁹ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 56.

¹⁰ Lawrence Ganong & Marilyn Coleman, *Stepfamily Relationships* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2004), 77.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹² Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 57.

¹³ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 47.

¹⁴ Philippians 2:3; “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” (NKJV).

sidestep this oneness in marriage through the use of the prenuptial agreement, which allows a way out of the marriage. As a result, oneness rarely will form in the marriage. The point of marriage is not to see if you can make it as a couple, but rather the act of becoming a couple. It is giving of your life to the other and becoming one. When the two become one, then the marriage relationship becomes a primary and permanent relationship.

Genesis 2:25 present one more foundation for a marriage. Adam and Eve were both naked and were not ashamed. A married couple needs to be naked, or open, with each other.¹⁵ There are to be no secrets in a marriage. This is not easy, since we are profoundly fallen people living in a profoundly fallen world. Sin hinders purity in the marriage and each one is responsible for his or her own sin. What happens when one spouse does not meet his or her covenantal obligation? The question is still what will you do to meet the covenant you made to your spouse? Your covenant is not based on what he or she does, but what you do. Being “naked” before each other allows you to learn to meet you covenant obligation and grow in grace with each other. When a marriage goes bad, it is a reflection on the individual’s relationship with God.

God declares marriage to be good, so there is nothing like marriage that will meet our need for companionship. Since God declares marriage to be good, married couples should show respect for each other. One is not giving up their freedom when getting marriage, but is entering in a relationship that God has designed. When one knows the purpose of marriage it will mold the marriage relationship, and the couple will act and live accordingly. The problem with marriages today is that couples are not placing God first in their marriage.

¹⁵ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 74.

92% of all men and women marry by age 50
 43% of first marriages will end in divorce within 15 years
 25% of all men and women report being married two or more times by age 50
 42% of all marriages were remarriages for at least one partner
 Of those who get divorced, 75% will remarry (65% bring children from a previous union)
 60% of those who get remarried divorce again
 15% of remarriages will end in divorce within 3 years, 25% within 5 years, and 39% within 10 years
 The average length of first and re- marriages that end in divorce is about 8 years
 The average time between first divorce and remarriage is about 3.5 years
 54% of women will remarry within 5 years of first divorce and 75% within 10 years
 50% of men who remarry after their first divorce do so within 3-4 years¹⁶

The church must learn to do a better job in encouraging marriage. When a Christian goes through a divorce he or she not only has to deal with the failed marriage but also the broken covenant with God. No one is saying that couples never fight in a marriage relationship; instead the emphasis is on how well they can fight and learn to work out their differences.¹⁷ The way couples fight can be broken down into three basic styles: validation, volatile, or avoidant.¹⁸

Validating couples look at the “we-ness” of their marriage instead of individual goals and values.¹⁹ They share what each other have. The possible drawback to this arrangement is that each person may sacrifice selfhood for togetherness.²⁰

Volatile couples have little interest in hearing each other’s story. They try to persuade their mate that they are correct instead of listening to the other’s side of the story. Winning is

¹⁶ www.stepfamilies.info/stepfamily-fact-sheet.php, National Stepfamily Resource Center, (accessed April 8, 2013).

¹⁷ John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

what is at stake to a volatile couple. During conversations, this type of couple tends to interrupt each other with questions.²¹

Avoidant couples minimize conflicts because they make light of their differences instead of resolving them. They are more interested in sharing common ground in the relationship instead of focusing on the differences in the relationship. The problem with this style is the couple may not realize the conflict until it is too late.²²

To determine the style of a marriage, Gottman supplies a self-test for both partners. There is no right or wrong style. It is important to recognize your style in order to learn to handle conflict better. Regardless of your style, the key is to accentuate the positive without eliminating the negative. Gottman suggest that as long as there is five times as much positive feeling and interaction between married couples as there is negative, the marriage is likely to be stable.²³ Every marriage has conflict. The question is not “will we have conflict?” but “when will we have conflict?” When the five to one balance is not maintained in a marriage, it becomes vulnerable negative forces that can eat away at the marriage.²⁴

The Role of the Husband

One of the main responsibilities of the husband in a marriage is to love his wife, as Christ loved the church.²⁵ A husband is to be willing to lay down his life for his wife. The issue

²¹ John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 42.

²² *Ibid.*, 44.

²³ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁵ Ephesians 5:25; “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for he.*” (NKJV).

frequently found in modern society is that men have a distorted view of the headship in the home. The husband is the leader of the home but he is not the dictator. The man does not deserve any more blessings than the woman, and he has no more honor than the wife. Both are sinners and need a Savior (Romans 3:23). God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34). The husband is to live with his wife with understanding.²⁶ The man does not have to become an expert on all women, just one woman: his wife. In a blended marriage, a husband must not compare his present wife with his ex-wife. This is an area of concern, since the majority of divorced men remarry within three years.²⁷ That allows for only a very short time to deal with losses caused by the ending of the first marriage. It is important that the man lets the kids know that he and his ex-wife will continue to love them and be there for them throughout their lives. It is also equally important that they understand that the new wife is not a replacement mom, but their father's new wife.²⁸ Dr. Eggerichs in his book *Love & Respect* offers the acrostic listed below to help understand how a husband is to show his love for his wife: How does a husband love his wife?

Closeness – Am I always remembering to move toward her and accepting her need to talk and connect with me to be reassured of my love?

Openness – Do I share my thoughts with her, and am I sure I'm not resisting her efforts to draw me out?

Understanding – Am I careful not to try to “fix” her every time she talks about one of her concerns or problems? Am I remembering that she is an integrated personality and whatever happens affects all of her, especially her emotions?

Peacemaking – Am I always willing to resolve issues, and am I careful to never say, “Let's just drop it and move on?”

Loyalty – Do I constantly look for ways to tell her that I will be loyal to her forever – that she's the one love of my life, the only woman for me?

²⁶ 1 Peter 3:7; “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding...” (NKJV).

²⁷ Susan Lanford, “The Church Ministering to Remarried Couples and Blended Families,” *Journal of Family Ministry* Volume 4 (1990): 10.

²⁸ Guide to Step-parenting & Blended Families, “How to Bond with Stepchildren and Deal with Stepfamily Issues” www.helpguide.org/mental/blended_families_stepfamilies.htm#maintaining, (accessed April 22, 2013).

Esteem – Do I always let her know that I treasure her and put highest value on her as a person? Do I let her know that what she does and thinks is important to me? Does she know I couldn't possibly do without her?²⁹

The husband owes his wife at least three things that are expressed in Ephesians 5:23-38.

He owes her leadership because he is the head of the wife. He owes her love because he is to love as Christ loves the church. He owes her loyalty because he is to leave his father and mother and join to his wife. The priority of the marriage is for the man to leave his parents. The permanency of marriage is to join to his wife. The purpose of the marriage is to become one flesh with his wife. In the blended family it is important that the man displays a new sense of love, respect and open communication with his spouse. She should not have to worry that her husband still has an emotional attachment to his ex-wife. When the blended family sees that the husband is emotionally attached to his new wife, this will build security within the new family. It is in complete humility that the man is to lead his wife. He will be held accountable to God for how he treats his wife.

The husband is to be a leader to his wife. God has created her and she has God-given abilities. The husband's role is to come alongside of his wife and help her grow. He is not to make all the decisions in the home, but together with his wife make the best decision for the home. In a healthy marriage both spouses have a balanced sense of identity and belonging, and neither has an excessive dependence upon the other.³⁰

The husband is to be focused on the marriage and his wife. He is to have no other woman in his life. He is not to look at another woman as he does his wife. When a man starts looking outside his marriage, he becomes sidetracked from his responsibilities to his wife. This is true for a husband with his ex-wife. Once he is remarried, his focus is to be with his new wife.

²⁹ Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect*, 260-261.

³⁰ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 101.

King Solomon is an example of a man who lost focus. By the end of his reign he had over 700 wives and 300 concubines.³¹ King Solomon had very little time, if any, to develop intimate relationships with his many wives. Men today can learn a great lesson from King Solomon. We may not have but one wife, but we have many distractions in our lives. The man is so concerned about providing for his wife that he spends too much time at work and subsequently runs out of time for his wife. God has called on man to be one with his wife, not his career. Many men feel that they are doing their family a service by working long hours and sacrificing their time. If a man really searches his heart, he is probably working more out of greed than as a provider. The husband's role is to turn his heart toward God and his family, and to be content with them and give them the rightful place in his life.³²

The greatest gift that a man can give to his wife and family is himself. When a man works at his career more than he should, he thinks he is making a difference; however that difference is at the expense of his family. The greatest difference he can make is with his family. He can change the world one family at a time, starting with his family. Since the purpose of the marriage is to become one flesh with his wife then this is to be his priority. It is through living out this priority that he will fulfill the permanent relationship in which God has placed him. There is no greater calling for a man than to know that he is living out his life with the woman that God has given him to love. To know that you represent God's love for the church every time you love your wife is almost too much to comprehend. It is through Jesus Christ that God has chosen to tell the world that he loves all people and it is through the Christian marriage that God wants to show His covenant love to his people. When a husband realizes this truth, he will

³¹ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 115.

³² *Ibid.*, 118.

be well on his way in living with contentment in his marriage. When a man goes through a divorce and remarries, he is still responsible in keeping his covenant with his new wife. God is a God of second chances. When a man remarries, he is bound to commit to his new wife. This role becomes harder because his life is now divided, and his family is now blended. He not only has to help his family adjust to his new wife, but he has to help his children adjust to the absence of their mother. There will be conflict in the blended family.

The Role of the Wife

In the beginning when God created man, He declared that it was not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). After Adam named all the animals, God created woman. Woman came from the rib of man (Genesis 2:22). She was created to be at his side. She was to be his helper, a suitable helper (Genesis 2:18). A woman's primary ministry is to be a helper to her husband. As such, she balances his inabilities with her own abilities. This is the way opposites attract. The marriage reflects the image of God as your strengths and weaknesses complement each other.³³ The wife's role is to respect her husband continuously.³⁴ A great example of this on going respect is found in Proverb 31. Since God established the man as the head of the household, it is honoring to the wife to respect the position of the husband as the head or leader of the home.³⁵ This respect is to be displayed in her attitude and behavior toward her husband in public. He is to be spoken of in a respectful way. He is not her "old man" but her husband. A man may not deserve this respect if his lifestyle is in question, but God will honor the wife that honors what

³³ William Cutrer & Sandra Glahn, *Sexual Intimacy in Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 170.

³⁴ Ephesians 5:33; "Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." (NKJV).

³⁵ Fred & Brenda Stoeker, *Every Heart Restored: A wife's Guide to Healing in the Wake of a Husband's Sexual Sin* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 153.

He has established. Even when the wife reproves her husband, she is to do so respectfully. Her goal is to always restore her husband to God so he can fulfill his role as the leader of the home.

One word that is misunderstood in today's society is "submissiveness." According to Ephesians 5:22, the wife is to be submissive to her husband. This verse is only understood in the context of verse 21. Both partners are to be submissive to each other. This scripture context encourages the wife to understand her motive when she is out in public. It is not out of vanity or to impress other men, her focus is to be on her husband. This type of respect is to be taught by the older women to the younger generation. A woman is to be discreet, chaste, a homemaker, good, obedient to her husband; and she must not blaspheme the Word of God.³⁶ Paul even tells wives to be submissive to their husbands in the church. In Paul's time the wife was separated from the husband when he would take the family sacrifice to the priest in the temple. The woman was not allowed to enter into the inner court of the temple; it was for Jewish men only. If the wife wanted to speak to her husband in the temple, she had to yell across the court to get his attention. Paul is telling the husband to have his wife wait till she was home to ask him a question. Paul was trying to bring order to the church service. The principle continues that the wife is to submit to the authority of the husband, even in church.³⁷ These verses are not saying that the wife should never open her mouth or have an opinion; in fact, a wise husband will seek out the counsel of his wife. She too has God-given abilities that will benefit the marriage.

It is important to note what submission is not. Submission is not referring to the wife as an inferior creature to the husband. It does not mean a wife should stop trying to influence her

³⁶ Titus 2:4-5; "...that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husband, that the word of god may not be blaspheme." (NKJV).

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; *Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home...* (NKJV).

husband, or give in to his every demand.³⁸ She is not in total submission to her husband because she is focusing on God's design for marriage, not the man's design. If the man is seen as the head of the home, the wife is the neck that helps the head stand strong and proud. By submitting to her husband she is fulfilling the function of the order that God has established. Submission is being willing and ready to renounce our own will and desires for that of another. It is a voluntary attitude of respect and cooperation.³⁹ This is a form of obedience to God, as the wife depends on God's protection, which is spoken of in 1 Peter 3:5-6. Ephesians 5:22 speaks of the wife's submission as a spiritual matter – "as unto the Lord." Her husband will never be Christ, but the wife is to show honor to her husband as she does unto the Lord. One of man's basic needs is respect, and this type of respect will challenge him to live at a higher level for the good of the marriage.⁴⁰

The best way a woman can be the woman her husband wants her to be is to submit to God and His way of doing things. Since God is the one who make the husband and wife, He is the One who can mold the marriage into all it needs to be.⁴¹ Here are several questions for a wife to ask herself about her love for her husband:

1. What are the things/situations that create an impatient unfriendliness in your marriage?
2. How often do you find yourself doing things that you know bother your husband?
3. What would you say causes you to do those things?
4. How would phileo love impact your daily interactions with your husband?
5. While phileo love is a love characterized by fond affection, agape love is a love characterized by unconditional acceptance. Why is it important to have both types of love in your marriage?

³⁸ William Cutrer & Sandra Glahn, *Sexual Intimacy in Marriage*, 176.

³⁹ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁰ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 174.

⁴¹ Susie Davis, *Loving Your Man Without Losing Your Mind* (Ventura: Regal, 2007), 25.

6. How do you give and receive agape love?
7. How do you give and receive phileo love?⁴²

The important part of answering these questions is if the wife is willing to daily give her husband her best or just what is leftover?⁴³ This love is not just a romantic love; it is an everyday love. It involves a wife who shows her respect for her husband when she is with her friends. It is speaking highly about their father in front of the children. It is a wife who delights in having sex with her husband even though he is not in the greatest shape. Real romance survives through thick and thin. This way of loving her husband is a lifestyle. The following acrostic from Dr. Eggerichs book, *Love & Respect* offers some help in understanding how a wife shows her love to her husband.

