There is a Need for a Biblically Sound Education for Developing Healthy Blended Families at Healing the Broken Hearted Ministry

Submitted to Dr. Robert A. Gowins in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of Doctor of Ministry

by

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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Blended families experience repeated divorce and contribute to the growth of dysfunctional families because churches do not have a dedicated biblically sound education that is specifically designed for blended families. Such an education, addressing issues representative of what blended families experience, will help establish blended families that follow the biblical model as stated in Colossians 3:18-21, with a submissive wife, a loving husband, and obedient children. Blended families will continue to struggle if they cannot access additional resources that will help them in dealing promptly with blended family issues as they surface, using God’s precepts. Family therapists and counselors, including those who claim to be experts on blended family matters, cannot address blended family issues because they tend to apply solutions based on the traditional or nuclear family setting.¹ The proposed education will equip blended families to prevent surfacing issues or promptly handle blended family issues that could result in repeated divorce or family members ending up in a dysfunctional state. This project will examine the need for such a proposed education.

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Abbreviation(s)

HBHM  
*Healing the Brokenhearted Ministry, Inc.*
**Chapter 1: Introduction**

The Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, instructed the church at Colossae regarding God’s design for the functioning of the family, which anybody can find in Colossians 3:18-21 (NIV):

> Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

During Aristotle’s time, such instructions appear in the so-called household code, in which the main emphasis was on the accumulation and management of wealth. The focus then was the proper functioning of the household, with the man expected to rule the family. The authors in the New Testament, being influenced by Hellenistic Judaism, incorporated the same household code into their writings, which called for wives and children to submit to their husbands and fathers to demonstrate their relationship to Christ. One notes that wives are to submit to their husbands” as is fitting in the Lord” (Col 3:18), while the children must obey their parents as their "acceptable duty in the Lord" (Col 3:19 NRSV).²

These verses are part of the passage that calls for full and rich family life (Col 3:18-4:1). Verses 18 and 19 focus on the relationship of Christian spouses, for those who want to live like Christians to be able to experience the fullness that God intended for them.³ A woman was a thing under Jewish law, a possession, just like the husband's house, flocks, or material goods, and had no rights whatsoever. The husband could divorce his wife for any cause, while the wife

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had no rights in the initiation of the divorce. Complete servitude was demanded of the woman, but the husband could do whatever and marry as many women as he desired. All privileges belonged to the husband, while all duties belonged to the wife.

The domestic rules in Colossians are different from those of that period. Thein such a way that the wife is addressed equally with the husband, both husbands and wives have duties, and a hierarchy exists in the marital relationship that places the wife next, after her husband. The placement of the wife in this hierarchy does not make her spiritually inferior to her husband. The Holy Trinity, for example, has a hierarchy, yet equality exists: Jesus Christ shares equality with God, His Father, while simultaneously being submissive to Him. The same relationship is expected in a marriage. Women's submission is not the same as "servile, menial bondage"; it is voluntary, and it is not to make a way toward sin or harm to self or others. The command for the husband to love his wife involves unceasing care and loving service, and it is comparable to Christ's sacrificial love for the church in that he is willing to die for her. Otherwise, God's call for the husband to love his wife is not fulfilled.

Regarding the instruction for children to obey their parents, everyone must realize the indispensableness of discipline and obedience if fullness is to be experienced in the home. An important question raised by the writer of Hebrews that is worth noting is, "For what son is there whom his father does not discipline" It further states that undisciplined children are illegitimate ones, not to be called sons (Heb 12:7-8 ESV). The absence of discipline means that the father is weak and not practicing his fatherhood. Inconsistent disciplinary actions show a lack of love. In

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
contrast, the obedience required from the children is different from the "submission" instruction to wives, which is voluntary.\(^7\)

The message to the Colossian believers is to set their minds on the things above. This does not mean that they can brush aside their calling in their homes. Their new life should start at home, with Christ's Lordship present in the day-to-day routine experiences, and the peace of Christ should rule as they do everything in the name of the Lord. \(^8\)

Brian Grant sees how the changes in the shape of the family, especially when it comes to family's role, over the centuries from ancient Israel to today have influenced the theology in today's church.\(^9\) No matter how the culture evolved, the church should not deviate from God's mandate to have a biblical family. Today's modern family is not identified by the simple nuclear model anymore. The contemporary family continues to evolve in its demographic and constituency. An emerging reality in the family dynamic is the blended family unit. Blended families, by definition, are the blending/uniting of two distinct family units into a new family unit. These newly blended families include members from a combination of relationships that may have resulted from death, remarriage, and divorce, and they always include children. These families face distinct issues that are specific to the blended family dynamic. The lack of sound education highlighting the various problems experienced by blended families creates the possibility for unbiblical family dynamics, dysfunctional family relationships, and the reality of repeated divorces.

\(^7\) Ibid.


When churchgoing family members do not have education on issues specific to blended families, one tendency is to resort to resolutions focused on what benefits them the most. Unfortunately, this causes others' pains, hurts, and destructive effects because their decision could cause other blended family members. The other tendency is to listen to the advice of others who do not have education, or who lack experience on blended family matters, or those who follow the practices of those outside the church, which typically do not align with God's teachings on how families should operate as taught in Colossians 3:18-21. Colossians 3:18-21 sets biblical guidelines for a family structure, with a submissive wife, a loving husband, and obedient children. Such a structure can help lessen divorce rates and the growth of dysfunctional family members, as discussed in the scholarly literature reviewed in the following pages.

In a marriage relationship, the wife's submission\textsuperscript{10} to her husband mirrors the Trinitarian relationship. In this type of relationship, the husband is given authority over his wife while still maintaining unity. In other words, together, the male and female as one should reflect the "God-Chris" relationship. In the "God – Chris" relationship, even though God (the Father) and Christ (the Son) are co-equal, Christ submits to and obeys His Father (God). God sees the placement of the authority to the husband as the head and the wife's submission in the same connection.\textsuperscript{11} "Submission" does not mean "inferiority" The submission and authority happen in the context of God's love for the Son. In 1 John 4:8, God is defined as love. That is, out of this loving relationship, the Son submits.

In the same way, the husband is not to demand his wife's submission but rather to love, care, serve, and encourage her to grow in God. The wife is to submit to the husband willingly;


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
the husband is not to force his wife to submit. Otherwise, it would be marring the Godhead’s relationship.

Many men today seek to rule and dominate their wives instead of loving them (Col 3:19). When the wife finds her husband not loving her, she should continue to submit, pray, and love him. She should maintain a gentle spirit in encouraging him in his leadership role and not nag him. The wife should remain chaste, conduct herself in a godly manner, and be in prayers to change his heart (1 Pet 3:1-2). Additionally, submission shows the world the beauty of the relationship between Christ and His church, the bride (Eph 5:32). However, many men use violence to show that they are in charge. Submission is supposed to accomplish positive results (see 1 Pet 2:13-15) and promote harmony, spiritual growth, and spiritual maturity for believers (Eph 4:2-3, 13).

Submission does not apply to all situations. Peter and Paul refused to submit when a situation called for non-submission (Acts 4:18-20). Jesus did not submit when doing so could make way to evil in desecration of God’s house (Mark 11). Jesus never bullies or overpowers, never forces or coerces. He leads only when a church is willing to be led. He never destroys the door but patiently stands (Rev 3:20). Biblical headship is servanthood and sacrifice for Christ. These attributes are in contrast to aggressive leading, one of a husbandly headship dominion. Leadership in the Christian sense is not a matter of exercising power but of using authority with an attitude of servanthood: to serve and not to be served.13

12 Ibid.
When it comes to a husband loving his wife, his love ought to be realistic, sacrificial, purposeful, and personal. The husband is called to love like Christ (Eph 5:5-28). To be realistic means not to have unrealistic fantasies, imagining things that are impossible or improbable. When it comes to being sacrificial, the husband is to love the wife just like Christ loves the sinful and imperfect church (Rom 5:8). Through her faults, he must love her and love her as Christ loved the church and be willing to die for her. He must, at times, give up other things to serve and please his wife. He must sacrifice his time, entertainment, friendships, or even his career out of his love for his wife. His focus should be his purpose for his wife. That is, to cleanse her with the Word and present her a perfect bride. This includes teaching her the Scripture, engaging her to serve and grow spiritually, and cultivating her character so that she can fulfill God’s calling in her life. He must know what her gifts and talents are and encourage her to exercise them for God’s glory. This love also means that at times, he can admonish her so that she can grow spiritually. To love a wife personally is to love her as his own body. There will be no issue for a wife in submitting when she is loved like this. When the wife is not submitting, the husband should just let the love of God flow through her and be patient (1 Cor. 13:4) and trust God to work on her heart.14