How does a wife show respect for her husband?

Conquest – Am I always standing behind him and letting him know I support him in his work and endeavors in his field?

Hierarchy – Do I let him know I respect and appreciate his desire to protect and provide for the family and me? What have I said recently to communicate this?

Authority – Have I gone on record that, because he has the primary responsibility for me, I recognize him as having the primary authority? Do I let him be the leader?

Insight – Do I trust his ability to analyze things and offer solutions and not just depend on my intuition?

Relationship – Do I spend shoulder-to-shoulder time with him whenever I can? Do I let him know that I am his friend as well as his love?

Sexuality – Do I honor his need for sexual release even when I don't feel like it?⁴⁴

When a wife looks at her marriage as permanent, then she will invest in making it work. She will get serious about making her husband the main concern of her life.⁴⁵

⁴² Susie Davis, *Loving Your Man Without Losing Your Mind* (Ventura: Regal, 2007), 25-26.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁴ Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect*, 260-261.

⁴⁵ Susie Davis, *Loving Your Man Without Losing Your Mind*, 135.

A woman's four basic needs are security, affection, open communication and leadership.⁴⁶ When a wife knows that her husband is also looking at the marriage as permanent she feels secure. This is sometimes hard for a man to understand in the marriage setting. It is not that he does not understand it is that he just does not recognize it. When a man is at work and his boss is generous and selfless, he feels secure in his employment. If his boss is overly demanding or selfish, he will lose a sense of security and joy. The husband is not the boss of his wife but the sense of security works the same way. The wife would love to know that her husband cares for her and wants to make sure her needs are being met. She wants to know that her needs are important to her husband. As a man works harder when he knows that his employer appreciates his work, so will a woman who knows that her husband appreciates what she brings to the marriage.⁴⁷ The wife not only wants to know that her husband appreciates her, she also wants him to communicate this to her. If the husband wants to see his wife blossom fully, he needs to let her hear how beautiful she is and how much he loves her. In this second need of a wife, if she does not receive it in the marriage she may soon seek it outside of the marriage. For a woman to have to go outside of the marriage for praise is an indictment of her husband.⁴⁸ The wife wants to know that she is admired and respected. She wants to hear that her husband is secure in the marriage and is looking for a long marriage.⁴⁹

The second need for a woman in the marriage is affection.⁵⁰ When a husband shows affection in a non-sexual way, the wife knows that she matters more than to her husband than

⁴⁶ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 128.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴⁹ Lilo & Gerard Leeds, *Wonderful Marriage* (Dallas: Benbella Books, 2008), 47.

⁵⁰ Evans, *Marriage on the Rock*, 134.

just being an outlet for his sex drive. When children are a part of the family, the affection between the father and mother serves as a great model for the children. Security in the marriage has an influence on the family. It is through the example of affection between the husband and wife that the children in a blended family will learn to trust in the family again. Trust takes time, and is not easily given. Stepchildren both fear another loss and experience divided loyalties.⁵¹ Small acts of affection throughout the day will go a long way in the blended marriage.

It is a fact that women communicate more with words than men. Communication is a basic need for a wife and not just a want. In the marriage, the wife is dependant on the husband. God placed the husband as the head of the home, so when the husband communicates what is going on in his life she feels included. Communication is not a one-way street; the wife also needs to share her life with her husband. The husband must remember that this need to communicate is so important to the wife that she will find someone outside the marriage to talk to if her needs cannot be met in the marriage.

The wife looks to the husband for leadership within the marriage since he is the head of the household.⁵² God has not given men the ultimate authority in the home to get their own way. Man has been given this authority in order to have the ability to lead.⁵³ It is his responsibility to create an atmosphere where his wife feels secure. When the wife is secure in her husband's leadership she will be more willing to follow. A wife does not want her husband to be a dominant leader but one who is willing to listen and respect her. A good leader will always find ways to communicate with those he is leading.

⁵¹ Susan Lanford, *Journal of Family Ministry* Volume 4 (1990): 15.

⁵² Evans, *Marriage on a Rock*, 139.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 139

Number One Problem

When a wife ask her husband questions, the husband will do well not to answer with “nothing,” “fine,” or “nothing really.” The woman wants to know details and man wants to tell her just the facts. The man must learn to communicate the whole story. What must a man communicate to his wife? His wife must know that she is first in his life. She must know that he loves her and that he is faithful to her. She must hear that she is the only woman in his life. This can be communicated with or without words. If the man needs to watch dirty movies or other pornographic material, he is telling her without words that she is not enough to meet his desire.⁵⁴ When the man starts watching other women, he will start comparing his wife to what he is seeing. This is very dangerous for a marriage.

Communicating to each other can be difficult, but there is always room for improvement. The husband and wife must find ways to break the cycle of negativity. A very simple way to limit the negativity is to refocus the discussion if it turns negative. One technique is to try calming down before entering into a discussion. Learning to calm down will help prevent unproductive fighting or running away from discussions that need to happen.⁵⁵ It is hard to carry on a normal conversation when your heart is racing out of control. In order to solve the problem, you must communicate with your spouse so take a deep breath and start again.

Since defensiveness can go both ways, taking a non-defensive stance will help to eliminate defensive communication. When one spouse takes the non-defensive stance, the other spouse will not feel the need to defend. By having the courage not to be defensive, your

⁵⁴ Evans, *Marriage on a Rock*, 132.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 176.

marriage will have a greater chance of improving.⁵⁶ Praise and admiration will go a long way in defusing defensive communication. The reality is that there will be bad times in a marriage but the bad times do not cancel out the good times. Each spouse has positive qualities so it is a good practice to focus on these positive qualities when becoming defensive. Many times a defensive attitude is a choice. You can choose to look at what is not in your relationship and convince yourself to have negative thoughts, or you can do the opposite.⁵⁷ For example, you can be upset that your spouse did not clean the house the way you wanted or you can be thankful that he tried to clean the house in the first place. The idea is that each spouse is trying to contribute to the marriage. No two people are the same, and it is good to allow the other to contribute in the best way they can. Instead of looking at what your partner is doing right, there is the tendency to find the negative. Everyone responds better to positive feedback, including your spouse.

Everyone wants to be heard and it is no different with married couples. It is important that each spouse understands how the other feels by validated what the other says. Validation is simply letting your mate know that you understand his/her feelings and consider them valid, even if you do not share the same view.⁵⁸ It is important to take time to talk about things that are important to your spouse. Stay positive in the process, and celebrate what you have in common. Try to keep the criticism to yourself; it is helpful to be tolerant of each other's faults. When you have different ideas about how to do something, find a new solution that you both can live with. Do not come up with a compromise that neither one likes.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 181.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁵⁹ Lilo & Gerard Leeds, *Wonderful Marriage*, 55.

Communication takes practice. It does not happen by simply opening your mouth and speaking your mind. Communicating clearly and honestly involves skills and habits that one needs to learn and practice.⁶⁰ Learning to deal with anger will help in developing good communication patterns for the life of the marriage. There will always be conflict in the marriage. It is really a question of when, not if. Good communication and conflict-resolution skills bring strength and quality to the marriage.⁶¹ Anger is a God-given emotion that warns a person that something is wrong. The solution to conflict is to resolve it quickly.⁶² Conflict can be an opportunity for one spouse to find out what is really bothering the other in the marriage. Marriage involves meeting each other's needs, and when one's needs are not being met, anger follows close behind. Sometimes a spouse will find out the needs of the other simply by listening to each other.

One of the best ways to listen is to put yourself into the other person's shoes. When listening, do not try and justify why you do not feel the way your spouse does. Do not try to fix the problem, just listen. Sometimes a spouse does not want you to fix anything, he or she just want be able to express how he or she feels. The man wants only the short version of the story if he asks for more information this is important to the woman when it comes to communication and listening. It is a good practice to re-state what the other spouse is saying to show them that you are really listening. Defensive listening is major barrier to efficient communication and problem solving because it perpetuates nonlistening and an argumentative atmosphere. The

⁶⁰ Lilo & Gerard Leeds, *Wonderful Marriage*, 91.

⁶¹ Jack & Judith Balswick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 74.

⁶² Ephesians 4:26; "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath... (NKJV).

opposite is also true. True listening promotes cooperation; it shows that the other person has worth to you.⁶³

Knowing each other's communication style can help. Each person has a unique style. The important thing to realize is that there is no right or wrong style of communication. God has made both man and woman, so it is important to embrace the differences and learn to listen to each other. One of the biggest differences between men and women is that men tend to want to fix or solve the problem but women want to express feelings and build a relationship.⁶⁴ A couple will learn to communicate better when they can learn to adopt their style and accept how the other communicates. When you say up front in a conversation that you just want to express how you feel or ask for help, the direction of the conversation can be more easily focused.

Criticism can be a major obstacle in the communication process. Criticism is in play when spouses speak in general terms such as, "You always" or "You never." It is all right to complain but not criticize.

A complaint is specific, limited to one situation. It states how you feel. ("I am upset because you didn't take out the garbage tonight.")
 A criticism tends to be global and includes blaming your partner. You'll often find the word always or never in a criticism. ("You never take out the garbage. Now its' overflowed and that's your fault. I can't ever rely on you.")
 Contempt adds insult to the criticism. It is verbal character assassination in which you accuse your spouse of stupidity, incompetence, etc. ("You idiot, why can't you ever remember to take out the garbage?")⁶⁵

Be as specific as possible when complaining. If you stay focused on the facts of what is upsetting you then it's more likely you will be understood. Speaking to your spouse in a way that does not provoke a negative response will only improve your communication. A great way

⁶³ Madelyn Burley-Allen, *Listening* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 12.

⁶⁴ Lilo & Gerard Leeds, *Wonderful Marriage*, 96.

⁶⁵ John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 189.

to keep from provoking a negative response is to remember that no one has to be right or wrong every time. Some conflicts involve just a difference of opinion, and a healthy discussion is all that is needed. The goal of a marriage discussion is not who will “win” to prove who’s “right.”⁶⁶

Since communication is such an important part of any marriage, especially in a blended family, here are eight recommendations a pastor can focus on to help remarried couples deal with issues facing the blended family. The first recommendation deals with working on the relationships in the blended family. The goal of the pastor is to increase the flexibility between the stepparents-children relationships. Each member has preconceived ideas of how the relationship will be. Most of the time these expectations are based on the previous marriage. The problem is that they are no longer in the previous marriage and many things have changed. If the stepparent-stepchild can learn to trust and be open, the emotional closeness will follow.⁶⁷

The second one deals with the resources of a blended family. Stress is experienced in a blended family as the rules change in the distribution of the resources a parent has to offer the children. After a divorce the single parent may focus more time and affection on the child. During this time, the child is the recipient of most of the parent’s resources. The problem arises when the parent remarries and the time and energy resources have to be divided among the new blended family. Conflict is the result of the limited resources that the child now has to share. The pastor can assist the blended family in time management, finances, and becoming more flexible with everyday resources.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Lilo & Gerard Leeds, *Wonderful Marriage*, 100.

⁶⁷ Debra K. Huntley ed., *Understanding Stepfamilies: Implications for Assessment and Treatment* (United States: American Counseling Association, 1995), 88.

⁶⁸ Debra K. Huntley ed., *Understanding Stepfamilies*, 89.

The third recommendation focuses on the new routine of the blended family. In remarriages, routine is frequently disrupted. In the first marriage, the parents have the longest shared history but in the blended family the longest shared history is blended between parents and children at the same time. Each family knows what their family life is all about and each stepparent and stepchild is an outsider to that system. It is the stepparent that disrupts the routine of the biological parent/child relationship. The pastor's task is to help the blended family examine the routines of the previous families and determine which ones are worth maintaining and which ones maybe less important. It is important that some routine is maintained so there is some sense of continuity. In the blended family there is a lot of loss that has to be dealt with and maintaining some routine will be helpful.⁶⁹

The fourth recommendation is about working with rituals of past and present families. Some healthy rituals will help to enhance a sense of cohesion in the blended family. Developing new rituals can be problematic in the blended family. In one sense it is good to start new rituals that you can call your own, yet in creating new rituals you are communicating the end of past rituals. It is always a good idea to include all the members of the blended family to decide on the new rituals. The pastor can help the blended family explore ways new rituals can be celebrated. The task for the pastor is to create a balance of new and old rituals. This balance can be very difficult to achieve but if all the members of the blended family participate, the results can be promising.⁷⁰

In the area of resolution conflict, the way a parent disciplines may vary from the first marriage. Mothers in a blended family are more authoritarian than mothers in a first marriage

⁶⁹ Debra K. Huntley ed., *Understanding Stepfamilies*, 89.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

family.⁷¹ Authoritarian parenting behaviors, as mentioned earlier in the thesis project, are big on control and lacking in discussion. This parenting behavior can negatively affect a child's behavior. Authoritative parenting behaviors are supportive, supervision and rely on good communication. This behavior is associated with a child's increased well-being. The child's hostility, resistance and coerciveness toward the stepparent often hinder the relationship between the stepparent and the other parent's child. It is this dynamic in the blended family that makes it difficult for the stepparent to be authoritative with the stepchild. Burley-Allen in his book, *Listening: the Forgotten Skill*, offers a good approach to reducing resistance in confrontation situations (Table 1).

It is important to let others know our limits and expectations if we want our relationships to run smoothly. Just as important is being able to express our negative feelings when we are upset about something. The manners in which we handle these situations will strongly influence the results. An I-rational approach can decrease resistance and increase the possibilities of the receiver listening to us. We most often confront people using a you-blaming approach. This you-blaming approach often builds resistance and turns people off. As a result, the listener tunes us out and very little of our message is heard and understood.⁷²

Table 1 Rational vs. Blaming Approach

I- Rational Approach	You – Blaming Approach
1. This approach leads to a win/win resolution, both people feeling the the solution meets their needs	1. This approach usually leads to a win/loss resolution, one feeling victorious, the other defeated
2. A plan of action is developed to achieve the best outcome	2. A plan of action is usually not developed
3. One person discloses something he or she is unhappy about, in the hopes of modifying the other's and his or her own behavior	3. One person discloses something the person is unhappy about to let the other know he or she should change
4. The person is operating from a	4. The person is operation from a

⁷¹ Debra K. Huntley ed., *Understanding Stepfamilies*, 91.

⁷² Madelyn Burley-Allen, *Listening: The Forgotten Skill*, 176.