The children must also obey their parents (Col 3:20). The word "children" here refers to any child still living at home or still being provided for by their parents. A child who does not obey his parents and recognize their authority will not recognize other authorities. He will disobey his teachers, bosses, the law, and ultimately God (Rom 13:1-2). However, children should not be obligated to obey those against God's precepts (Rom 14:23). On the other hand, the parents have the responsibility to their child(ren), such as that fathers are not to provoke their

14 Brown, “God’s Design for the Family.”
children so that they become disheartened (Col 3:21). Being disheartened does not just refer to a child getting angry but rather a type of influence that can impact them negatively for the rest of their lives.15

Churches should protect their people, and one way of doing this is to love them (John 21:16-17).16 At Healing the Broken - Hearted Ministry, Inc. (HBHM), love can mean helping blended families attending HBHM to meet their needs. Blended families at HBHM need knowledge on how to deal with their everyday struggles inherent to being in a blended family structure.17 Being equipped with the do's and don'ts will protect family members from well-meaning counselors with non-biblical teaching and advice. Being aware of various issues that could arise in a blended family setting and knowing how to avoid problematic situations or handle different issues as they surface will equip blended family members to avoid further deterioration and, hopefully, head toward blending. Constructive and progressing improvement should result for each family member and the whole family when biblically founded education specifically designed for blended families is not available at HBHM.

HBHM, along with other churches and ministry settings, will be best able to serve its members and non-members when biblically founded education that is specifically designed for blended families is put in place. HBHM started in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 2007. Since its genesis, HBHM has expanded to a global ministry that seeks to serve, educate, minister, and help everyone, as referenced in Matthew 28:19-20, which calls believers to teach all nations of God's

15 Ibid.
teachings and to obey His precepts. Ministering to blended families has become a significant part of HBHM's ministry. In the effort to serve and support these blended families, it is more important than ever for HBHM to make available a biblically founded education that covers issues such families typically experience. It should therefore be a priority for HBHM to offer an education that teaches biblical principles. This educational tool should guide blended family members on how to respond and address the issues at hand. The goal of educating blended families on the blended family issues is to help blended families minimize or avoid the increasing number of divorces, dysfunctional family relationships, and unbiblical family dynamics.

HBHM Demographics

HBHM's focus areas include counseling, family strengthening, church planting, biblical teaching, and social outreach ministries. Outreach ministries include feeding the hungry, helping the orphans and widows, developing skills for people to obtain employment, and any other ministries as needed. These align with the Great Commission, as stated in Matthew 28:16-20. The great commission includes making disciples and teaching others to obey God's commandments. HBHM serves various ethnic groups of all ages and varying social statuses from zero to middle-class wage earners. Members include singles or unmarried and married couples with and without children, some belonging to traditional family


19 In this paper, the focus is on the great commandment, which is to love others (Matt 22:37), and on family behavior (1 Tim 3:4-5 and Gen 18:19). Tending and meeting the needs of the family is part of loving a family; see Parrott and Parrott, “How to Love Like Jesus.”
structures while others in blended family units. Many staff members at HBHM serve in the capacity of a volunteer in administration, counseling, and teaching. HBHM is currently in the process of establishing training that will sharpen the teaching and counseling skills of both volunteers and pastors. Establishing an education that is biblically grounded that covers issues experienced by blended families are timely since the teaching and counseling training is just starting. The referenced proposed education will be incorporated into the curriculum for training and education.

The Ministry of Healing the Broken Hearted Ministry (HBHM)

HBHM has pastors assigned in the United States and the Philippines, and there are assistant ministry leaders who assist the pastors. All leaders, including the pastors and assistant ministers, will undergo leadership training so that they are equipped to teach sound doctrine and provide education to blended families. HBHM's education ministry extends to non-members. Those who belong to a blended family structure often seek the counsel of outside counselors but are not helped because of the counselors' lack of expertise on blended family struggles and challenges.20 Within the church, members are most knowledgeable when it comes to the various roles of family members belonging to a typical traditional family system. Therefore, they are not able to minister to those who belong to blended family units. Surrounding pastors who are invited to teach and counsel also give advice that applies to members belonging to a traditional family system; therefore, members of blended families are not helped because their issues are unique.21 Family members who belong to a blended family system continue to experience


difficulties and heightened struggles because the advice they receive is intended for members of a traditional family system and not applicable to blended family systems. There is a desperate and increasing need for biblically sound education covering various issues that are typically faced by blended family units. Each pastor serving at HBHM in all locations should therefore have their copy of the proposed education tool for blended families.

**Statement of the Problem**

The structure of a family that aligns with God's desire is found in Colossians 3:18-21. In this Bible verse, the wife is instructed to submit\(^{22}\) to her husband and the husband to love\(^{23}\) his spouse, while the children are to obey their parents.\(^{24}\) The blended family system deviates from this structure because the couple's oneness and the children's obedience as the Bible commands is breached by loyalty conflict. For example, biological parents tend to side with the biological child, such that the new spouse ends up feeling unloved, unprotected, alone, and separated from her or his spouse.\(^{25}\) These feelings can push a wife to withdraw and refrain from submitting to her husband because of feeling betrayed.

On the other hand, stepchildren may not respect and obey the incoming stepparent because of a lack of biological ties. The resident biological parent may not enforce obedience

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\(^{22}\) Green, “Wife Abuse.”

\(^{23}\) Husbands are to help their wives live pure and holy, just like Christ labors for the church’s purity. This means that a godly husband should prioritize the spiritual growth of his wife. Husbands are to be understanding with their wives (1 Pet 3:7) and strive to get to know and understand them. A husband should make his wife a priority and give himself up for his wife. “The basic principle is that the husband should set aside what he values to help his wife value most what is most valuable—God himself. As someone has said: ‘A husband must be willing not only to die for his wife but also to live for her.’” Ryan Higginbottom, “Husbands, Love Your Wives,” Unlocking the Bible, May 15, 2018, https://unlockingthebible.org/2018/05/husbands-love-your-wives/

\(^{24}\) Brown, “God’s Design for the Family.”

because of fear that the biological child may move to the non-resident biological parent. This behavior is common when child support is involved.\textsuperscript{26} The fear of paying child support can cause the resident parent to tolerate the biological child's actions.

All of these problems deviate from God’s teaching on marriage and impact couples’ intimacy. Since intimacy is the foundation of having and maintaining a biblically healthy family structure, it won't be easy to establish a family structure that follows the Colossian 3:18-21 precepts. The lack of understanding and education on God’s design for what a family structure should be and how it should function even in a blended family setting creates vague roles for each family member involved.\textsuperscript{27} Educating family members on the danger and consequences that can result from failure to attend to various blended family issues can convict family members to change.