“OK-OK” frame of reference	“not-OK” frame of reference
5. Confronting that is rational, objective, and not overly emotional	5. Confronting that is overly emotional and dumps feelings
6. The person is aware of his or her nonverbal behavior and the nonverbal clues the other person is sending, such as gestures, postures, facial expression	6. The person is not aware of the importance of the nonverbal aspects of the communication process
7. States message in a nonblaming noncritical manner – no put-downs	7. States message in a blaming, critical, judgmental manner, by name-calling, by stereotyping, or by attacking or threatening
8. Takes responsibility for his or her own feelings: “I feel upset...”	8. Puts the responsibility for his or her own feelings on the other person: “You make me upset ...”
9. Allows the other person freedom of choice to change or not to change his or her behavior – no hidden <i>should</i> <i>must</i> , or <i>ought to</i>	9. Doesn’t allow freedom of choice <i>should</i> , <i>must</i> , or <i>ought to</i> implied nonverbally
10. Observes and states specifically the behavior that is bugging him or her	10. Labels the behavior as good or bad, right or wrong
11. Doesn’t use words that tend to push the other’s hot buttons	11. Uses words such as: <i>you should</i> <i>you ought to</i> , <i>have to</i> , <i>must</i> ⁷³

The pastor must be able to help the child to express his/her negative feelings and thoughts. The children in a blended family have gone through a lot of loss, and those feelings have to be expressed sometime and to someone. If not dealt with properly they usually are expressed negatively toward the stepparent, who is looked on as the outsider. The pastor can also help the stepparents learn to emphasize flexibility in their stepparenting.⁷⁴

⁷³ Madelyn Burley-Allen, *Listening: The Forgotten Skill*, 117.

⁷⁴ Debra K. Huntley ed., *Understanding Stepfamilies*, 91.

It would help the remarried couples for the pastor to communicate the different roles in a blended family. The stepparent role is not the same as the parental role in the first marriage. It is more difficult and less clearly defined. In most blended families the stepparent's expectation is to be less involved in the parenting process, at least for the first couple of years. This varies from blended families but the idea is it will take time for the members in the blended family to adjust to the new order. After a couple of years, the stepparent can take on more of an active role in the childrearing. The more the biological parent and the stepparent communicate, the smoother the transition. The pastor can assist the biological parent and the stepparent through this process. It is important that the pastor helps the remarried couple to remain flexible in adjusting to their new roles because it will take time. If they do not remain flexible they will become frustrated. It is also a good idea for the pastor to communicate these role changes with each member of the blended family together.⁷⁵ It will help the child accept the new roles if they are a part of the process.

It is important for the children to take part in making new rules and understanding the responsibilities that come with the rules. Adolescence is a time of testing limits, boundaries, exploring values, forming identities, and testing and exploration of existing rules and expectations.⁷⁶ If this is a natural reaction for a child then when a stepparent tries to enforce new rules the likelihood of resentment or disobedience increases. This reaction to a stepparent's new rules is usually caused by the child's memory of the way his or her biological parent parented them. The answer to this dynamic is again consistency. The biological parent and stepparent must agree on consistent yet flexible rules. At first the biological parent will handle most of the

⁷⁵ Debra K. Huntley ed., *Understanding Stepfamilies*, 93.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

rules, but as time passes the stepparent and biological parent share in the discipline, rule making and decision-making. In the first couple of years the stepparent can use the biological parent's name in giving direction to the biological parent's children. This will show the stepchild that you are trying to help carry out the wishes of the child's parent and not trying to take the place of their real parent. It is helpful for the parent and stepparent to communicate with each other about when it would be appropriate to relax the rules. This process might increase the stepparent-stepchild bond.⁷⁷ As this process goes on, it will help the remarried couple start to reframe the blended family.

Reframing means thinking about the new family from an adoptive model, rather than a deficiency model (i.e., the blended family does not operate like a first marriage family, then it must be lacking what the first family had).⁷⁸ This thesis project presents the blended family as a family. As the blended family learns what it means to be a new family, it will learn to develop a broader definition of what it means to be a family. Many times this definition will be different than it was with the first family. It is important that during this process of redefining the blended family, the remarried couple remain sensitive to the past and the loss of each family member. When the stepchild is allowed to remember his or her past, they are more accepting of the reframing process. A pastor can help the stepchildren become more receptive to new ideas and roles in the blended family by creatively defining family in the blended family role, rather than to be restricted by a first family ideology.⁷⁹ A pastor can use cognitive therapy in helping the

⁷⁷ Debra K. Huntley ed., *Understanding Stepfamilies*, 94.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

members of the blended family change their thinking about the situation as a means of enhancing understanding and dealing with stress.

Knowing the stages of stepfamily development can enhance the communication between the stepparents. The stepfamily cycles help identify appropriate development milestones in a stepfamily. There are three basic cycles: early stage, middle stage, and later stage.

In the early stage, the task is not to make wholesale changes but to spend time getting to know each other. Stepfamilies usually will remain primarily divided along traditional family lines. In this stage, the pastor can help the stepparent in the role of being a “sounding board, not a savior.” The stepparent must provide support for the biological parent, help enforce the rules of the house and get to know the stepchildren. Stepparents should only make two or three changes at a time. It is important to realize that blending is less effective than compartmentalizing. The stepparent and stepchildren are the outsiders in the stepfamily. It is important to spend adequate one-on-one time building new relationships within the stepfamily. By spending time with the step relationships, the biological parent will be free from functioning as the go-between person.⁸⁰

In the fantasy stage, the stepcouple is looking for a better relationship than the first marriage. Both stepparents love the other couple’s children. The hurt from the first marriage is overlooked “for the moment”. Reality starts to set in during the immersion stage. The children’s issues start to develop between the new couple. Favoritism starts to show up between the siblings. The child starts to look past the new parent (intruder) to his or her biological parent. This can make the biological parent feel connected and needed by his or her child, yet it leads to feelings of rejection and resentment on the stepparents’ part. When there is only one set of

⁸⁰ Debra K. Huntley ed., *Understanding Stepfamilies*, 7.

biological children involved, the biological parent cannot provide empathy or validation for the feelings the stepparent is going through. This begins to cause stress and confusion in the stepfamily relationship. During the immersion stage, the child is affected as much as the adult. Many times the child thinks there is something wrong with him/her. It is in this stage that a pastor can help the stepfamily walk through the fact that divisiveness is a normal consequence of a blended family.⁸¹

As the blended family moves through the immersion stage, the events that cause the hurt and confusion start to become clearer. A pastor can help a blended family move to the next stage, awareness, by completing two tasks: an individual and a joint task. The stepparent frequently feels jealous and inadequate. A pastor can help by showing the stepparent that these feelings are tied to real events such as constant exclusion from family decisions or when the biological parent's child ignores them. The pastor can also help the biological parent to recognize language like "feeling torn" or "trying to please everyone." If a parent knows the stage that the blended family is in, there is a better chance of listening and picking up the language of the other members of the family. The joint task deals with the members of the stepfamily becoming sensitive to each other. The biological parent needs to be aware of how it feels to be excluded and the stepparent needs to realize how the biological parent feels about being torn between child and spouse. During this stage the parents must become aware of the children's feelings of loyalty and loss. They are being divided between the biological parent and the stepparent.⁸²

⁸¹ Debra K. Huntley ed., *Understanding Stepfamilies*, 8.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 8.

The next stage is called the middle stage and consists of two parts: mobilization and action. The mobilization is seen in a major structural shift. The stepfamily starts to adopt some of its own ties. The previous family is still important but the new family is starting to find some common ground on which to function. Because of the communication that took place in the Awareness stage, the stepparent starts to become more vocal. The children in the blended family start to become more open to the changes that take place in a blended family. The need to compete with the other outsider parent decreases in this stage. The action part deals with the blended family taking action to determine how this new family is going to operate. The blended family comes to a consensus on what traditions will be carried from the previous marriage and what new traditions will be started.⁸³

The final stage is called the later stage. This stage consists of two parts: contact and resolution. It is in this later stage that more one-on-one step relationships are formed. The stepfamily starts to focus more on being a family instead of a stepfamily. It is in this final stage that the family finds resolution. They begin to celebrate holidays and family events with less stress. Even though the stepfamily makes it to this final stage the pastor should remind the blended family that stepfamily conflicts could still create the need to revisit an earlier stage.⁸⁴ The good news is that the new stepfamily has more wins under their belt this time around.

Sometimes communication between ex-spouses does not go as planned. The dynamic in the blended family depends greatly on the continued communication with the ex-spouse. For the sake of the children involved, the adults need to make a better effort to keep an open line of communication. Ron Deal gives ten helpful tips in dealing with a difficult ex-spouse:

⁸³ Debra K. Huntley ed., *Understanding Stepfamilies*, 9.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

Dealing with a difficult ex-spouse can be very discouraging and defeating. Yet, we are called to continue trying to pursue good, to “turn the other cheek,” and “walk the extra mile.” Hopefully the following tips can aid you in your efforts to cope—*because it’s all about the children.*

1. **Be sure to notice your own part of the ongoing conflict.** Christian ex-spouses, for example, often feel justified in their anger toward their irresponsible ex-spouse. It’s easy, then, to also feel justified in your efforts to change them in whatever ways you feel are morally or practically necessary. Unfortunately, this sense of “rightness” often blinds good-hearted Christians from seeing just how their own behavior contributes to the ongoing cycle of conflict. Any time you try to change a difficult ex-spouse—even if for understandable moral reasons—you inadvertently invite hostility or a lack of cooperation in return. Learn to let go of what you can’t change so you don’t unknowingly keep the between home power struggles alive.
2. **Stepparents should communicate a “non-threatening posture to the same-gender ex-spouse.** An ex-wife, for example, may continue negativity because she is threatened by the presence of the new stepmother. It is helpful if the stepmother will communicate the following either by phone or email: “I just want you to know that I value your role with your children and I will never try to replace you. You are their mother and I’m not. I will support your decisions with the children, have them to your house on time, and never talk badly about you to the children. You have my word on that.” This helps to alleviate the need of the biological mother to bad-mouth the stepparent or the new marriage in order to keep her children’s loyalties.
3. **Keep your “business meetings” impersonal to avoid excessive conflict.** Face-to-face interaction has the most potential for conflict. Use the phone when possible or even talk to their answering machine if personal communication erupts into arguments. Use email or faxes when possible. Keep children from being exposed to negative interaction when it’s within your power.
4. **Use a script to help you through negotiations.** This strategy has helped thousands of parents. Before making a phone call, take the time to write out your thoughts including what you’ll say and not say. Also, anticipate what the other might say that will hurt or anger you. Stick to the business at hand and don’t get hooked into old arguments that won’t be solved with another fight.
5. **Whenever possible, agree with some aspect of what you ex-spouse is suggesting.** This good business principle applies in parenting as well. Even if you disagree with the main point, find some common ground.
6. **Manage conversations by staying on matters of parenting.** It is common for the conversations of “angry associate” co-parents to gravitate back toward negative personal matters of the past. Actively work to keep conversations focused on the children. If the conversation digresses to “old marital junk,” say something like, “I’d rather we discuss the schedule for this weekend. Where would you like to meet?” If the other continues to shift the conversation back to hurtful matters assertively say, “I’m sorry. I’m not

- interested in discussing us again. Let's try this again later when we can focus on the weekend schedule." Then, politely hang up the phone or walk away. Come back later and try again to stay on the parenting subject at hand.
7. **When children have confusing or angry feelings toward your ex, don't capitalize on their hurt and berate the other parent.** Listen and help them explore their hurt feelings. If you can't make positive statements about the other parent, strive for neutral ones. Let God's statutes offer any necessary indictments on a parent's behavior.
 8. **Remember that for children, choosing sides stinks!** Children don't want to compare their parents or choose one over the other. They simply want your permission to love each of you. This is especially important when the two of you can't get along.
 9. **Wrestle with forgiveness.** Hurt feelings from the past are the number one reason your ex—*and you*—overreact with one another. Do your part by striving to forgive them for the offenses of the past (and present). This will help you manage your emotions when dealing with them in the present.
 10. **Work hard to respect the other parent and his or her household.** For your kids' sake, find ways of being respectable even if you honestly can't respect your ex-spouse's lifestyle or choices. Do not personally criticize them, but do not make excuses for their behavior either.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Deal, "Dealing with a Difficult Ex-Spouse: 10 Tips to Help You Cope," *n.d.*, <http://www.successfulstepfamilies.com/view/117>

CHAPTER 3

BIRTH ORDER AND BLENDED FAMILIES

The birth order within the family can be defined as the science of understanding your place in the family line.¹ Each level of the birth order has some personality traits. The first-born is known to be a perfectionist, reliable, conscientious, a list maker, well organized, hard-driving, a natural leader, critical, serious, scholarly, logical, someone who doesn't like surprises and loves computers. The second-born or middle child is known to be a mediator, compromising, diplomatic, avoids conflict, independent, loyal to peers, has many friends, is a maverick, secretive, and unspoiled. The baby of the family is known to be manipulative, charming, tends to blame others, is an attention seeker, tenacious, a people person, a natural salesperson, precocious, engaging, affectionate, and loves surprises. The only child has his or her own personality traits. The only child is known to be very thorough, deliberate, a high achiever, self-motivated, fearful, cautious, a voracious reader, a black-and-white thinker, uses words like "very", "extremely", "exactly" a lot, can't bear to fail, has very high expectations for himself or herself and is more comfortable with people who are older or younger.² The importance of knowing your birth order is three-fold. First, the family is the most important influence in a person's life. Second, some of the most intimate relationships experienced are in the family. Finally, the relationships in a family are ever-changing.³ When looking at birth order, there are

¹ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 14.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

many variables to take into consideration. Understanding the birth order may be a science but not an exact science. Some variables include spacing, which spacing deals with the number of years between children. The sex of each child determines if it is not only first-born but also the first-born boy or girl. So a family can have two first-borns, a first-born male and a first-born female. Adoption may not change the birth order but how a parent interacts with the new adoption among the birth order is important. The first-born will always have first-born traits, even if an older child is brought into the family through adoption.