Today, many apply strategies that relate to the traditional family structure, so blended family units do not experience the transformation they need; to become a unit where roles and practices align with the teaching of God as is typically observed in a traditional family unit.\textsuperscript{28} There is a need for a biblically sound education that covers issues specifically experienced by blended family units. Such education will help blended family members resolve issues specific to them to promote unity and growth towards a biblically healthy family. The experts today that blended family members turn to may not necessarily know about stepfamily experiences. A family therapist, for example, despite claimed expertise, may not necessarily be equipped in


\textsuperscript{27} Martin, \textit{Stepmonster}, 242.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
handling blended family issues such as working with married couples with stepchildren.\textsuperscript{29} Incoming children in a blended family system cannot know how to act within a family structure that involves a stepparent and biological parent, especially if there is a loyalty issue because of a lack of knowledge on how to confront issues in a constructive rather than destructive manner. Blended family members can utilize the blended family educational tool in helping them understand how to cope with their unique situations.\textsuperscript{30}

Research further shows that the most neglected ministry is blended family due to a lack of resources that can help with the unique struggles experienced by members of blended families.\textsuperscript{31} Patricia Kelley and Terry Trepper express the need to adopt new and different rules that can help blended families, further demonstrating that there are still many topics that blended families need help on but do not have the knowledge or resources.\textsuperscript{32}

The following pages will discuss the focus points that blended families must know. When blended family members become aware of the destructive impacts their actions can bring to the family and its family members, they may change. Therefore, the educational tool will include the topics discussed in this paper. The new knowledge that blended families will learn through this educational tool should result in blended families’ behaviors and actions to change, resulting in blended families staying intact and family members protected from ending in a

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\textsuperscript{29} Amato, “The Impact of Family Formation Change,” 75-96.


dysfunctional state. Such realization can impact blended families positively and can help them develop a biblically model blended family

**Purpose Statement**

Using a biblically sound education that is specifically designed to address issues experienced by blended families in churches and other ministerial places such as HBHM to educate blended family attendees will help blended family members live a lifestyle that aligns with God’s teaching. Generally, families that are grounded with God’s precepts normally end up staying intact and with family members not becoming dysfunctional because this is what God intends the family to be. The growing number of re-marriages with children desperately calls for a biblically sound education representative of blended family issues. Currently, available counseling guidelines and theories are more geared towards nuclear families. A biblically sound education tool focusing on blended family issues needs to be developed to help blended family members deal with the unique challenges experienced by blended families. Otherwise, blended family members will not be able to cope with their families’ struggles, thereby continuing to live a life that is not in line with God’s precepts. Making blended family members aware of key issues and the danger that can result from not confronting these problems will help in dealing with unique blended family issues. Education on blended family issues using this tool is very

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important because, from a tiny family unit, its effect continues into society. In contrast, for a family member, its impact extends to his or her future family.\textsuperscript{35}

The spread of these dilemmas, such as repeated divorce and the growth of dysfunctional family members, need to be stopped or at least minimized. A biblically sound education presenting various blended family issues will help stop these dilemmas. The children who belong to a blended family unit will be able to handle the constant challenges that they will face in the future and when they enter a blended family relationship because of the education that they will receive using the proposed educational tool. They will know the various blended family issues and how each issue can be prevented or handled. They will also know how to cope with their unique situations. Such education will help blended family members understand the issue at hand and know-how and why blended family issues differ from traditional families’.\textsuperscript{36} The biblically blended family-designed education will help current HBHM pastors and other ministers, including those who will be ministers in the future, blended family members facing family issues to become vessels that will change the blended family culture. This project will educate blended family members on important and impactful blended family issues identified and addressed by experts in the field to help to resolve some of the problems and dilemmas referenced. Furthermore, this project will seek to (1) demonstrate and quantify the need to educate blended families using the educational tool proposed and (2) identify the focus topics to include in the proposed educational tool.

\textsuperscript{35} Thornton et al., “Intrafamilial adolescent sex offenders.”

\textsuperscript{36} Ron L. Deal, \textit{The Smart Stepdad: Steps to Help You Succeed} (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House, 2011), 57–154.
Basic Assumptions

There is an assumption that the blended family system has similar issues to the traditional family system. This is the reason why many available counseling materials are designed for the traditional family system and why many family therapists today use theories that are typically applicable to traditional families. This assumption necessitates a biblically sound education on blended family issues in churches and other ministry settings such as HBHM. Some of the issues that will be covered in this paper and incorporated into the proposed educational tool include clarifying each member’s role and making each person accountable for performing his or her role. There is an expectation that each blended family member will own his or her role as clarified, thereby bringing a change to every family member involved. As each blended family member gains understanding and becomes accountable to the change necessary, as learned in the referenced education, the blended family culture should also change to become stronger in the days to come.

Definitions

The definitions below will help the readers understand the various terminology used throughout this paper. Understanding the meaning of these terms will help the reader better understand the discussions of the role of each family type and family member on various subjects. When the readers know what each term below means, they will better understand the issues present in both family structures, what makes one family structure differ from the other, and how terminologies relate to each family structure under discussion.

37 Amato, “The Impact of Family Formation Change,” 75-76.

All-inclusive
Includes various issues experienced by blended family units or members.

Nuclear family
Includes a husband and a wife, with all children belonging to that relationship or marriage.

Residential parents
Refers to biological and non-biological parents living with children.

Traditional family
Another term used for “nuclear family.”

Blended family
Includes members from a combination of relationships that resulted from death, remarriage, and divorce, and which always includes children.

Stepfamily
Another name for “blended family.”

Biological family member
Any person related through blood.

Divorce
End of marriage through legal proceedings.

Blending
All members of the blended family are mingling in harmony.

Dysfunctional state
Deviating from the norms of social behavior in a way regarded as disruptive to harmonious patterns of relationship.

Dysfunctional family
A family with multiple internal and external conflicts. Internal conflicts can include domestic violence, mental illness, sibling rivalries, parent-child conflicts, or single parenthood. Examples of external conflicts include gambling, drug or alcohol abuse, extramarital affairs, or unemployment— influences that negatively affect meeting the basic needs of the family unit.

**Family Dynamics**

The pattern or process of change, growth, or activity within a family.

**Permeability**

Lack of or non-enforcement of discipline and boundaries.

**Quasi-kin**

One’s former spouse remarries. Also refers to former in-laws and other former and added kin resulting from divorce and remarriage.

**Biblically healthy family**

Family members put each other’s needs above their own and above outside family members (as in exes). Compromises are reached as a married unit. According to Kelly Spears, some of the attributes of a healthy family include:

- People communicate freely and openly, but compassionately as well.
- Everyone’s basic physical and emotional needs are met.
- Family members listen to one another and appreciate differing opinions.
- Conflicts are resolved directly, and family members don’t hold grudges.
- Parents show unconditional love for each child, even when they don’t approve of specific behaviors.
- Family members work together to reach mutual goals.
- Each family member is encouraged to develop preferences, interests, and a unique personality.

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Statement of Limitations and Delimitations

There are many possible structures in blended family units. This thesis will cover remarriages for heterosexual (opposite-sex) couples with either one or both spouses bringing in children from previous marriages. Individuals who were divorced or separated due to unresolved blended family issues, are raising children, and are not cohabitating with a partner will be included in the population. This paper will not include discussions of remarriages with no children, divorced or separated individuals who did not parent non-biological children, family structures with same-sex couples, or healthy nuclear families. This study will also not include the nuclear family population. This project is a response to the need for biblically sound education specifically designed for blended families at HBHM, which should also be put in place by other churches and ministry settings. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the survey population was decreased in size to abide by social distancing, lockdown, and other regulatory bodies’ guidelines.

Statement of Methodology

A survey populated with questions that relate to blended family units will be taken from 100 participants. The participants will be blended family couples bringing in children to the family and with ex-spouses who will interact with the blended family members. The survey will be open to the public for couples who are between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, are parenting one or more non-biological children, and attend church. No names will be retained. The participants will fill out only the gender and age in the survey questionnaire to maintain confidentiality. The online participants who will complete the survey will only be asked a few demographic questions and will not be asked to personally identify themselves with a name,
email address, or any specific self-identifying marker. The surveys will be anonymous. The results will be used to support the thesis that currently, there is no biblically sound education specifically designed for blended families in church settings, that blended families do not get adequate help or counsel on blended family issues, and that there are issues still unresolved because of a lack of knowledge or help on how such issues can be resolved.

The questions that will be surveyed will relate to topics on family formation and structure, spirituality and faith, preparation, family strengthening and maintenance, couples’ intimacy, stepparenting, the dysfunctional state, blending, and the need for education specifically designed for blended families containing the various issues such families experience. Upon approval of the thesis, invitation flyers to take the survey will be distributed to church-going individuals out in public. The survey will direct individuals to go to surveymonkey.com, where they can take the survey. The consent verbiage will be presented at the very beginning of the survey before the survey questions populate. The first few questions will start with qualifiers. One such qualifier is that if the person taking the survey is younger than eighteen or older than forty-eight, a command will pop up for them to exit the survey, thanking them for visiting surveymonkey.com because the survey is only for individuals between eighteen and forty-eight years old. Filling out the survey should take around 10-15 minutes. Ethical issues or informed consent should not be a concern because no personal information will be revealed in the survey questionnaire; only the gender and age are filled out, in addition to answering the survey questions.