The birth order of the parent plays a major role in how the child is raised in the family birth order. A wife who is a first-born may be very critical to her first-born daughter. The first-born father may show favoritism to his first-born son. It is natural that the parent takes on the same traits and notices those traits in their children. The birth order can be impacted in the making of a stepfamily. The changes may not be extreme but the parents would be acting in the best interests of their family by at least recognizing the shift in the children's roles and positions. When a new baby of the family displaces a baby of the family, this can cause a dramatic reaction.⁴ The birth order in a blended family does not change because a new order is formed. The first-born will be a first-born, the middle child will be a middle child and the last-born will still have the personality of a last-born. In the stepfamily it is critical that the parents do not try to make the children be something that they are not. The children in a stepfamily may need to play different roles from time to time but will still have the traits of their birth order.⁵ Before looking at each level of the birth order, there are some issues to consider when working through the birth order of a family.

⁴ Ron Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily*, 182-183.

⁵ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 61-62.

One of these issues has to deal with the parent comparing children to each other in the family. Why does the first-born seem better in school or brighter than the second-born? It is not that one is better than the other; they just have different traits that influence their behavior.⁶ A second trap a parent can fall into is thinking a child is better because one child is brighter or more successful than another. A first-born tends to feel more confident and in control in a family. Part of this is due to the younger children looking up to the first-born. Parents can encourage the differences in the birth order by creating opportunities for the younger children. Siblings do not need to be in competition with each other. Many times the second child is expected to follow in the footsteps of the first-born. A parent must be careful not to encourage the first-born to such a degree that the second-born rebels. Every child wants to belong and if their needs of a secure attachment are not being met, they will try other ways to get the parents' attention.⁷ Every family is different, and the first-born may be the one who gets into all the trouble while the second-born is the angel.⁸

Another issue to address is the spacing of the birth order. Age difference plays a big part in the birth order. The more years there are between children, the greater the probability that each will have traits of a first-born. Children who are seven years or more apart will rarely if ever view themselves as occupying the same developmental territory.⁹ One final issue is the relationship of the first-born with the rest of the family, and the rest of the siblings' perception of the first-born. The first-born had no one to share the parents' love until the second-born came along. There can be some hurt feelings there. The second-born never had the parents alone and

⁶ Angela Miller, *Raising Thinking Children & Teens* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 121.

⁷ Daniel Hughes, *Attachment-Focused Family Therapy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 13-14.

⁸ Angela Miller, *Raising Thinking Children & Teens*, 122.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

has always had to share the parents' affection. The second-born can feel that the parent doesn't love him like they love the first-born.¹⁰ This is an exercise that Dr. Leman used in a parenting seminar that will help give some understanding on the differences in birth order.

I ask all seminar participants to join one of four groups: Only children in one corner, first-born in a second, middle born in the third, and last-born go over in a far corner where they won't bother anyone but themselves. At this point I tell all four groups, "Just chat a bit but remain in your circle." Then I move from one group to another and as casually as possible, I leave a piece of paper in the center of each group, face down, containing identical instructions: "Congratulations! You are the leader of this group. Please introduce yourself to the others in your group, and then have each person do the same. As you talk together, make a list of personality characteristics that you all seem to share. Please start work immediately." I return to the front of the room and all the groups keep waiting for me to give some kind of verbal instructions, but I say nothing. Instead, I pretend to look busy and wait for the "birth order nature" to take its course. Who will pick up the piece of paper first? Almost invariably, a person in the only child and firstborn groups picks up the paper and reads the instructions. Someone in the middle-born group soon follows suit. In no time, three groups in the room are busy with their assignments. The last-born are usually still milling around, their piece of paper lying on the floor unread. I wait a few minutes and make one more announcement: "You have only a few more minutes to finish your assignment. Be ready to report to the rest of the group at that time!" The only born and first-born look up like startled deer and then redoubles their efforts to finish the assigned task. While the middles don't look quite as impressed, they do try to press on toward the finish. The last-born, however, are usually having such a good time they don't even hear what I said.¹¹

In order to address some of these issues one needs to understand the characteristics of the birth order.

First Born

The first-born is thought of as the eldest in the family. This is true; however the first-born is not only the eldest. A first-born son or first-born daughter can have first-born traits. If the children are separated by five years or more can also create a first-born personality. A family

¹⁰ Angela Miller, *Raising Thinking Children & Teens*, 123.

¹¹ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 76-77.

can have several first-borns. Having several first-borns in the family can cause stress on family unity. The first-born is known as outstanding leaders and achievers. The very traits that work for them in work, school or other organizations will often work against them in the close relationships of the family.¹² Just imagine having three leaders among the children's rank and two first-born parents – a situation everyone is telling everyone else what to do. Even more frustrating is being the first-born in the first family but now the baby in the blended family and not being taken serious. For the first-born everything is important. What makes a first-born have these types of traits? With the firstborn everyone in the family (parents, grandparents) usually has a great celebration upon their arrival. This is the first baby and everything is noted, like the first time he or she turns over, the first step, or the first word. There are more pictures of the first-born, more videos of the firstborn. The fourth or fifth child wouldn't make it in the photo album if it were not for the older kids. The parents of first-born have no other child to compare. No wonder the first-born takes on more grown-up characteristics at an early age. All this attention given to a first-born naturally encourages them to achieve. With this high expectation comes the added responsibility that brings added pressure to a first-born. The first-born hears comments like, "I don't care what he did – you're the oldest," or "Couldn't you keep your little brother out of trouble?" "He's smaller than you. You should know better!"¹³ First-born make comments like, "I never got away with that when I was younger." The first-borns naturally are left alone with the younger child when the parents want to get away. Parents would do well not to expect the oldest to be the automatic babysitter for the family. Everyone is looking at the first-born to achieve in something. They are the pacesetters for the rest of the

¹² Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 85.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 90.

children. The first-born has the leadership abilities to take charge, yet may come off as too overbearing or aggressive. Because the first-born is sometimes aggressive, others may view them as being insensitive or selfish. As perfectionists, they are always looking to do the right thing but even when they do the right thing, they are never satisfied. Their passion for excellence could be an underlining fear of not being good enough.¹⁴

The first-born is generally known to be a perfectionist, for whom nothing is good enough. For the perfectionist, it is all or nothing. The problem often arises that they take on more than they can handle. This leads to panic, because of all the obstacles they see ahead of them. As the obstacles grow, the perfectionist internalizes the obstacles and wonders what went wrong. They think, “If only I could have done better.” When the pressure becomes too great, the perfectionist bails out or surrenders to a substandard performance. By this time, it is not because they could have done better but because they ran out of time. Either way the perfectionist is left feeling he or she must try harder the next time.¹⁵ There is a difference between the hopeless pursuit of perfection and the satisfying search for excellence. Perfection is setting goals beyond your reach and excellence is setting goals according to high standards, which are within reach. A perfectionist must accomplish the task at all cost. For the perfectionist does not find value in the task but in himself or herself accomplishing the task. A perfectionist may not understand why the task was completed but someone who strives for excellence learns from mistakes and tries to do better the next time. A perfectionist is only satisfied with being number one, while the person seeking excellence is happy in trying and giving his or her best. A perfectionist does not handle criticism well; while someone who seeks excellence doesn’t like criticism but will embrace the

¹⁴ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 95.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 104 (The Hopeless Pursuit of Perfection chart).

criticism improve. Finally, a perfectionist has to win, while the seeker of excellence does not have to finish first to be content.¹⁶ These perceptions serve to remind the first-born that even though they may strike out the first time, the game isn't over till it's over.

Middle Child

The middle child is a child born somewhere between the oldest and the youngest in the family. It is normal for the middle child to feel left out. They get the hand-me-downs from the oldest and pass them on to the last-born. They never have anything to call their own. They do not get the privileges of the first-born and they don't get away with what the last-born does. One of the difficulties is determining who is the middle child, the second, third, fourth. It could be any of these in the family. Anytime a second-born comes into the family, the life of the first-born changes. One of the problems for a middle child is that the oldest gets all the glory and the last-born gets all the attention. This leaves the middle child feeling left out.¹⁷ Friends become very important to the middle child, since he or she feels out of place or left out in the family circle. The middle child is not the beginning of the family or the end – just the middle. They learn to exist between two ends. Since the middle child must learn to live in the middle, they become good mediators. They did not have the privilege of having Mom and Dad to themselves so they must find ways to get their attention. For the middle child, compromise is important in getting what they need in life. Due to this tendency to compromise, the middle child learns to do without, even when it comes to not having many friends. They are more secretive in their relationships. The problem with this trait is many middle children carry secretiveness into their

¹⁶ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 118-119.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

marriage.¹⁸ Another trait of the middle child is independent. Since the parent focuses on the first-born and last-born the middle child will learn to fend for himself. It is important for the parent to remember that attachment matters, even to the middle child. It is through helping the middle child to regulate his or her emotions and express interest and delight in his or her exploration and accomplishments that the parent shows the middle child matters.¹⁹ This understanding by the middle child leads to an adult who is loyal to their spouse. They grew up compromising, so when they marry they want to make sure everything works out in their marriage.²⁰ Having friends is important to a middle child but keeping them is even more important. However, this need to keep friends can lead to clouded judgment when it comes to keeping a friend. He or she is an independent person who is willing to take risks yet others may see this as stubborn or an unwillingness to cooperate. Compromise is a strong trait that helps in mediation but can be taken advantage by others. Due to this trait, the middle child chooses not to share his or her real opinions and feelings for the sake of keeping the peace. The middle child is secretive and can be trusted with sensitive information yet this secretiveness can cause trouble when they fail to admit when in trouble.²¹

The Last-born of the Family

The last-born of the family learns to live under the shadow of the first born and middle child. The last-born is not taken seriously and is looked on as being the baby of the family.

¹⁸ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 160.

¹⁹ Ruth Newton, *The Attachment Connection* (Oakland: New Harbinger, 2008), 212.

²⁰ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 162.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

They are looked on as affectionate, absentminded, the family clown or entertaining. They also can be rebellious, temperamental, manipulative, spoiled, and impatient.²² The last-born of the family is likable and easy to be around, yet manipulative and a bit unbelievable. He or she seems to stretch the truth a little more than the other children. The last-born of the family is the life of the party yet may come across as undisciplined or one who talks a good game but doesn't produce results. The youngest learns early in life to keep at it until they get their way but later in life this can work against them. For the baby, life is not complicated. They appear to be relaxed and having fun. One drawback to his trait is they may appear to be absent-minded or out of touch with reality. The last-born of the family is entertaining, funny and knows how to get attention. But at times they may appear self-centered or unwilling to give others credit.²³ So what is a parent to do with the last-born of the family? If you are an authoritarian parent, you would say, "Do it my way or else!" If an authoritative parent you would say, "I'd like to have you do it this way because..." If you are a permissive parent you would say, "Ahh, you do it your way, you cute little guy."²⁴ No matter what type of parenting style you use, first and foremost, don't let the last-born of the family get away with breaking all the family rules. As a parent, it is important to realize that the rules for the first-born and middle child did not hurt them and they will not hurt the last-born either. Second, do not let the older children do everything for the baby of the family. Family chores are good for children, even for the one who seems to have everything handed to him or her. Third, do not let the last-born get lost in the

²² Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 168-169.

²³ *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 321.

shuffle. The accomplishments of the last-born are as important as the first-born. Fourth, the last-born of the family likes fun, so parents should use fun to motivate them.

Birth Order in the Blended Family

The idea that opposites attract can be applied in marriage. When a first-born marries a first-born the question is, who will be in charge? If both are perfectionists then someone has to be wrong, and here in lies the problem. First-born couples need to stop trying to improve each other. First-born couples need to stop “shoulding” each other – “you should do this or you should do that.” Finally, they may want to try letting the other partner have it their way.²⁵ When first-born and middle-child marry, the first-born should realize that he or she married a very loyal person. The middle child needs to realize that the one person they should open up to is their first-born mate. This combination would do well to have sit-down discussion time, when they make sure that all is okay in the relationship. The first-born would also do well to go out of his or her way to ensure the middle child is special to them. Remember, that the middle child had to fit in and sometimes felt left out.²⁶ When a first-born marries a last-born, opposites usually attract. The first-born brings organization and goals to the last-born and the last-born helps the first-born have a little bit more fun in life. The first-born must learn to accept the last-born flaws and the last-born needs to work on reducing those flaws. The last-born needs to remember that even the first-born likes to get the attention from time to time. First-borns are organizers so it would be good practice for the last-born to run things by the first-born before doing

²⁵ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 218.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

something.²⁷ When middle child marry a middle child, the result could be a marriage where two people are secretive, and this is not good. Both are compromisers, so neither will make a decision. Both parties need to ensure that the other is precious and needed. Remember that friendship is important to the middle child, so each spouse should be given space for friends. Since the middle child did not experience a lot of respect growing up, each spouse should show mutual respect to each other.²⁸ When middle child marries the last-born of the family, the middle child's compromising ways compliment the last-born's social needs of having his or her needs met. The middle child likes to enjoy friends and include the last-born of the family in the fun. The last-born should not overshadow the middle child by taking all the attention, the middle child has been sharing the limelight all their life.²⁹ The last example is when the last-born of the family marries another last-born. This couple should determine early in the marriage how to handle the finances, because both like to have fun. Last-borns can be manipulators so it is important to guard against selective listening. The most important thing is that since both enjoy life, they can enjoy life together.³⁰

The following tables give a summary of the characteristics of the first-born, middle child and the last-born. This can be helpful as the pastor counsels the stepfamily.

²⁷ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 222.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 224.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 225.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 227-228.

Table 2: Positive and Negative Aspects of Being a First-born or Only Child³¹

First-born Trait	Positive Aspect	Negative Aspect
Perfectionist	Does everything well	Overly critical and dissatisfied with his own performance
Driven	Ambitious, headed for success	Always under great pressure
Organized	Able to stay on top of everything	No room is his life for flexibility
Scholarly	Able to think problems through and solve them	Sometimes thinks too much, is overly serious
List-Driven	Gets things done; knows where he's going	Boxes himself in; becomes a slave to his "to-do" list
Logical	Avoids pitfalls of compulsive behavior	Knows he's right even when he isn't
Leader	Plays an important part in his family, community, etc.	Expected to do too much; always leaned on by others
Compliant	Known as a "good guy"	Known as an "easy mark"
Aggressive	Gets ahead in life; others look up to him	Tends to be selfish and to disregard the feelings of others

Table 3: Positive and Negative Aspects of Being a Middle-Born³²

Middle-Born Traits	Positive Aspect	Negative Aspect
Feels squeezed and rootless	Learns not to be spoiled	May be rebellious because he feels he doesn't fit in
Sociable	Makes friends easily	May make the wrong kind of friends or place too much importance on social activities
Compromising	Easy to get along with	Can be taken advantage of
Compatible	Willing to work things out	May not share real feelings
Mediator	Good negotiator and peace maker	May be willing to have peace at any price
Independent	Entrepreneurial, willing to take risks	Uncooperative, bullheaded or stubborn

³¹ Ronald Lee Beck, "Effective Blended Family Ministry in the 21st Century Church" (D.MIN Thesis, Liberty University, 2009), 87.