Pastor Price (personal interview, June 27, 2020) and Pastor Green (personal interview, February 6, 2021) believe that blended families should follow a biblical family model that aligns with Colossians 3:18. However, they cannot say what they would like to see in an educational
tool because of a lack of deeper knowledge on other issues that blended families go through. Pastor Johnson (personal interview, March 20, 2020), on the other hand, has been exposed to some blended family issues. However, she cannot say in its entirety what she would like to see in a blended family-designed educational tool for the same reason but emphasized that such educational tool is desperately needed in churches.

For supplies, only electronic devices such as laptops, desktop computers, tablets, or smartphones will be needed. There will be no video or audio recording. After the survey, the doctoral candidate will compile the data and prepare a narrative summary of the results of the survey. Charts or graphs will be presented with the narrative report or findings. For security and confidentiality purposes, only the researcher or the doctoral candidate will have the password to access the data. No other parties will be given access to the data.

**Conclusion**

Many issues can surface in a blended family unit that is not experienced in a traditional or nuclear family unit. Blended family members and those who interact with them need to be aware of these issues and possess the knowledge on how to deal with them. Making available a biblically sound education that is specifically designed for blended families, and addressing issues they experience, will help keep blended families intact. In addition, the same education will help create a blended family culture that will be in line with what God intended a family to be. The proposed education should help HBHM in helping blended families to become a replica of God’s design for what He intended the family to be, as stipulated in the Bible, His Word. Blended families will, therefore, be able to face the unique challenges that they will encounter. The education and the positive changes that can result should help avoid or lessen repeated divorces and prevent family members from being in a dysfunctional state.
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Review of Literature

The review of various studies, as presented below, substantiates the damages (such as repeated divorce and growth of dysfunctional family members) caused by blended family members’ failure to act, engage, or perform certain responsibilities. Some of this failure is due to unclear roles and not being aware of what consequences can result if certain actions are done or not done. None of the reviewed studies contains discussions of all or even most of the typical issues experienced by blended families. Rather, they focus on specific issues of interest to the authors.

Blended family members or units are not helped because those who intend to help lack knowledge in addressing these issues. Blended family members will not know how they should act to avoid negative outcomes without the education necessary to combat the issues they face. These findings support the need for a biblically sound education specifically designed for blended family members that HBHM and other churches or ministries can put in place to educate its attendees in blended families. Findings are presented that expose the many damages that can result to each member of blended families with unresolved issues. These damages include repeated divorce of newly formed couples and cause an increase in family members being in a dysfunctional state. For example, a child raised in a blended family home can end up in a relationship that will end in divorce. Another negative outcome could be for a resident child raised in a blended family home to be sexually abused because of unresolved blended family issues.

Each study discussed below either focuses on only one topic or gave a less comprehensive look at several topics, some of which call for desperately needed discussions.
Few cases are presented where non-biological partners experience hurts that eventually lead to withdrawal from relationships, some of which result in marriage dissolution. Children’s emotions, on the other hand, are affected negatively to the point that they end up in a dysfunctional state.\textsuperscript{41} The cases presented herein and the various authors’ statements affirm the need to educate blended families on blended family issues. The same should convince the reader of the necessity of providing a biblically sound education addressing various topics representative of what blended families experience. These topics include family formation, family structure, faith and spirituality, advance preparation, family strengthening and maintenance, couples’ intimacy, parenting (which includes stepparenting, step fathering and step mothering), the dysfunctional state (which includes poor education, poor mate selection, diversities and complexities, loyalty conflict, and intrafamilial sexual offending), blending, and the need for educating blended families. These topics, which are discussed in the following pages, play significant roles in building a biblically founded family model stated in Colossians 3:18-21. Therefore, the same topics necessitate further study for inclusion in the educational tool to educate blended families.

**Family Formation and Structure**

Encyclopedia Britannica defines family as “a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption, constituting a single household and interacting with each other in their respective social positions, usually those of spouses, parents, children, and siblings.”\textsuperscript{42}

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare:

\textsuperscript{41} Kansas State University, “Dysfunctional Families: Recognizing and Overcoming Their Effects,” https://web.archive.org/web/20190616192557/https://www.k-state.edu/counseling/topics/relationships/dysfunc.html

\textsuperscript{42} “Family,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/family-kinship
Families are the core unit of society in which people are supported and cared for, and social values are developed. The role of each member within a family can be affected by changes in family situations and changes in the formation of the family itself. How well families function is a key factor in their ability to nurture personal wellbeing and serve as the basis for a cohesive society.\(^{43}\)

God established families from the very beginning. It is His plan for His children to have a happy family. To achieve this purpose, Jesus Christ teaches that marriage is holy and essential to God’s plan.\(^{44}\) Tony Reinke quotes the seventeenth-century writer Thomas Brooks:

> Holiness differs nothing from happiness but in the name. Holiness is happiness in the bud, and happiness is holiness at the full. Happiness is nothing but the quintessence of holiness. An absolute fullness of holiness will make an absolute fullness of happiness. When our holiness is perfect, our happiness shall be perfect; and if this were attainable on earth, there would be but little reason for men to long to be in heaven.\(^{45}\)

Furthermore, the Bible states that the man is to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, twain as one flesh. God also says that He put marriage together and that what God has put together, no man should separate (Mark 10:6-9). One of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament directs children to honor their parents (Exodus 20:12). The Apostle Paul often spoke about family relationships, counseling that children should obey and honor their parents and that fathers should bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:1-4).\(^{46}\)

Focus on the family notes that the Bible is clear in the Creation account that God made the woman and the man and united them as “one flesh” (Gen 1:27-28; 2:23-24). Deuteronomy 11:19 and Proverbs 22:6 instruct God’s people to train up their children in the way of holiness


\(^{45}\) Quoted in Tony Reinke, “Are You Chasing Happiness or Holiness?” Desiring God, August 7, 2017, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/are-you-chasing-happiness-or-holiness

\(^{46}\) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, “How Can the Bible Help Strengthen My Family.”
and truth. Family is a resource of its family members for day-to-day living. One of the vital resources for healthful living is a sense of self-worth. It is in families that individuals learn about and experience behaviors and patterns of living. Such learned patterns may include substance use or abuse and domestic violence.

According to Ronald Lee Beck in his dissertation titled “Effective Blended Family Ministry in the 21st Century Church,” there is a great need to educate blended family members. He says that churches should introduce a pastoral strategy that will adequately address both the ideal values of the Christian faith and the realities of the changing and surfacing blended family structures. In addition, the worst enemy of a couple’s relationship is stepfamily because each member’s hunger and desire to fight for the attention of their biological parent often causes parents to fight against each other. However, he notes that it is essential that the new couple’s needs are prioritized. Beck shares the need to establish a strategy that will adequately address the increasing problems in a ministry setting experienced by blended family units. The proposed education should include establishing strategies on clarifying roles, setting responsibilities and accountability, and making family members aware of what God’s expectations are for each member of the family.

In an article posted on the Focus on the Family website, Natalie Nichols Gillespie shares the unique challenges experienced by blended families. She gives guidance on expectations,

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discipline, and conflict resolution.\textsuperscript{50} Blended families can work on blending by clarifying what is expected from everyone, how and when the discipline will be carried out, and the process that will be followed when conflict arises. These should be included in the proposed education agenda.

The textbook \textit{Couples and Family Therapy in Clinical Practice}\textsuperscript{51} list the characteristics of a functional family, which each blended family should try to achieve:

1. Connectedness and commitment of members as a caring, mutually supportive relationship unit
2. Respect for individual differences, autonomy, and separate needs, fostering the development and well-being of members of each generation, from youngest to eldest
3. For couples, a relationship characterized by mutual respect, support, and equitable sharing of power and responsibilities
4. For nurturance, protection, and socialization of children and caretaking of other vulnerable members, effective parental or executive leadership and authority
5. Organizational stability, characterized by clarity, consistency, and predictability in patterns of interaction
6. Adaptability: flexibility to meet internal or external demands for change, to cope effectively with stress and problems that arise, and to master normative and nonnormative challenges and transitions across the life cycle
7. Open communication characterized by clarity of rules and expectations, pleasurable interaction, and a range of emotional expression and empathic responsiveness
8. Effective problem-solving and conflict-resolution processes
9. A shared belief system that enables mutual trust, problem mastery, connectedness with past and future generations, ethical values, and concern for the larger human community
10. Adequate resources for basic economic security and psychosocial support in extended kin and friendship networks and from the community and larger social systems


\textsuperscript{51} Ira D. Glick, Douglas S. Rait, Alison M. Heru, and Michael S. Ascher, \textit{Couples and Family Therapy in Clinical Practice}, 5th ed. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 43.
These characteristics, when conveyed to blended families, should help blended family members keep their families intact.

Joshua M. Gold, in his book titled *Stepping In, Stepping Out: Creating Stepfamily Rhythm*, acknowledges the large and increasing growth of blended families. He says that with its expected growth comes an increase in its unique challenges. Gold shares the “dos” and the “don’ts” for the proper functioning and health of stepfamilies. He acknowledges that the increasing growth of blended families results in an increasing number of unique challenges and supports educating blended families on blended family issues. His do’s and don’ts list include offering children a sense of well-being and security, promoting access to positive adult role models, addressing extrafamilial relationships and intrafamilial challenges, knowing the legal rights of parents and stepparents and adhering to them, fulfilling financial responsibility, and knowing the rights of stepparents, and being aware of cognitive adjustments that need to be made by the individual experiencing the transition. He says that stepfathers should avoid competing with the absent biological father and encourage a realistic time frame for relationship development. Those in blended families should avoid dwelling on step mothering myths, which include jealousy, incest, or greed; i.e., separate the person of the stepmother from the unrealistic and oppressive myths. He also notes that it is helpful for blended family members to be aware that stepfamilies have inherent structural ambiguities, loyalty conflicts, guilt, and family members’ problems. In addition, it is essential to reauthor stepmother myths by fostering more

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53 Ibid., 25–36.

54 Ibid., 37–50.

55 Ibid., 51–62.
positive stepmother functioning and focusing more on the possibility of stepmothers’ roles in achieving greater success and sustainabililty in the new family setting. Gold also recommends trying to maintain mutual appreciation and respect for non-custodial parents, stepsiblings, and grandparents and maintaining connections beyond the family residence like grandparents for children’s development.

Allan, Crow, and Hawker emphasize boundary setting between the parents and the children and between siblings. Inappropriately set boundaries will be damaging to the overall functioning and the organization of the family. Boundaries that are inconsistent, too permeable, overly rigid, or unclear will cause problems and difficulties and result in specific individuals becoming a scapegoat. Biological parents are found to intervene in disciplinary actions or in enforcing boundaries to their biological children in an attempt to protect them. Non-biological children, on the other hand, resist discipline because of perceived emotional commitment and conflict as to who has the authority of enforcement. Unspoken recognition of the different emotions of love, commitment, and identity leads to resentment. Non-biological children may feel that the non-biological parent is giving more quality time to the biological child. Incoming parents feel that they are taking more responsibility for parenting non-biological children than they would prefer. Stepchildren feel that the new family is imposing a new set of practices without giving them much voice. Allan, Crow, and Hawker point out the focus on family’s continuity despite family changes that affect interactions, relationships, and the presence of

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56 Ibid., 63–74.
57 Ibid., 87–114.
diversity. Allan et al. discredit leaving the past behind so that the focus can be shifted entirely to the new family because of the perceived importance of linking children to the natural parent.

Sara Dupuis states that having a first-hand understanding is very important for family members to fully conceptualize the struggles that they are experiencing. Dupuis focuses on family members’ interaction, what affects each family member, and how one behavior can impact the whole environment. Some of the issues she emphasizes are setting boundaries, equilibrium or balance, and variety in meeting demands and dealing with changes.59

Barry W. McCarthy and Emily J. McCarthy point out that remarriage can become rich, rewarding, and full of love when respect and trust are present. The authors point out the importance of both assessing and changing feelings, attitudes, and behavior that can bring the best out of the new couple. They share that couples should identify factors that led to the end of their past marriage(s) and learn from past mistakes in starting over. Couples should use their past mistakes to build positive qualities and develop new characters within them that will help strengthen the new marriage.60

The 1999 book Coping with Divorce, Single Parenting, and Remarriage notes an increase in issues related to blended families.61 The divorce rate after first marriages is higher than in first marriages. The challenges and changes in roles, relationships, and life experiences associated with family transitions can undermine family members’ well-being. Couples that promote fondness, friendship, and admiration for each other and who infuse marital interactions


with a positive response (especially when it comes to conflicts) are the most successful in their marriage. It is important, therefore, for couples to be in the state of persuasive behavior when trying to resolve conflict and be able to exhort influence as his or her partner. It is very helpful for men to accept the influence of their wives, such as de-escalating negativity in interacting and when their wives can soften the starting point of a conflict. The husband is encouraged to support the new wife and vice versa to help them understand the changes in everybody’s behavior, in preserving the marriage (Gen 2:24), and in adhering to the message of Matthew 19:6 to stay together by not allowing anything to break their marriage which God created. Parents’ remarriage contributes to adolescents’ increasing problems. It is important that stepfamilies establish supportive, warm, and involve relationships across all stepfamily members.

Stepfamilies are discouraged from family relationships characterized by more coercive, punitive, and conflictual exchanges. This aligns with Colossians 3:21, in not embittering children, so they are not discouraged, and with Ephesians 6:4, to not exasperate children but rather bring them up in such a way that is in line with the training and instruction from the Lord.

Craig A. Everett acknowledges the presence of greater stressor levels in stepfamilies. Stressors in blended families are different from the stressors in nuclear families. Increasing stress results in an increased occurrence of abuse. Stepfamilies experience more stress than the first family. Therefore, it is not appropriate to provide solutions to stepfamilies based on first

62 Ibid., 3–22.
63 Ibid., 295–319.
65 Ibid., 6.
66 Ibid., 3.
families because each type of family experiences different problems. Everett also notes that stepchildren are more susceptible to being exposed to physical and sexual abuse. Stepparents tend to be neglectful and abusive because stepparents relate less to stepchildren than biological parents. Further, he states that the lack of resources that address all issues faced by blended families justifies further work in the field. Everett equips blended families with knowledge that will help them understand and cope with various stressors. Some of these stressors include less parenting, intrafamilial sexual attraction, identity change, and disruption of the relationship between the exposure and quasi-kin. Everett notes that “a complete understanding of family stress cannot occur until all interdependent levels of social systems are integrated into models utilized to arrive at these findings.” This statement substantiates that there is a gap between existing findings and what still needs to be known, which then justifies a continuous need to educate blended families so that the gap between the known and the unknown can continue to be narrowed down. The proposed education can then be the first step in closing such a gap.

Lisa Zeleznikow and John Zeleznikow point out in a 2015 article that there has been less focus by researchers on keeping blended families together and more attention on how to support the ex-spouse and their children. Stepfamilies desperately need support because of the increasing number of members from failed re-partnered relationships. Blended families’ futures can be enhanced if appropriate strategies are followed. The authors acknowledge a needed focus that should be undertaken to support a more complete and representative educational scope that

67 Ibid., 5.
68 Ibid., 6–7.
69 Ibid., 8.
will discuss many strategies specific to blended families. One of the areas of focus pertains to loyalty conflict. Zeleznikow and Zeleznikow state that biological children are more loyal to their biological parents. They also point out that biological children should be taught to interact with both parents in such a way that they will be more aware of how to deal with the non-biological parent fairly, without the feeling that they are breaching their loyalty to their biological parents.

“Family structure” is a term used to describe household members linked by marriage or bloodline, usually with at least one child residing in the home under the age of eighteen. Such a structure is identified as one parent, two-parent, or “living with neither parent” (e.g., foster care families, adoptive families, grandparent families, other relatives, or institutionalized children). Since the mid-1940s, other family life changes have resulted in other family structure designations, such as blended families. One type of family structure is called the “nuclear family,” where a child lives with two married biological parents and with only full siblings if siblings are present. Stepfamilies or blended families, which terms are used interchangeably, is another type of a family structure. This structure results when there is a remarriage or when children share one or no parents living in a household. A blended family is formed when there are stepsiblings, half-siblings, or stepparents.71

According to a 2016 article in *MarriageToday*, marriage should be prioritized and protected first because it is the main core that the family will be built on. The stepparent and the biological parent must not allow their children to play with their emotions and manipulate them.