³² Ronald Lee Beck, "Effective Blended Family Ministry", 88.

Table 4: Positive and Negative Aspects of Being a Last-Born³³

Last-Born Traits	Positive Aspect	Negative Aspect
Charming	Likeable, fun to be around	Manipulative, maybe a little flaky
People Oriented	Relates well to others	Lacking in discipline, would rather talk than work
Affectionate	Caring and lovable, wants to help	Can be gullible, easily taken advantage of
Uncomplicated	What you see is what you get, seldom uptight	Can be absent-minded or seem like an airhead
Seeks Attention	Entertaining and funny	Can be temperamental, spoiled, or impatient
Tenacious, persistent	Won't take no for an answer	Can paint himself into a corner, see things only "my way"

³³ Ronald Lee Beck, "Effective Blended Family Ministry", 88.

CHAPTER 4

CO-PARENTING

Parenting

Today's society teaches the parents that they need to seek professionals to help them raise their children. Seeking such help presents a problem only if the parents think they are not capable of learning to care for their child on their own. Each child is different, and unique in its own way. Problems arise when the parents begin to second-guess their own judgment about raising their child.¹ The Bible gives a good model to follow in raising a child. A new infant is dependant on others, who will model, teach and discipline them in this process of growth. The human development process follows a similar progression from dependency and infancy on toward maturity and adulthood.² This process requires a parent/child relationship that is not developed out of a How-To manual on raising a child, but in living together and experiencing life together as a family. Raising a child takes time. Children will learn from their family surroundings. If they live with criticism, they learn to condemn. If they live with ridicule, they learn to be shy. They live with shame and they learn to feel guilty. With encouragement, they learn to be confident. If they live with approval, they learn to like themselves. The best training a child can receive is watching their parents living a Godly life for them to follow. Parents are prone to give their child everything except the one thing they need the most, and that is time. They need time for the parent to listen and understand. They need time to interact and learn

¹ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 104.

² Ibid.

interpersonal skills from the parent. There are several styles of parenting, such as instrumental, socioemotional and biblical parenting.³

Instrumental parenting has four components: neglecting, teaching, modeling, and discipling.⁴ A neglecting parent gives no direction verbally or by example. The child is on his or her own to latch on to any social norm or form of behavior. The child is left to learn by trial and error. The problem with this style is that everyone wants to belong to something. If a child does not have the guidance from his or her parents then they will have to decide on their own what is right for themselves. In this parenting style, there is no support system to help the child make correct decisions. The sad part of this parenting style occurs when a child who does not find acceptance and guidance within the home seeks it outside the home. A child wants to belong somewhere and will seek a sense of belonging out.

In the teaching component, the parent is quick to tell the child what to do, but slow in living by example what they are teaching. They abide by the old saying, “Do as I say, not as I do.” The child feels like he or she is being preached at in this component. This style is effective only in the short-term. As the child matures, he or she sees the differences in what the parent is saying and how the parent’s life does not match what they are teaching them. The child starts to become disrespectful to their parents because the parents seem hypocritical.⁵

The modeling style is a little better than teaching, in that the child at least sees how to live correctly. The problem with this style is that there is very little instruction from the parent to the child on how to live this example. It is like the Christian who thinks that all they have to do

³ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 108.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 109.

is “let my light shine” for others to accept Christ. They are modeling the Christian life, but speak very little instructions on how to live the Christian life. Modeling is good way to teach a child but it can be improved with some instructions on how to live the lifestyle being taught. The problem with this parenting style is that the child sees the end result of the parent’s life without understanding the struggles they had to go through to get there.

The final component is called discipling. In this mode, the parent teaches the child by word and by deed.⁶ The parent who uses this style not only lives the lifestyle they want for their child, they also instruct the child along the way. Jesus modeled this style with His disciples as He walked with them, teaching and serving others. The child will benefit, when their parents realize that God has given the child to them and it is their responsibility to disciple and train their children. The task is not a chore but a responsibility of the parents. It is not the parents’ responsibility to only discipline their children, but they also to make disciples of them. They are to model this style as they walk with their children, teaching and serving others (Appendix One).

Socioemotional parenting contains four components: neglectful, permissive, authoritarian and authoritative.⁷ The neglectful parenting style does very little to control or support the child. In today’s society, these may be the latchkey children. The single parent who has to work to support the family finds himself or herself in this style simply because they have limited time to spend with their children. When the single parent is forced to work, the older children tend to watch over the younger children. The older child fills in the leadership role with the younger children. Problems arise when the single parent remarries and the older child is demoted back to a child status. The older child may see the new stepparent as competition and

⁶ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 110.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

many times this turns into resentment. If the child becomes jealous, he or she might sabotage the new marriage in order to restore their previous status.⁸ This type of style is found in families that have little interaction and is known as a disengaged family.⁹ Another problem with this style is the child longs for guidance and does not find it in the parents; when that happens they will find it in another leader. The parent is disengaged with the child's activities and thus is not aware of the type of leader the child may be following. Children of neglecting parents are easy prey for cult leaders, who become the authoritarian leader in the children's lives.¹⁰

The permissive parent allows the children to find themselves. They were born with potential and they will find their own purpose through free expression. The problem with this style is the child tends to become self-centered and lacks interpersonal skills.¹¹

The authoritarian parent is high on control and low on support. Rather than telling the child directly what to do or think, the psychologically controlling parent may use indirect hints and respond with words that causes guilt feelings in the child or withdrawal of love if the child refuses to comply.¹² Many times the father takes on an instructional leadership role and the mother a socioemotional role. There is partial bonding between parent and child in this style of parenting. One parent usually takes the leadership role, expects the child to follow the rules, and teaches him or her what is needed to follow those rules. The other parent takes on the support

⁸ Ganong & Coleman, *Stepfamily Relationships*, 76.

⁹ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 111.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

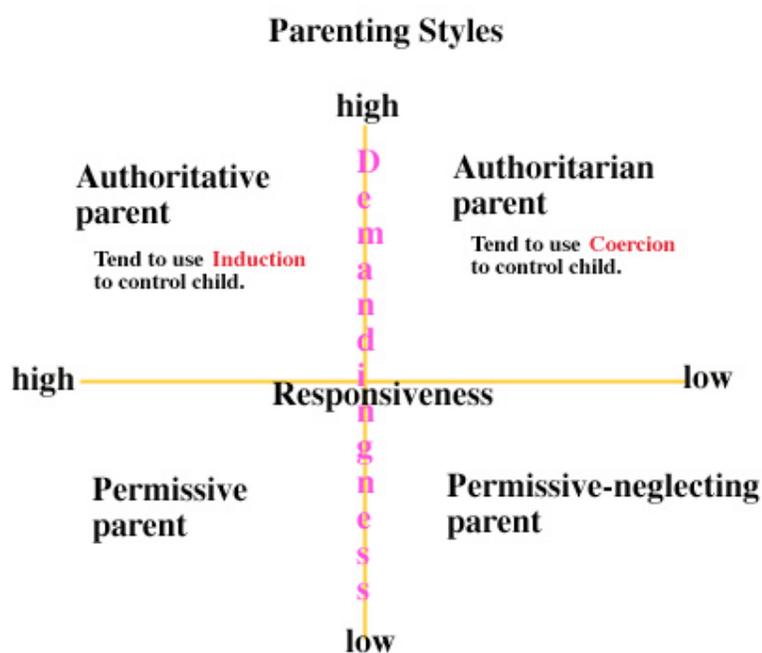
¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Marc Schulz, Pruett, Kerig, and Parke, *Strengthening Couple Relationships* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2010), 63.

role.¹³ In most cases the mother takes on the emotional support role because women are more relational than men.¹⁴ Together, the two parents can make a good parenting team.

The final component is authoritative. The authoritative parent combines the best qualities found in the authoritarian and permissive styles.¹⁵ This parent interacts well with the child. They set guidelines and explain how to live within those guidelines. The important part of this style is the parent expects the child to conform to the house rules, yet allows the child to express him or herself. The child does not set the rules but is allowed and encouraged to live within them. This style gives the child the security he or she needs in the family (Appendix Two).

Table 5: Parenting Styles and Explanations¹⁶



¹³ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 112.

¹⁴ Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect*, 35.

¹⁵ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 113.

¹⁶ WSU, CHF 1500 Human Development. "Parenting Style Chart," departments.weber.edu/chfam/1500/ParStyles.htm (accessed April, 22, 2013).

The following explanation is taken from the website cited for Table 5. The quoted cite explains the authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles found in Table 5.

Two major variables: When considering the dimensions of parenting styles and the child outcomes, Baumrind and others tend to focus on 2 major characteristics. (1) **Responsiveness** of the parent to the child. This includes being reasonable and providing supportive feedback to the child; (2) **Demandingness** of the parent for the child to comply with established rules and expectations.

Authoritative Style: These parents love their children, hope the best for them, and have high expectations in terms of compliance to adult direction and school success. They expect their children to do well in school, in sports, in arts, and in society in general. These parents tend to be reasonable in how much they expect and in how they support the child's development and behavior. They tend to provide warmth and nurturance as they respond to the child. They also encourage the child to understand the issues, values, and expectations of the parent. They talk, discuss, provide feedback, and allow for cooperation and collaboration, as they try to convince the child to voluntarily comply with the parent. This process of inducing voluntary compliance is called "**Induction**." Induction tends to be the control technique used by Authoritative parents. In other words, these parents are high on demandingness and high on responsiveness. Children of these parents tend to be better adjusted in life and more successful in school.

Authoritarian Style: These parents love their children, hope the best for them, and have high expectations in terms of compliance to adult direction and school success. They expect their children to do well in school, in sports, in arts, and in society in general. These parents, however, tend to be unreasonable in their expectations and unresponsive to the child's developmental needs. Compliance to parental authority seems to be of great importance, at the sacrifice of the child's understanding of the issues and values. "You don't need to understand, you only need to comply!" seems to be the motto of the strict authoritarian. These parents tend to rely heavily on the use of "**Coercion**" to force the child's compliance. Coercion includes the use of threat, intimidation, physical punishment, fear, and love withdrawal. In other words, these parents are high on demandingness but low on responsiveness.

Permissive Style: These parents love their children, hope the best for them, but do not provide specific direction in terms of expectations and rules for compliance. Children are often left to decide for themselves what they will do. Although these parents may be warm and reasonably responsive to the physical and emotional needs of the child, they do not provide the guidance support that children need. In other words, these parents are low on demandingness and range from low to high on responsiveness. Children of these parents tend to be the least mature when compared to children from the other parenting styles. They tend to be self-centered, impulsive, and rebellious.¹⁷

¹⁷ WSU, CHF 1500 Human Development. "Parenting Style Chart," departments.weber.edu/chfam/1500/ParStyles.htm (accessed April, 22, 2013).

Biblical parenting is modeled after the attributes of God. God freely gives us grace and love yet He also expects and demands obedience. This model also has four components: covenant, grace, empowering and intimacy.¹⁸ The parent/child relationship begins with the unconditional love given by the parent to the newborn child. It is important that the child experiences this unconditional love early in life, because the child will develop his or her attachment to the parent in their first year of life.¹⁹ This attachment of the child is usually with the mother in the early years, and with the father when the child approaches toddler age and preschool age.²⁰ The maturing of this covenant is made possible because of the grace and forgiveness in which the parent empowers the child and the parent/child relationship grows into new levels of intimacy.²¹

In an ideal situation, the four elements of the parent/child relationship are in a continual process of maturing: intimacy leads to deeper covenant love, which enhances the atmosphere of grace, which strengthens the empowering process, which leads to deepened intimacy, and so on. This cycle is relational and requires reciprocity. The foundation consists of a faithful commitment and accepting environment where children and parents can be vulnerable and open with each other. This relationship connection promotes the empowerment process in which parents and children learn to serve and to give to each other.²²

Jesus came to serve, so the parent is to follow by serving the family. Empowering parents are engaged intentionally with their children. When parents recognize and enhance their children's potential, they are empowering their children to learn to stand on their own. This experience between parent and child is known as intersubjectivity. The parent and child at that moment are

¹⁸ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 114.

¹⁹ Ruth Newton, *The Attachment Connection*, 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 114.

²² *Ibid.*

in sync. Their cognitive focus is on the same event or object and their intentions are congruent.²³ This process of empowering does not mean the parent is giving up any authority. When the child knows that the parent has their best interest in mind and helps them succeed, the child develops and achieves a sense of personal power, self-esteem and wholeness.²⁴ This empowerment process does not happen overnight. The parents' commitment to be available, sensitive, and responsive to their child makes intersubjective experiences more available and enhances the child's development.²⁵ There are several levels that the parent goes through to help the child reach the goal of empowerment or maturity. The first level is telling. This level is characterized by one-way communication. The child is young and the parent must provide most of the direction with clear communication. As the child ages, the communication goes from telling to teaching the child. In the teaching level, the parent is still exercising a high level of control and support. The difference in this level is that the communication becomes more two-way. The child is at an age that they want to know why everything is as it is. As the level of the child's participation increases, the parents must increase their level of support to allow the child to learn new things. As the child grows in this level the parent becomes more involved with the child and models proper behavior. The parents are living out their teaching with their child by increasing their participation with the child. The child's identification with their parents guides the organization of their experiences and the meaning they place on those experiences. This interaction also guides the child's developing skills and their ability to interact with their peers.

²³ Daniel Hughes, *Attachment-Focused Family Therapy*, 14.

²⁴ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 117.

²⁵ Daniel Hughes, *Attachment-Focused Family Therapy*, 14.

These interactive states are at the core of children's "zone of proximal development," where the parent becomes the encourager and the child increases his or her abilities.²⁶

This participation of the parent is critical in the preteen years. The preteen is getting older and wanting to exercise his or her rights, yet without any life experience. It is important that the preteen realizes that the parents trust them but do not trust the teen's inexperience. The parent must exercise less control and increase their support so the teen will be encouraged to do things on his or her own. This is a slow process but if done right the preteen will recognize the parents support and have more confidence in the decisions he or she makes. What the parent will find is that the preteen actually welcomes the newfound freedom as well as the parents wisdom. Teens want to be successful so as they see parents more in a supportive role, a teen will more likely welcome feedback from parents. As the child builds life experience, the parents move into the last level of parenting, which is delegating.²⁷ The parents now trust the person (child) and his or her experience. Sometimes the hardest thing for a parent to do is to let go of their child. By following the biblical pattern of parenting, letting go becomes a little more tolerable.