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When issues are dealt with properly, such as equality and setting up disciplinary guidelines by both spouses, the newly formed family can experience a high probability of surviving.\textsuperscript{72}

Gregory Brown’s article “God’s Design for the Family” states that everything ends up in chaos when marriage is not working correctly.\textsuperscript{73} That is, the structure that God intends for the family to have is altered, such as allowing the children to be in between the new couple in a blended family relationship. God’s intended family structure is also altered when a husband or the wife who brings a child to the new marriage does not allow the wife or husband to teach or enforce discipline with the non-biological child. This article will help parents in a newly formed blended family to know that despite changes in the family structure, the new wife and the children, whether biological or not, need to function under God’s precepts—that is, the husband and the wife in the new couple lead, not the spouse and the biological child, nor the spouse and the ex-spouse just because they have a biological child together. This information, when conveyed to blended families, will eliminate favoritism and jealousy that typically destroys families and contributes to the dysfunctional growth of children.

The family formation section focuses on the roles, behaviors, challenges, and stressors that impact family formation. Zeleznikow and Zeleznikow (2015) confirm that there has been less focus on keeping blended families together. Genesis chapters one and two, as discussed in the theological basis section, emphasize family order. It is, therefore, necessary to start the topic for discussion on family formation. \textbf{The family structure intertwines with family formation. As}

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\textsuperscript{73} Brown, “God’s Design for The Family.”
the family structure operates as God’s designed it to be, the family formation will start to shape as God intended it to be, as stated in Colossians 3:18-21.

Spirituality and Faith

A spiritually healthy family is one in which each family member knows and practices his or her role within the family as God teaches in the Bible. God is seen as first, as in a hierarchy structure, and His Word is the guiding beacon, such as the light on top of a tower, that each family member looks at. This knowledge should be the driving force in how each member conducts his or her daily lifestyle. To have a spiritually healthy family does not mean that everyone in the family is perfectly functioning but rather that everyone looks to God for guidance.74

Ted Cunningham points out that families should look at where they are now and set a guide as to where they want to go. Further, he says that family members should know their roles and how each can contribute to the spiritual growth of their home.75 Cunningham’s writing, when conveyed to blended families, will help align family roles with God’s precepts. Each person in the family must be educated to know how to conduct himself or herself and be a good steward of the role God has given him or her if the family is to function spiritually and in faith.

Faith and spirituality play an important role in family formation and structure because spirituality teaches about the hierarchical or structure of families that align with God’s teaching in Colossians 3:18-21. This section will help family members to be equipped to know what their


roles are and how to carry out their roles in such a way that it will contribute to making possible a biblical model family that aligns with Colossians 3:18-21.

Advance Preparation

Advance preparation helps family members to be proactive. Being equipped with the knowledge of what can be expected in a blended family setting will help in planning on how to handle issues when they surface. Preparation is what makes a person proactive as opposed to reactive. The advantage of advance preparation is the ability to manage problems quicker and more efficiently because of the “What-if” solutions at hand that can be readily implemented. Preparation is a skill that can be learned, which is the aim of the proposed education.76

In a 2009 article, Jaymes Gonzales77 states that blended families get into a relationship with little or no awareness of what to expect. Each blended family needs education on common problems that blended families experience so that they can be prepared to resort to the appropriate solution for each difficulty family members will face. Gonzales confirms that blended families need to know more about their type of family structure. He brings awareness to the various issues that blended family members experience and the importance of being proactive in decision-making.

The American Psychological Association (APA)78 recommends various issues that individuals must have knowledge of, or what blended families must know and implement for


stepfamilies to work. These issues should be part of discussions when planning for remarrying and how new couples should handle each issue once married. These issues include living and financial arrangements, resolving any feelings or concerns regarding the previous marriage, the anticipation of changes and decisions on parenting, quality of marriage, stepfamilies’ parenting, child-stepparent relationship, and issues relating to nonresidential parents. Advance knowledge of these issues will help children from feeling abandoned while helping the stepparent to know when to stay out or step in. In addition, families will be aware that when issues are not properly handled, family dissolution could result. This resource on the APA website includes a wealth of information, so it will be helpful for blended families to know how to access this website. The proposed education should include direction on how to access this resource. Blended families can then choose the topic on whatever issue(s) they may be facing and get the proper counseling help.

Advance preparedness plays an important role in forming a biblical family model because it gives every family member wisdom. Wisdom will help each family member discern and understand God’s precepts (Proverbs 2:6, 18:15). Knowledge will guide each family member on how to conduct themselves in such a way that everyone is focusing on building a biblically founded family model as stated in Colossian 3:18-21. When the children receive training in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:26), parents are preparing them to have the advanced knowledge for the future, as in this paper’s focus, in building a biblical family model.

**Family-Strengthening Maintenance**

Parents should maintain a strong bond for a strengthened family. When there is a strong family bond, children end up with better behavior, better performance at school, strong parent-child communication, and better friendships with other children. Quality time helps to develop
strong family bonds. Family bonds build and strengthen family and give security and a sense of belonging for family members. Doing activities together helps children develop social skills and build higher self-esteem. Parents, therefore, should always be mindful of cultivating and protecting these family bonds. Many families need help in forming strong family connections. The proposed education can help achieve this goal. The discussion on other factors that will help strengthen family bonds follows below.

Roger Barrier also notes that a stepfamily can fall apart in 2-3 years if not helped or not supported immediately by a resource that specifically addresses issues that can only surface in a blended family setting. Ronald Lee Beck states in his dissertation that it is not until his daughter went through a divorce and attempted to form a blended family that he saw the urgent need to minister to blended families after twenty-eight years in ministry. Beck points out the importance of educating blended families on the “what” and the “how” aspects of resolving blended family issues. Unresolved family issues can weaken family bonds.

Ron L. Deal and David H. Olson, in their book titled The Smart Stepfamily Marriage, present the main qualities of a lasting marriage relationship. Discussions should include where the couple is at present, what they would like to accomplish, and how to get to where they want to be. Couples need education on building qualities that can guide them to be where the family wants to be.

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81 Beck, “Effective Blended Family Ministry.”

82 Deal and Olson, The Smart Stepfamily Marriage, 184.
In a 2019 article, Laura Petherbridge conveys the need for churches to launch specialized dedicated blended family teachings. She also expresses that pastors in churches, especially senior pastors, should use stepfamily language in sermons and on examples and illustrations. Doing so, according to Petherbridge, will help stepfamilies and those contemplating marriages know and tackle common challenges faced by blended families.

A lifestyle that continues to focus on family strengthening and maintenance is necessary for the ongoing progress of blended families in becoming that biblically founded family model that aligns with Colossians 3:18-21.

**Couples’ Intimacy**

Intimacy refers to closeness, both physical closeness, and a deeper psychological or almost spiritual closeness. Many couples have problems with intimacy. Different people have different intimacy needs, so one partner may feel the need for more intimacy while the other feels that their relationship is just fine. However, if one spouse has a problem, then the relationship has a problem. It is therefore important that couples are given education on intimacy. Intimacy is about how close each spouse is to the other. More intimacy can help a spouse value the other spouse more. It can help them gain more trust. Having an intimate relationship can help couples discuss their needs and their thoughts on their relationship need in healthy and productive ways. The big question is whether couples can talk about intimacy. Without enough intimacy, a spouse may feel ashamed or afraid to be open to discussing things. This will prevent spouses from expressing their needs and desire, which can result in unhappiness and an

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unsupportive relationship. When a spouse is afraid to talk about his or her need for intimacy, neither will know that there is the need for more intimacy. In a healthy relationship, couples feel happy and are satisfied. Different people grow in intimacy at different rates, so when some spouses feel the need to be more intimate, those wishes should be respected even if the other spouse does not feel such a need. A willingness to work with issues that build intimacy helps in marriage success. Being open in discussing issues, regardless of who is in need, can stop separation. Being aware of issues that can lead to loss of intimacy is also helpful. Couples should sit down and discuss how things are and what needs to be done to improve intimacy.⁸⁴

As pointed out by the Blended and Step Family Resource Center, it is easier to handle struggles when priority is placed on issues that will impact couples’ having things together, including better parenting to blended family children.⁸⁵ Physical intimacy strengthens the bond between two people and fosters closeness, love, and affection between couples. It helps to minimize psychological stress and anxiety. It is a major binder that helps couples iron out the differences between them. Being physically intimate in a relationship helps lower blood pressure and reduces stress responses in the same brain area that helps regulate stress.

Intimacy is not just about sex. Poor non-physical intimacy negatively impacts physical intimacy. Non-physical intimacy can include what happens outside the bedroom, which should improve as well. Improving intimacy raises morale, enhances the immune system, and increases relationship satisfaction. It builds trust and happiness, and it fosters closeness, love, and affection. It is a major binder that helps couples iron out the differences between them. Intimacy

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also helps in mitigating any existing negativity and in building and enhancing trust. Trust is a huge part of relationships, and it develops over time when a couple gets to know one another’s true loyalty, patterns, and behavior. Intimacy also gives a stronger sense of companionship between couples. When two people trust one another, they feel freer to be themselves, are not suspicious of a third party entering the relationship, and can be more open, honest, and vulnerable with one another. Therefore, intimacy is crucial in a marriage. Misunderstandings about the true meaning of intimacy can lead to misunderstandings in relationships, while openness in discussing intimacy in constructive ways can stop the relationship from falling apart.

Graham Allan, Graham Crow, and Sheila Hawker recognize the dramatic change in family patterns and household formation in a blended family unit. Such changes can negatively impact couples’ need to maintain increasing intimacy. The authors point out that intimacy is contingent on continuing satisfaction. Therefore, the new couple should receive education on the various behaviors or issues that can hinder forming long-term intimacy.

As Johnson et al. note in a 2008 article, marital satisfaction impacts stepfamily success. Remarriages have lower satisfaction rates than first marriages, and remarried women have less satisfaction than remarried men. For marriage continuity, marital quality should receive close attention because of its impact on marital satisfaction and marital stability, affecting marriage stability. The article discusses various stressors that impact stepmothers’ satisfaction and affect

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87 Allan, Crow, and Hawker, Stepfamilies, 1.

relationships. It is the ability to cope with the stress that enables a marriage to be able to continue. When compared to stepfathers, stepmothers experience more stress, lower self-esteem, and less role satisfaction. Factors that impact stress include residency of stepchildren, lack of social support resources, unclear roles, and responsibility for household chores and the care of the stepchild.

One category of stressors is the difficulty in rearing stepchildren. Stepmothers shared the concern of not being considered the mother but are expected to do a larger amount of household and childcare chores when they have stepchildren and feel no compensation benefit for the additional hard work. Residential stepmothers are more likely to default to a parenting role with the expectation of being more involved with decisions regarding their stepchildren, such as in the areas of school matters and discipline. Imbalances from perceived demands and resources generally lead to an increase in stress levels. Another major source of distress in marriages is inequality in household and childcare chore responsibilities. Stress levels can lead to poor adaptation, which results in less marital satisfaction. Stepmothers get less emotional and instrumental from extended family, siblings, and friends. Stepmothers do not also receive enough support from their spouse, who is pulled between the children and the stepmother.

Another cause of difficulty in getting social support is due to the “wicked stepmother” stereotype thinking. The inherent issues associated with this belief may reduce certain resources stepmothers can get in terms of social support. Stepmothers may not reach out to others in their

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89 Ibid., 127.
90 Ibid., 120.
91 Ibid., 122.
92 Ibid., 123.
same situation due to an unwillingness to associate themselves with such a negative stereotype. The size of support stepmothers get causes stress and impacts marital satisfaction.\textsuperscript{93} Stepmothers may also take on more responsibilities than desired because of the “wicked stepmother” stereotype mentality, which leads to resentment and higher stress levels. Increased responsibility in caring for a stepchild also causes high levels of stress.\textsuperscript{94} Role clarity, which is another stressor, is present in both stepparents and stepmothers. Blended family members need to communicate more to clarify everyone’s role. Role clarity is one of the main stressors in step mothering. As the variables above cause stress, so as their negative impact on marital satisfaction. These additional stressors to already existing stressors for remarried spouses can affect the stability of the stepfamily.\textsuperscript{95} Managing and conveying the stressors to blended families so that they do not negatively impact intimacy is vital.

The strength of a couple’s intimacy is a strong binding force that makes couples work together in resolving issues smoothly. Therefore, blended family couples should not allow any behavior or practice that can weaken a couple’s intimacy, such as marital dissatisfaction, stressors, loyalty conflicts, or ex-spouse intrusion. These are just a few examples of issues that can impact a couple’s intimacy negatively. A couple’s oneness is severed when intimacy is not strong and when this is the case, blended families are not practicing Colossians 3:18-21 in its entirety.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 124.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 127.
Parenting

Blended families today are more common than ever. Children connect with new stepparents after parents’ divorce or separation. With the already existing incoming stepchildren, adding a new child can even make parenting complicated, as discussed in the following pages. Complications can be from various scheduling conflicts, disagreements about parenting styles, or issues that could arise with ex-partners on parenting matters. The new life the family members face can become complicated and frustrating. Educating blended family couples can make situations—and the new family itself—highly rewarding once the “bumps” are overcome. It is necessary to build skills on how to develop stepfamilies, how to understand children’s response to divorce or separation, how to create plans and disciple in blended families, how to communicate to co-parents, and how to deal with conflicts. These are just some of the many issues that will be part of the discussions in this paper and appear in the biblically sound education tool for blended families. Blended families will then be able to comfortably create effective strategies in parenting which include (1) giving feedback that others can receive openly in addressing misbehavior, other issues, in setting guidelines, limits, and boundaries, (2) in communicating with the children, (3) in finding solutions to problems and challenges in the day-to-day living, and (4) in providing a nurturing environment which can minimize any negative impacts from separation or divorce.96

Stepfathering

There are so many challenges that face men who become stepfathers. One such challenge involves finding their role in the new blended family. The barriers stepfathers face can include feelings of resentment or rebellion, thinking that the stepfather is replacing the child’s biological father, feeling hard-pressed in developing a relationship with another man, and seeing the stepfather as an interloper to the biological parents’ relationship. 97

Wayne Parker shares some tips to help stepfathers face and succeed in their challenges. He says that during courtship and as the relationship is getting serious, the incoming future stepfather should involve the kids. After marriage, stepfathers should not act like their dad, but should instead act like a mentor to the stepchildren. The mother should continue the disciplinary tasks with her biological kids while the stepfather’s role would be to support her, make sure that she is treated with respect, and show solidarity. The stepfather and biological mother should set rules and boundaries together. Connecting with kids, not taking rebellion personally, and continuing to be patient and persistent will be rewarding for the stepfather in the long run. Lastly, the couple needs to spend time together without the kids. 98

Ron L. Deal 99 states that stepfathers are often left with unclear directions on how to operate in the new blended family setting. He points out that a stepfather should be a godly model to his stepchildren, learn how to connect with them, enforce discipline, and work with the biological father while keeping a strong bond with the new spouse. He points out that stepdads should learn the necessary adjustments so that, despite uncertainties and challenges, they will


98 Ibid.

99 Deal, The Smart Stepdad, 57–154.
know how to stick through the marriage while maintaining a lifestyle that is in line with God’s precepts.

Remarriage adds complications to fatherhood. According to Michael E. Lamb,\textsuperscript{100} fathers should help rear children because doing so benefits children. Stepfathers should show support through everyday assistance in instruction, encouragement, responsiveness, and affection. Fundamental resources for children include support and monitoring.\textsuperscript{101} These are necessary so that children do not drift into antisocial or delinquent activities. Fathers’ emotional support and support for mothers’ authority significantly impact children’s development.\textsuperscript{102} Lamb’s writing will help blended family couples avoid creating obstacles between the biological father and the biological child in pursuing and maintaining their relationship. Lamb educates blended family units regarding the differences between blended family settings and the traditional family system. Such awareness will help blended family couples to know the importance of not eliminating the non-resident biological parent from the new family picture to avoid putting the children in a disadvantaged position or allowing the new blended family to fall apart.

In a 2005 article, Paul R. Amato states that children with only one biological parent differ from children with both biological parents present. He states that stable children appear to come from families with a higher standard of living, more parental presence, and parents who are cooperative and more effective in their parenting; such children are closer to both parents emotionally and experience less stress.\textsuperscript{103} Amato also points out that no matter what the structure


\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 342.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 347.