The problem families face in society today is the abandonment of biblical values. Society itself may pose the biggest obstacles to the family surviving in modern society.²⁸ One obstacle that the family faces is divorce. Divorce is common today and couples are getting divorced for any reason or for no reason at all.²⁹ The women's movement has tried to make speaking of the man's role as the head of the family as being not politically correct. The mother is encouraged to work outside the home. The entertainment world gets people to laugh at the

²⁶ Daniel Hughes, *Attachment-Focused Family Therapy*, 33-34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁸ John MacArthur, *What the Bible Says About Parenting* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2000), 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

dysfunctional family as if it was normal. When the society is more concerned about killing an animal than the killing of a child in the womb, it has strayed far from the biblical standards set for the family. Society has it backwards when it protects the right to distribute pornography yet prohibits the teaching in public schools that sexual promiscuity is immoral.³⁰ Society is screaming for reform when what it really needs is redemption.³¹ If the family is to experience redemption, it must start with each individual in the family. As the family becomes right with God, then the community will become right with God. When the community becomes right with God, then our society will experience the reform it is seeking. It is through the parent that is environment can be created.

Parenting styles influence the social adaptation in childhood and adolescence.³² Parents who are responsive, warm, and in sync with each other tend to have children who are more readily accepted by their peers.³³ Children who have limited peer acceptance are more likely to have parents who are more directive, demanding, expressing more negative affect and have lower levels of engaging and sustaining play interaction with their children.³⁴ The parents' interaction also affects the emotional competencies of the child with peers.³⁵ Each parent has distinctive interactive styles that contribute to the child's emotional and social competence.³⁶ Parents contribute independently to the emotional and social competence of the child. The father

³⁰ John MacArthur, *What the Bible Says About Parenting*, 10.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Snyder, Simpson, Hughes, *Emotion Regulation in Couples and Families* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2006), 143.

³³ Snyder, Simpson, Hughes, *Emotion Regulation in Couples and Families*, 144.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

and mother come from different families and carry their differences in the raising of the children.

Understanding these differences will enhance their ability to raise the child. The author of *The*

Pastoral Counseling Handbook gives steps for the pastor to assist parents and children:

Steps for the Couple as Parents:

1. Are the parents aware of what they are saying in front of the children? Parents must realize that they need to keep adult conversation to adult ears. This helps build unity between the parents and to diminish stress for the children.
2. Evaluate the family dynamic. Help the family set goals for their family dynamic.
3. Identify unforgiveness and bitterness the stepparent might have toward the child. This will help promote unity within the family.
4. Make clear distinctions between roles of the parents.
5. Help parents identify a united discipline and guidance system as a couple.
6. Help parents set goals to institute consistency and security for the children.
7. Address the lie that the stepfamily will someday function as a natural family.
8. Insure that the stepparent cannot take the place of a biological parent.³⁷

Steps for the Children

1. Determine what areas of unforgiveness lay in the way of unity.
2. Look for any area of rejection. Children almost always feel rejected by the parent that left the home.
3. Focus on the children's self-esteem.
4. Evaluate the children's expectation, realistic and unrealistic. Are the expectations appropriate and attainable?
5. Help the children see the stepparent as an authority figure. Not as one who is trying to take the place of their biological parent.
6. Help the child realize that it will take time to accept their life as it is – with a stepparent.³⁸

Through playful interaction with parents, the child learns how to use the emotional signals of encoding/decoding to interact with their peers.³⁹

The child learns to express discomfort by frowning or learning to adjust his or her own behavior by the reaction of the parents. This early interaction with parents enables the child to cope better with peers throughout life. As a parent teaches and disciplines the child, the child

³⁷ Ruth Hetzendorfer, *The Pastoral Counseling Handbook*, 218.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 219.

³⁹ Snyder, Simpson, Hughes, *Emotion Regulation in Couples and Families*, 148.

needs to have an understanding of why he or she is being disciplined. When the parent takes the time to explain the reasons for the discipline, it helps the child accept the discipline. This understanding enhances the child's ability to deal with peer relations and the emotions that come with a relationship.

Discipline

The neglectful parent uses little if any discipline with the children, thinking if children are left alone they will figure out what is wrong for themselves.⁴⁰ The authoritarian parent disciplines the child with a full set of rules. The child will do as the parent says or else.⁴¹ This type of parenting disciplines the child and does not ask why the child broke the rules. With this type of parental discipline there is still partial bonding between the parent and child. It is more of a dictatorship type of bonding, but it is at least has some form of engagement.⁴² The permissive parent is just the opposite. Permissive discipline allows the child to explore and express what he or she wants. The parent using this style has very few rules and gives the child unlimited choices.⁴³ Both authoritarian and permissive parenting styles have consistently produced children who lack self-control, have poor decision-making abilities, and who struggle with value-centered living.⁴⁴ This leaves the parent with the authoritative discipline style. This style is somewhere in between the authoritarian and permissive styles. The authoritative discipline guides the child with action-oriented techniques. The discipline is tailored to give the

⁴⁰ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 111.

⁴¹ Ron Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily*, 147.

⁴² Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 112.

⁴³ Ron Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily*, 147.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

child loving correction and training.⁴⁵ In this style of discipline, there are still rules to be followed. The discipline fits the infraction. The discipline is explained so the child has a better understanding and hopefully will not repeat the action. The child is never abused but disciplined firmly. Parents who use this style remember that they are the adults and they stay in control of the discipline. When anger clouds the decision on whether to discipline the child or not, the parent gives space and time before administering the discipline. Unlike the authoritarian style, the authoritative parenting style wants the child to learn the rules of the family and be accountable and responsible for his own actions.⁴⁶ The use of the authoritative style of discipline and the biblical style of parenting will give children the best chance of being brought up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

The parents' pattern of emotional expressiveness is associated with the child's style, social behavior and acceptance by peers.⁴⁷ The child's verbal and physical aggression with peers is related to the patterns of reciprocated negative affect between the father and child.⁴⁸ The father has more impact on the children than he realizes. Many times this impact is not seen until years later. An early indication of how much the father is doing to deal with the child's emotional expressiveness can be seen when the child plays with his or her toys. The son expresses his learned emotion in the way that the leader of GI Joe leads his troops or the daughter acts out the roles of Ken and Barbie. This type of role-playing comes from the interaction of the father with his children and how he interacts with his wife in front of the children. The media also has an influence on the emotional expressiveness of the child, but it is

⁴⁵ Dr. Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order*, 255.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

still the parents' responsibility to supervise what the child is exposed to in the media. So the parent is still directly involved in the child's emotional expressiveness. How do parents improve their interaction with their children?

One way is to have intentional communication with them. Take the time to talk with them and not at them. Ask them open-ended questions and not just yes/no questions. When a child makes a mistake, parents should use it to educate their child. When things go wrong, parents should show unconditional love, acceptance and forgiveness. When parents treat their children in this manner, it gives the children a sense of security. Children need to know that their parents care about them, so it's important to be consistent with them in an inconsistent world. "Yes" must mean yes and "no" must mean no. Again, their security is depending on it. When a mother or father is wrong, they should admit it to the child. This is not a sign of weakness on the part of the parent. It takes a strong parent to admit that he or she was wrong. Children are watching their parents and they need a leader to show them how to handle situations in their life. Since the children are watching, it is vital that the parents have a relationship with God. If the parents expect their children to pray, then the parents must be seen praying. If the parents expect the children to worship, then they must worship in front of the children. Gary Collins in his book, *Christian Counseling*, introduces some guidelines for single parents that are also good advice for couples in blended families.

- Don't try to be both parents to your children
- Don't force your children into playing the role of the departed parent
- Be the parent you are (without trying to be a buddy, big brother, or big sister)
- Be honest with your children
- Don't criticize your former spouse in front of the children
- Don't make your children undercover agents who report on the other parent's current activities
- Recognize that the children of divorce need both a mother and a father. Don't deny them this right

Don't become a Disneyland Daddy or a Magic Mountain Mommy. (There are parents who act like a weekend Santa Claus, showering their children with good times and gifts, then sending them back to the realities of daily living with the other parent.) Children need to see and spend time with the departed parent in a real-life setting.

Help the children keep alive their good memories of the past marriage
If possible, try not to disrupt the many areas in your children's lives that offer them safety and security⁴⁹

The list can go on and on. It is important to let the children see that their parents have problems and make mistakes too. Children can learn to enjoy working alongside of their parents. Finally, it is important to enhance the interaction between parents and children, and to have fun together. Parents should teach their children to have fun with them, as well as their own peers.⁵⁰

The child's skill in regulating emotions is important to the child's success in developing peer relationships.⁵¹ The child that uses positive regulatory strategies such as reasoning or thinking of alternative solutions is more likely to be accepted by their peers. The opposite is also true for the child who uses negative coping strategies such as avoidance or engaging in unacceptable behavior.⁵² What role does the parent have in how the child expresses his behavior? Over-controlling parents are less likely to endorse the use of expressive behavior in the child. Controlling parents tend to focus on the negative emotions of a child instead of the positive emotions expressed. The child whose expressive behavior is over-controlled tends to be less socially competent. This is the result of parents limiting the child in expressing different emotional responses. Sometimes the parent needs to let the child learn for himself; experience is sometimes the best teacher. The key for a parent is when to allow the child to express his or her

⁴⁹ Gary Collins, Ph.D., *Christian Counseling*, 462.

⁵⁰ Pat Williams, *Coaching Your Kids To Be Leaders* (New York: Warner Faith, 2005), 241-244.

⁵¹ Snyder, Simpson, Hughes, *Emotion Regulation in Couples and Families*, 149.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 153.

behavior and to train them about proper or unacceptable responses. A child's burst of behavior that shows disrespect is not acceptable behavior but a natural emotional response shaped by natural consequences is. This type of learning on how to express behavior will enhance a child's peer social encounters.⁵³

Parenting is not just about the mother to taking care of the child. The relationship between the husband and wife is linked to the children's adjustments.⁵⁴ Children learn to deal with parental conflict differently. For the boy, self-reported depression is linked to parental conflict. He tends to blame himself for his parent's conflict. This emotion is related to aggressive behavior and peer-rated gossip. For the girl, the marital conflict negatively affects her social competence and is negatively related to her friendships.⁵⁵ As negative response from the parent affects the child's competence among peers so do positive responses.

It is through the family socialization experiences that the development of children's social competence is influenced.⁵⁶ Marsolini in her book, *Raising Children in Blended Families*, lists ten guidelines for smart stepparenting:

1. Don't try to be the super parent.
2. Respect the child's other parent, the one who doesn't live at your house. You are not a replacement parent.
3. Don't insist on being called "dad" or "mom".
4. Stepparent role is to come alongside of the birth parent.
5. Don't be selfish with your new partner's time. Parent-child bonding was in place long before the re-marriage.
6. Smart stepparents defer to, not take over, a birth parent's position as primary disciplinarian in their child's life.
7. Keep regular date nights on the calendar in your marriage.
8. Do not favor your child over your stepchild.

⁵³ Snyder, Simpson, Hughes, *Emotion Regulation in Couples and Families*, 154.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 154-155.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 155.

9. Be willing to talk out family problems with others
10. Plan fun time for the complete family. A regular dose of good times help bring balance to the seriousness of the blended family.⁵⁷

Parents who are intentional in their discipline should also be intentional in their praise.

When a child is not exposed to emotional negativity, their attention regulatory processes are less essential to positive social functioning.⁵⁸ The opposite can be said of a child who experiences anger and negative emotions from the parent, which only hurts the child's ability to use attentional regulatory processes such as cognitive restructuring or other coping skills.⁵⁹ Lower levels of cognitive decision-making and higher levels of negative emotions contribute to more problem behaviors and negative interaction with peers.⁶⁰ When a father consistently uses negative dominant emotions such as anger or criticism, the child usually has difficulty controlling negative emotions. Much of the child's self-identity will be influenced by the father's words and treatment. The child will either believe he is special or worthless largely from the communication he receives from his father.⁶¹ This child might be seen as a bully in school when all he is really doing is reacting to the father's emotional response toward his son. Children not only act out their perspective of their parents when playing with their toys but also with their peers. In a society where tolerance and passivity define the approach to parenting, and restraint and correction are looked upon as too confining for the child's psyche. In a society where self-esteem supersedes self-control, parents are afraid to correct wrong behavior. What is a parent to do? Is control the answer?

⁵⁷ Maxine Marsolini, *Raising Children in Blended Families*, 25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Gary Chapman, *The Family You've Always Wanted* (Chicago: Northfield, 2008), 146.

If parents can control the children, then at least he or she will behave. The problem with this is the parent is not always going to be around, and if the reason for behaving is the presence of the parent then the child most likely will misbehave when their main authority figure is not present. This type of discipline, though not all bad, produces a conditional response in the child.⁶² If control is not the answer, then a parent is to keep their child away from all that is wrong with society. Is isolation the answer?

Keeping the child isolated from today's society and all the harm it has to offer will not insure the child will make right choices. The problem with this approach is that if the child doesn't learn what is right and wrong from the parents then he or she will learn it from someone outside the home. It is the parents' responsibility to monitor what their children watch, what movies they see, and where they surf the Internet. An unsupervised computer in a child's bedroom is not a good thing. What parent would give their child a loaded gun with no controls? The Internet is so corrupt that no child should have total access to it. It is a great mistake to think that a child will behave just because you shelter him from evil. The child is not tempted from the outside world but from within.⁶³ The most persistent source of temptation is not the world or the devil, but the flesh.⁶⁴ If control or isolation is not the answer, then the parent must ensure that the child has a good self-esteem.

If the child does not have good self-esteem, then he will surely do bad decisions. The parent must ensure that the children always feel good about themselves. If a child has enough pride or self-respect, better behavior will result. The problem with this type of thinking is that it

⁶² John MacArthur, *What the Bible Says About Parenting*, 34-35.

⁶³ Larry Crabb, *Connecting* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 86.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

encourages already selfish kids to think that they are justified in wanting their own way.⁶⁵ If these solutions do not work, what is a parent to do? The best answer for a child's behavior is regeneration.⁶⁶

The most serious responsibility of the parent is to bring up a child in discipline and instruction of the Lord. It is the responsibility of the parents yet something that they cannot do themselves. The parent has the greatest opportunity to encourage the child in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ.⁶⁷ Parents must not manipulate their children into a false profession of faith. It is the parents' responsibility to create the family environment in which the children seek out God. In order for this environment to exist, the parent must thirst for God. If the parent is not willing to lead the child, then who will lead in the family? It is through the home that we learn and experience the character of God's love. In the blended family, as in a traditional family, this journey will take time. Ron Deal in his book, *The Smart Step-Family*, gives seven steps to a healthy stepfamily.

Dual Parenting

A very important first step for the stepfamily is to realize that God is a God of second chances. We are all in the same boat and we all need a savior. The church today seems to look down on blended families as second-class citizens who are treated as though God is finished with them. Stepfamily adults become spiritually marginalized due to their own feelings of guilt and

⁶⁵ Larry Crabb, *Connecting*, 41.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 6:7, "You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the day, when you lie down, and when you rise up." (NKJV).

unworthiness. They feel that God will not accept them because of their remarriage.⁶⁸ There is no perfect family so this step helps the stepfamily to strengthen their relationship with God first, for God is a forgiving and redemptive God.⁶⁹ A blended family will have a better chance at succeeding when they realize that they, too, matter to God. The remarried couple must realize that there is life after divorce. Yes, God hates divorce, but He also is a forgiving God. The journey for the blended family is to draw closer to a redemptive God. Once a blended family experiences God's forgiveness and redemption, they must adjust their own expectations for the new marriage.

The remarried couple should not expect the stepfamily to become a family overnight. It is unrealistic to expect the remarried spouse to fall in love with the partner's children overnight; it takes several years to form a family identity. It is over time that the family members will discover their roles. Ron Deal compares cooking terms in this step with developing a stepfamily. The blender approach tries to get everyone to just blend in with each other. The food processor approach moves too quickly and expects each member to forget his or her past family history. The family that chooses the microwave approach tries to be something that they are not - a biological family. The pressure cooker approach is very stressful on the family because the expectations are too high. The tossed approach is expecting everyone to automatically make adjustments to ever-changing surroundings in the new family. The crockpot approach is the recommended approach since developing a stepfamily takes time.⁷⁰ Kids of different ages and genders will adjust to the blended family differently. Even though they adjust differently, they all need the remarried couples' love and affection.

⁶⁸ Ron Deal, *The Smart Step-Family*, 53.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

Young Children	May adjust more easily because they thrive on cohesive family
Under 10	Relationships Are more accepting of a new adult Feel competitive for their parent's attention Have more daily needs to be met
Adolescents aged 10-14	May have the most difficult time adjusting to stepfamily Need more time to bond before accepting a new person as a disciplinarian May not demonstrate their feelings openly, but may be as sensitive, or more sensitive, than young children when it comes to needing love, support, discipline and attention
Teenagers 15 or older	May have less involvement in stepfamily life. Prefer to separate from the family as they form their own identities. Also may not be open in their expression of affection or sensitivity, but still want to feel important, loved and secure.

Gender differences – General tendencies:

Both boys and girls in stepfamilies tend to prefer verbal affection, such as praises or compliments, rather than physical closeness, like hugs and kisses.

Girls tend to be uncomfortable with physical displays of affection from their stepfather. Boys seem to accept a stepfather more quickly than girls.⁷¹

In the process of developing a new blended family with children and stepchildren it is critical that the new couple not forget the importance of developing their relationship with each other.

The relationship between the husband and wife is the most important aspect of the marriage. The relationship each spouse has with God is the most important connection between a husband and wife. A person's identity is found in the relationship they have with God, not in their mate. This is true in the stepfamily, too. There is a lot of rejection in the stepfamily. The biological parent needs to remember this when the adolescent child chooses to live in the other household. Problems arise when the new couple places the step-kids before their relationship.

⁷¹ Divorce & Remarriage Help Guide: 3, http://www.helpguide.org/mental/blended_families_stepfamilies.htm#maintaining (accessed May6, 2013).

The new marriage is the foundation of the new home, and the husband and wife should make it a priority in the marriage to have a balanced commitment to both their spouse and kids.⁷² The first year of marriage is critical. Scripture affirms the need to spend time together when first married.⁷³ In the blended family the couples do not have this bonding time. The parent-child relationship has more history and in most case the marital relationship is the weakest.⁷⁴ The biological parent must help the stepparent move into a leadership position. If the biological parent does not help with this, the stepparent is likely to force his or her way into a leadership role. This often results in resentment and resistance from the biological parent.⁷⁵ A simple solution to this conflict is achieving unity and communication between the husband and wife. It is important for the child to feel welcome in the blended family and that they matter. Parents making choices that matter to the children accomplish this. As the blended family grows, then the biological parent can say “no” to the child and “yes” to the spouse. The biological parent and stepparent must agree on this strategy and have a unified front before the family. Another area for the blended family to focus on is the need to identify and work out the painful ghosts from their past marriage. Their new spouse is not and will never be their ex-spouse. Both spouses need to become “ghost-busters.”⁷⁶ Many times the new marriage relationship is viewed in light of the previous marriage. Deal suggests that a person wait at least three years after a divorce

⁷² Ron L. Deal, *The Smart Step-Family*, 92.

⁷³ Deuteronomy 24:5; “When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.” (NKJV).

⁷⁴ Ron L. Deal, *The Smart Step-Family*, 87.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

before starting a serious relationship.⁷⁷ Here are some simple questions for pre-remarital couples to consider:

1. Has it been three years since the ending of any prior significant relationships (whether death or divorce)? What are the benefits of slowing down your courtship?
2. To what degree have I/we achieved emotional divorce with a previous spouse and healing from difficult emotions?
3. To what degree have I/we been able to renew self-esteem and accept my/our single identity?
4. Have I tried to reconnect with former lost relationships (children and /or extended family)? What has been the result?
5. How much did I need to be needed when we first began dating?
6. What scares you about committing again?⁷⁸

In the blended family the exit from the previous marriage has to be balanced with the integration of the ex-spouse.

As the blended family matures the development of parents (spouse and ex-spouse) working together as a team needs to be an emphasis. The separated parents must move from their previous marital relationship while still maintaining a parental relationship.⁷⁹ This is known as co-parenting. At the moment of the divorce you may have hated your ex-spouse but now in a blended family you must find way to cooperate with your ex-spouse for the sake of the kids. Parenting and co-parenting is all about the children. There is no benefit to the stepparent criticizing the biological parent in front of the children. The key to building a parental team is for the parents to begin to work on building relationships with the stepchildren, and to develop cooperation between the two homes. The parents must come to the realization that they are adults, and the sooner they can come to a mutual understanding with each other, the sooner the

⁷⁷ Ron L. Deal, *The Smart Step-Family*, 95.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

families will come together. A good blended family is one in which the children are allowed to be children and the adults act like parents. A child should never have to choose between two families. An example is when one biological parent grounds a child for the weekend because of misbehavior. A problem emerges, as this is the weekend that the ex-spouse has the child. The biological parent insists that the ex-spouse honor the discipline and carry out the grounding for the weekend. The ex-spouse refuses because it is his weekend with the child. The one parent cannot control the ex-spouse any more than he or she could while they were married.

Cooperation between co-parents is important but both must realize that they are no longer able to control the other. They now live in different houses. The parent would do better to wait until the child returns to their home and then enforce the discipline.

Not only do the parents need to step in line, but the parents and stepparents need to as well. They are all parents, so for the sake of the children they need to work out how they are going to parent together. The biological parent holds three keys to aiding the stepparents' role in the new family. The first key is to declare the new spouse a lifelong partner. This is hard at first, since the first lifelong partner is no longer your partner. It is still important for the children to know and understand their place in the new family. The second key is passing power to the stepparent. The children need to understand that the biological parent and stepparent stand together on family rules. The third key is building trust with the stepparent. The problem with this is the stepparent is not the biological parent and does not have the same compassion for the child as the biological parent does. When the biological parent listens to the stepparent's input on raising the children, they are building trust.⁸⁰ Building this trust in a blended family takes time because of the struggles that each member of the blended family experiences.

⁸⁰ Ron L. Deal, *The Smart Step-Family*, 144-145.

There are many common pitfalls in stepfamilies. In the stepfamily there is the loss of a dad, a mom or some tradition to deal with. Ron Deal recommends people should wait at least three years before remarrying to deal with the grief that is associated with these losses.⁸¹ The blended family many times is the result of a marriage that follows death, divorce or the lack of marital bonding. A new couple might be happy about a new relationship but if the past relationship is not dealt with properly, then sadness and grief are not far behind. After divorce a person experiences a cycle of love, anger and sadness.⁸² Feelings of love for the person lost, the hope of reconciliation, and guilt over what is lost reoccurs before moving to the next cycle. Anger follows closely behind this cycle. Anger arises from the frustration over who is lost, resentment, rage, and hurt. The final cycle of emotion is sadness, which comes in the form of loneliness, depression, despair, pain, and grief. If this cycle of emotions is not given time to be processed, a person may marry too quickly. When this happens the person will carry the emotions into the new marriage. It would do a new couple good to set appropriate boundaries with former spouses that reflect the ending of the previous relationship. The fact that a marriage has ended does not mean that the relationship is never talked about again. It is good for new couples to give each other permission to struggle with grief. As the two engage in conversation about the past, they will learn to help each other live in the present. This is especially important when the first marriage ended because of the death of a spouse. This grief is not just among couples but also affects the children. The hostility of the child toward the stepparent stems from the unresolved emotions of losing a biological parent. One of the hardest things for children in stepfamilies is sharing a biological parent with a stepparent or stepsiblings. The child has

⁸¹ Ron L. Deal, *The Smart Step-Family*, 167.

⁸² R. Emery, *Renegotiation Family Relationships: Divorce, Child Custody, and Mediation* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), 26-28.

already lost one parent and it is understandable that they might have a fear of losing another one. To protect themselves from this fear, children may resist developing a relationship with the stepparent. The stepparent must recognize the hurt and the fear the child feels losing their parent to them. Ron Deal gives some practical strategies for coping with unrecognized loss and unexpressed grief in the stepfamily:

1. Look behind surface emotions to identify how loss is playing a role.
Be sympathetic to what's under the surface instead of reacting to what you see in front of you.
2. Help persons express sadness and grief.
Acknowledge loss when you see or hear it.
3. Talk about your losses.
Give permission to talk openly.
4. Take advantage of the windows of opportunity kids give you.
Ask questions to statements kids make about grief or something they are missing.
5. Realize that grief cannot be "fixed."
You cannot say something to make it go away, so do not try.
6. If your child seems to be "doing just fine with this," keep monitoring.
The pain may resurface later.
7. Some children will express their feeling with art or play.
8. Make changes in your stepfamily slowly.
More change equals more loss.
9. Biological parents should compartmentalize their lives to spend exclusive time with children without the stepparents.
10. Keep alive the "touch points" you have with your children.
Remember the important rituals between parents and children.
11. Help build connections between multiple generations.
Acknowledge the losses grandparents have experienced with grandchildren.⁸³

The stepparent must recognize the hurt and the fear the child feels losing their parent to them.

The stepparent can be sensitive to the stepchild by giving special time to the parent and child.

As time goes on, the stepparent can balance the time spent with his or her own biological child.

The traditions of past family relationships are important, yet it is also important to create new traditions in the stepfamily. When it comes to traditions in stepfamilies one must remember

⁸³ Ron Deal, *The Smart Step-Family*, 176-177.

that you cannot make everyone happy all the time. The sooner a stepfamily learns to negotiate, the sooner the stepfamily will learn to create new family traditions.

Sometimes the birth order is changed in stepfamilies. Ron Deal compares this to a man being displaced at work.⁸⁴ This change in birth order can be problematic for a child. An example of this is when a firstborn becomes the middle child in a remarriage. The first-born received special attention in the first family but now shares the attention with another stepsibling. In the stepfamily, the parent and stepparent must remember that change brings more loss, and losses added to substantial previous losses generates apathy and insecurity. It is the continual process of change that disheartens children and parents need to be sensitive to this.⁸⁵ The stepparents must talk through this change with the child in the new family order. It is important to give the child permission to be sad or angry over what has changed. Do not promise to restore old family order, because in a stepfamily change is required from everyone. Empathize with them yet encourage them that together the new family can make the changes necessary. These changes will take time but eventually can be worth the effort.

The “promised land” takes time to reach but by building trust in each other it is attainable. When the stepfamily is determined to bring the family together, over time this goal will be accomplished. The family must remember that the celebration may come later in the marriage, as it did with Israel after the wilderness experience. The stepfamily will have to handle special challenges along the way. Some of these special challenges include managing sexuality, how scripture applies to the stepfamily, and spiritual formation in stepfamily children.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ron Deal, *The Smart Step-Family*, 182.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

A stepfather could find himself confused about how to handle the physical relationship with his stepdaughter. A biological father, through his hugging and physically connecting with his daughter, lets her know that she has worth as she learns to be a young woman. When a divorce happens she loses some of the influence of this role model. In some cases the father is completely out of the picture. When this happens, the stepfather must realize the importance of his role and learn to show appropriate affection toward his stepdaughter. Affection is one of the top needs for a female and learning how to properly handle it early is key in a daughter's development.⁸⁷ One of the best ways for a stepfather to show proper affection is by having a close affectionate relationship with his wife. The closer the stepfather is to the stepdaughter's mother, the less threatened she will feel.⁸⁸ This action between the stepparents creates another challenge in the stepfamily.

If the stepfamily involves children, the children go through the dating and developing of the romance between the parents. In a biological family, this relationship has time to develop before children come into the picture. In a stepfamily environment, a child is often a witness to increasing physical affection and touches that couples experience as the romance deepens.⁸⁹ The couple must be aware of the children in the process of developing their sexual relationship with each other. Ron Deal gives an example of a daughter who had trouble with her mom closing her bedroom door at night after she remarried. Before her mom remarried, she would leave her door open at night so her daughter would feel safe. After the mom remarried, she would close the bedroom door when she was having sex with her new husband at night. One night the daughter

⁸⁶ Ron L. Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily*, 193.

⁸⁷ Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect*, 132.

⁸⁸ Ron L. Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily*, 195.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

busted into her mom's bedroom and caught them having sex. After this incident, the daughter related the door being shut with her parents having sex. Another challenge is the sexual attraction that does not exist in a biological family.

For the stepfamily, behavioral boundaries must be in place to discourage intentional and unintentional sexual attractions. There need to be set rules that honor privacy. It may seem innocent for a stepdaughter to wear only a t-shirt to bed but it is not innocent for her to walk around the house when a stepbrother or stepfather are there. This can become a real problem, especially if there is a teenage boy in the family. A dress code is not out of the question. Teaching the children what is appropriate is the responsibility of the parents. The simple rule of knocking before entering a room may stop an embarrassing moment among stepsiblings.

These rules apply not only to biological families but also to stepfamilies. Fathers and mothers are to guide their children and this also applies to stepparents.⁹⁰ In first marriages, the reality of marriage is based on the expectations of two people. With the blended family, both remarried couples and children bring expectations to the new family. The construction of the reality of the family is a task shared by the spouses and children together.

Stepfathers need to understand that spiritual leadership is not a convenient volunteer endeavor – it is a calling from God. When you give your life in marriage to another woman, you are also committing yourself to the care, discipline, and spiritual training of her children. You cannot pick your roles. Accept the full assignment (or don't sign on at all).

The good news is, most stepfathers want to be a positive spiritual influence on their stepchildren – I hope you are one of them. Yet you must exercise wisdom as you grow into this role. In other words, the responsibility for the spiritual training of your stepchildren is yours, but the process of application will be different than the one used by biological fathers.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Ephesians 6:4; “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (NKJV).

⁹¹ Ron L. Deal, *The Smart Step-Family*, 203.

A stepfather who claims authority just because he is the “man of the house” is likely to lose respect from his stepchildren and negatively affect his spiritual influence.⁹²

Ron Deal ends these steps with stories of successful stepfamilies. As God encouraged Joshua to be strong as he enters into the Promised Land, Ron Deal shares stories of those who have successful stepfamilies so others can know that it is possible. This book is a great resource for helping pastors to understand the dynamics of the stepfamily.

⁹² Ron L. Deal, *The Smart Step-Family*, 202.

CONCLUSION

God ordains marriage from the very beginning. Marriage was ordained to be between a man and a woman. This thesis holds to the biblical truths on the roles of a biblical marriage. For this thesis, a blended family is a marriage between a man and woman who were married before and have children from the first marriage. According to the U.S. Census of 2009, the U.S. divorce rate is about fifty percent. The church must realize that almost half of its church membership falls into this category. The church needs to champion the call to biblical marriage. If the church does not take this stance, the divorce rate will continue to rise. At the same time, the church cannot turn a blind eye to the number of blended families. This thesis project focuses on the biblical standard for marriage and the dynamics of the blended family. A blended family is still a family and God's Word still applies.

The family experiences an ever-changing cycle. The family begins when a person leaves his or her family as a young adult and travels through several stages of life. The person leaves one family and starts another by becoming one with another. This new union begins a family and then the birth order begins. The marriage makes adjustments to new systems and the realignment of relationships with extended family to include parenting and grandparenting roles. As the child grows, the family becomes more flexible with family boundaries to allow for the children's independence. The children grow up and the parent learns to shift from a parent/child relationship to a parent/adult relationship. No matter how old the children get, the parents will always be the parents and the children will always be the children. The child is commanded to honor the father and mother; there is no age limit on this commandment. The final stage of the

family, now in the later years, is accepting the shifting of generational roles.¹ The family is a very complex organization that takes daily improvement. When a child comes into the family there is a physical attachment. As the child gets older, he carries it around inside him, and eventually takes it with him wherever he goes.² When a child is added to the family, the birth order is changed and the responsibilities of the children and parent changes with each new birth. In a first marriage, the spouses have time to interact with each other and share their expectations that they learned from their families of origin.

In a second marriage constructing relationships is more complicated, since the remarried couple has to negotiate the beliefs of the child as well as their own. In the early years of a blended family, each member comes into the new family with expectations, which are commonly based on previous family experiences. This thesis project proposes three important issues facing the New Testament church as the pastor attempts to minister to stepfamilies: the biblical roles in the blended family, the birth order in the blended family and co-parenting in the blended family.

The role of the family as it pertains to the blended family is to have a strong biblical understanding of marriage. The married couple must be able to communicate biblical truth to one another especially in the blended family. The problem is that blended families can be very difficult; research indicates that 66.7 percent say that co-parenting is extremely difficult; while only twenty percent indicated it was neither difficult nor easy. Only 13.3 percent of the parents surveyed indicated stepparenting was extremely easy. The majority of the blended families said that parenting is very difficult parenting. This thesis project offers four parenting styles to help the pastor in working with the remarried couple: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and

¹ Patterson, Williams, Edward, Chamow, and Grounds, *Family Therapy* (New York: Guilford Press, 2009), 135.

² John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 185.

neglected. When the pastor understands each one of these styles, he will be able to help the new blended family make the adjustments they need. The pastor will also be able to help the new couple reach more common ground that will be needed for a secure base. This thesis project encourages the pastors to hold onto the biblical foundation of the family and the roles that a father and mother must take in the blended family. The blended family is still a family, and there are still father and mother roles that must be fulfilled. If it is in the stepfather or father, the role is still to be the head of the home.

This chapter also gives the pastor four concepts to focus on when ministering to the remarried couple: priority, pursuit, possession and purity. One or all four laws were probably broken in the first marriage so it would help the couples if the pastor reviewed and helped them make a new commitment to these laws.

The second issue was the birth order and the affect it has on the blended family. The first-born is known as a perfectionist, reliable, conscious, and someone who does not like surprises. The middle child is more a mediator, a compromiser, and diplomat type. The last-born of the family is known as being manipulative, charming, and an attention seeker. The only child is known to be very difficult, very thorough, and deliberate. The research revealed that over 70.6 percent of the parents responded that the change in the birth order affected the way they parented in the new family. With this high percentage, it is important that the pastor understands the differences between the first-born, the middle child, the last-born of the family and the only child. In order to help a new couple form their new blended family, it is the pastor's responsibility to help the new couple understand the dynamics of the blended family and the affect on the birth order. The surveys revealed that 40 percent of the parents had difficulty communicating these issues to the pastor. Meanwhile, through the interview process with the

pastors, 70 percent were comfortable in communicating the affect of the blended family (Figure 5). The remarried couples felt that the pastors were confident and knowledgeable about the dynamics of the blended family. This thesis provides for pastors a review of the characteristics of each birth order, so as to help the pastor in communicating more effectively how to bring the family together. This thesis project provides three charts that show the strengths and weaknesses of each one of the birth orders. These charts are to help the pastor assess the children and help the parents understand the difference in the children as it relates to the birth order. When the pastor ministers with a remarried couple, he must also recognize that the birth order affects the couple. When a first-born who is married to a last-born of the family in the first marriage and now in the second marriage the first-born marries another first-born the dynamics of those couples are quite different.

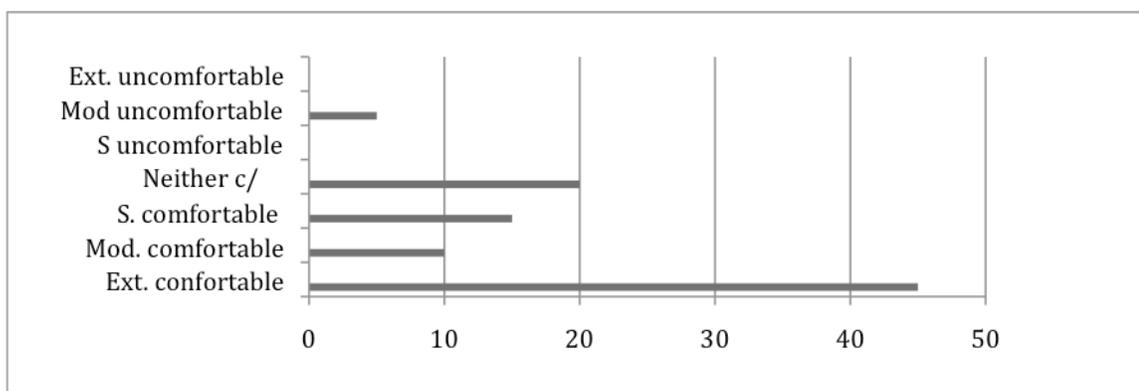


Figure 5 Pastor counseling blended families

The final issue deals with co-parenting and disciplining in the blended family. It reviewed the seven steps of a healthy family. Chapter four reviewed three parenting styles: instructional, socioemotional, and biblical. After reviewing the different parenting styles, the thesis suggests the biblical parenting style gives the parent of the blended family a better understanding of parenting. The responsibility still falls on the parents to raise the child in the

way of the Lord. It is in this understanding of the biblical roles in the home that the father or stepfather in the blended family is the leader. Discipline and leadership are sometimes difficult when the father or stepfather is disciplining a child that is not his own. He still has the role of the head of the home, because a blended family is still a family. This thesis project encourages the pastor to train and work with the man to be an expert on one woman, his wife. In the blended family the husband must not compare his present wife with his ex-wife. Once he is remarried, his responsibility is to his new wife. God is a God of second chances. The man now is bound and committed to his new wife. This role can be hard because his life is not divided it is blended. He not only has to help his family adjust to a new family but he also has to help his children adjust to the absence of a mother - this will be a difficult in the blended family. The wife is to be the helper to the husband is very biblical. When it comes to the blended family, she must be careful not to compare her husband to her ex-husband. The research came up with four basic needs of the woman: security, affection, open communication, and leadership. Each one of these is addressed in this thesis and gives advice for the pastor on how to help the husband understand the needs of his wife.

This thesis project has provided essential advice for the pastor in ministering to the growing population of blended families. It has provided material and resources for the pastor to gain a better understanding on the dynamics that make up a blended family. This understanding will assist the pastor in counseling and ministering more effectively to such a large population. It has also been the author's desire to provide a resource for remarried couples that will help them find comfort and encouragement as they take this journey to develop a blended family.

APPENDEIX ONE

Figure 6 Styles of Instrumental Parenting¹

		Action	
		High	Low
Content	High	Discipling	Teaching
	Low	Modeling	Neglecting

¹ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 109.

APPENDIX TWO

Figure 7 Styles of Socioemotional Parenting¹

		Support	
		High	Low
Control	High	Authoritative	Authoritarian
	Low	Permissive	Neglectful

¹ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, 111.

APPENDIX THREE

SURVEY QUESTIONS

**BLENDED FAMILIES IN CONFLICT:
ESSENTIALS A PASTOR MUST KNOW**

William J. Perry

Liberty University

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

Doctor of Ministry Program

1. Has a pastor ministered to your blended family in the past 90 days?

Three or more times

Twice

Once

Never

2. Were you satisfied with your last experience with the pastor's counseling

Extremely satisfied

Moderately satisfied

Slightly satisfied

Neither satisfied or dissatisfied

Slightly dissatisfied

Moderately dissatisfied

Extremely dissatisfied

3. How did you contact the pastor for counseling?

By phone

By email

Referral from family

Referral from a friend

In person

4. Was it difficult to communicate the issues facing your blended family to the pastor?

Extremely difficult

Moderately difficult

Slightly difficult

Neither difficult or comfortable

Slightly comfortable

Moderately comfortable

Extremely comfortable

5. Was the pastor knowledgeable of the dynamics in a blended family?

Extremely informed

Moderately informed

Slightly informed

Neither informed or uninformed

Slightly uninformed

Moderately uninformed

Extremely uninformed

6. Was the pastor comfortable talking about issues in your blended family?

Extremely comfortable

Moderately comfortable

Slightly comfortable

Neither comfortable or uncomfortable

Slightly uncomfortable

Moderately uncomfortable

Extremely uncomfortable

7. How difficult is it to be a parent in a blended family?

Extremely difficult

Moderately difficult

Slightly difficult

Neither difficult or easy

Slightly easy

Moderately easy

Extremely easy

8. List the ages and gender of the children before remarriage (father)

9. List the ages and gender of the children before remarriage (mother)?

10. Has this change in birth order affected the way you parent your new family?

Extremely affected

Moderately affected

Slightly affected

No affect

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March 25, 2013

William J. Perry

IRB Exemption 1559.032513: Blended Families in Conflict: Essentials a Pastor Must Know

Dear Bill,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:

(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.

Professor, IRB Chair

Counseling (434) 592-4054

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CONSENT FORM

BLENDED FAMILIES IN CONFLICT: ESSENTIALS A PASTOR MUST KNOW

William J. Perry

Liberty University

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

Doctor of Ministry Program

You are invited to be in a research study. This thesis is to review the issues facing the pastor in ministering to blended families. It will be researched through completing surveys and interviews with blended family members and the pastors ministering to these families. This thesis will provide essential advice for the pastor in ministering to this growing population and gain a better understanding on the dynamics that make up a blended family. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by William J. Perry, Doctoral student at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary in the Doctor of Ministry program.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to help a pastor to minister to blended families in the church more effectively. The family structure is affected by the birth order within it. When the pastor becomes more knowledgeable about the different roles in the family structure the more he will be able to minister with the family.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Please follow the link to Survey Monkey and complete a short survey that should take no more than twenty minutes. You will not be asked to enter your name or personal information at anytime. When the survey is completed, your responses will be automatically forwarded to the lead researcher anonymously.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has minimal risks: The risks involved in this study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits to participation: Participation in this project may or may not benefit the participant directly. However, the overall benefits will be to families that pastors are ministering.

Compensation:

You will not receive payment for participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private in a password protected personal computer file. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Any personal information of the participant such as name, email address, or phone number will be kept in private in a password protected personal computer file until the study has been completed. None of the identifying information will be linked in any way to the responses of the participants. All survey responses will be kept in the researcher's office in order to analyze the data. At the time the data is disseminated, the surveys will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is William J. Perry. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 2292 Tumbleweed Drive, Lebanon, OH 45036, wjperry@liberty.edu, (937) 654-0001.

You may also contact Dr. Charlie Davidson, Faculty Advisor, at cdavidson@liberty.edu, (434) 592-4241.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu

If you would like a copy of the consent information, please contact William J. Perry at wjperry@liberty.edu.

IRB Code Numbers:**IRB Expiration Date:**

(<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/K5XM8LT>) Click here to take survey.