\textsuperscript{103} Amato, “The Impact of Family Formation Change,” 77.
of the family is, the primary predictor of children’s social and emotional well-being is the quality of parenting.¹⁰⁴ For example, in a blended family unit, the incoming stepparent may restrict the non-resident biological parent from spending quality time with the non-biological child(ren). On the other hand, the resident biological parent may restrict the incoming stepparent in setting boundaries or in exercising Bible-based disciplining methods. Another example is when a biological parent allows a biological child to disrespect a stepparent because of the fear that disciplining his or her biological child may push him or her to move to the non-resident biological parent. This is observed especially when the custodial parent prefers receiving rather than giving child support.¹⁰⁵ All of these examples impact quality parenting negatively and thus impact the child’s emotional well-being.

Ericka Lutz, in her book title, “The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Stepparenting,”¹⁰⁶ presents advice that will save stepmothers’ sanity. She shares tips on how to resolve the most common complaints. Stepparents can experience aloneness and be steered to a dangerous path through frustrations, guilt, anger, and jealousy. Communication, time, and stepparenting can turn into chaos if not done correctly. However, it can be a very positive opportunity to form a true relationship if various aspects that can surface in blended family matters are handled right. For example, avoid living on images and myths of stepparenting, such as the notion that stepparents are cruel, wicked, and uncaring. This kind of thinking will influence thoughts and ideas about what a stepparent should be and how other people or neighbors perceive stepparents’ roles and behavior. Such thinking alone will contribute to stepparenting pressure, trying to prove what you

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰⁵ Weinberger Divorce & Family Group, “Kids, Divorce, and Manipulation.”

are and what you are not, and have impacts on what will happen and how the stepparent will think, perform, and behave.

Another example is to avoid unrealistic and uncommon expectations, e.g., that the new additional stepsibling will just blend in as a big brother, the comfort of having kids without going through pregnancy, or not thinking of outside family members who will creep in from time to time. Frustrations and disappointments could result if family members do not realize expectations. There are also opportunities to form a relationship without basing on bloodlines, in learning how to overcome personal challenges, in developing a diverse family, and in gaining personal satisfaction. Accepting the challenge of having undefined roles, not knowing anything about stepparenting, and not knowing what to do is a good starting point. Understanding that stepfamily is different from a natural or nuclear family (less spontaneous, requires more work) helps. The behaviors of neighbors, friends, and people from the other biological family are helpful in facing stepfamily challenges. For a successful blended family, a long, rewarding, and functional family structure is possible if the family members get rid of expectations that can fall as fantasy because they can only apply to natural or nuclear families, but instead, lower their goals and focus on opportunities—enhancing a child’s life, being an additional resource, becoming an ear and a strong shoulder, providing stability for the family structure that works, avoiding rivalries and loyalty conflicts, and knowing that love takes time and is earned.

Stepmothering

It takes several years for the average stepfamily to blend somewhat. One stepmother said that accepting that she is different, being comfortable in who she is, and finding her identity

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in Jesus Christ helped her in her step-mothering role. Gayla Grace\textsuperscript{108} shares with other stepmothers the importance of developing a relationship with the stepchildren: finding common ground with them, letting the biological parent lead discipline during the relationship-building period to avoid anger and resentment, not trying to replace the biological mother, working towards being a friend at the beginning, expecting parenting mistakes, yielding to the strength and power of the Holy Spirit when faced with difficult emotions, and allowing time for relationships to develop.

In their book, Kathi Lipp and Carol Boley\textsuperscript{109} admit the lack of skill set in their step mothering role. They say that step mothering can be a nightmare but at the same time can also be a rewarding and enriching experience. Stepmothering is one of the areas that God can use to strengthen, manifest help in surviving, and display His empowerment in the most difficult jobs a stepmother never expected and asked for. This resource points out the importance of communication in clarifying roles and expectations and setting realistic goals on organization, finances, holidays, vacations, relationships with stepchildren, negotiation, forgiveness, healing the past, building a strong marriage with stepchildren on the scene, dealing with in-laws and ex-spouses, dealing with sexual tensions in stepfamilies, health, depression, stress, and much more. Lipp and Boley emphasize with encouragement that there is no formula in becoming a successful stepmother in these areas, but what will guarantee success is the application of practical wisdom. The authors admit that there are still moments where they struggle in their roles, but the advice they give will fill the gap of need that stepmothers seek to feel. For step mothering success, it is


\textsuperscript{109} Kathi Lipp and Carol Boley, \textit{But I’m NOT a Wicked Stepmother!: Secrets of Successful Blended Families} (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), 7–27.
important to develop in knowing and handling various conflicting styles. For example, learning how to handle ex-spouses’ threats, clarifying roles to avoid confusion, creating an environment that minimizes power struggles, continuous discussions to lessen disappointments, and working with the spouse on managing loyalty conflicts helps.

Ron L. Deal and Laura Petherbridge\textsuperscript{110} acknowledge that stepfamilies hunger for practical guidance. They counsel stepmoms to be key caretakers and emotional connectors even when stepchildren do not accept her influence. When stepmothers encounter unrealistic and unclear expectations, they find difficulties in maintaining the Godly character God expects them to have. Sharing the message in this book to stepmothers will help them face and handle unrealistic expectations. However, the focus on stepmoms alone in one book, article, or resource is one-sided and, therefore, may become discriminatory. The one-sided focus may create an imbalanced result, leaving more burden on stepmothers in keeping the family while freeing the stepfather from being accountable for actions which he, in the first place, should be the one responsible for managing. Education that also addresses stepfathering will provide more balanced handling for both spouses.

According to Wednesday Martin,\textsuperscript{111} complicated emotions develop between stepmothers and children. It is, therefore, necessary to create a guide for women in their new role as stepmothers so that they can be empowered and experience fewer struggles. Damage occurs when women enter a remarriage relationship. Instead of having that tie that binds traditional families, blended families are characterized by heightened conflict arising from feelings of loss.

\textsuperscript{110} Deal and Petherbridge, \textit{The Smart Stepmom}, lxv–cclvi.

\textsuperscript{111} Martin, \textit{Stepmonster}, 232.
and inherent loyalty that cause stepchildren to reject or resent their stepmother.\footnote{Ibid., 242–243.} Martin’s writing brings awareness to the conflicts and loyalties inherent in blended family settings.

Philippa Greene Mulford\footnote{Philippa Greene Mulford, Keys to Successful Stepmothering (Hauppauge, NY: Barron’s Educational Series, 1996), 1–116.} presents suggestions for keeping harmony in the family and shares about the stepmother’s complicated role, including in the area of discipline. When included in the proposed education specifically designed for blended units, her insights should help stepmothers understand how they should play their role as stepmothers. Stepmothers need to know the reality vs. expectations. One reality is knowing that stepchildren may love her back but not give her their undying loyalty. Another reality is the little support or understanding, if any, that will come from family and friends. To expect that the new family that she is entering into is one instant happy family will also lead to a big disappointment. It is advisable, however, to expect that because the stepfamily is different, forming a close bond is a learning process. Knowing that step mothering is different from mothering and that it takes time—anywhere from eighteen months to four years—to create a working relationship with stepchildren will minimize stepmothers’ feeling of unpreparedness. Patience and maturity are also important because it takes time to create a relationship.

Stepmothers should avoid the “mother’s trap,” i.e., making the mistake of thinking that they are the “mother,” not the “stepmother.” This kind of thinking will avoid disappointments if faced with stepchildren’s rejections. Stepparents should not rush into having their children love the new spouse regardless of their emotions because children hold on to thinking that their biological parents will get back together. It is also important to hold regular meetings to talk about problems or issues, general interests, and stepchildren’s misbehavior. The stepmother’s
role can be complicated and usually misunderstood, and therefore, stepmothers should discuss with their husbands when experiencing difficulty in carrying out their step mothering role. It may be necessary for the stepmother to resort to a laissez-faire approach: let go, back off, or withdraw when the conflict in disciplining the stepchildren becomes an issue with the biological father. Stepparents should be aware that sexual attraction can occur between stepsiblings or between a stepparent and the stepchild. Stepsiblings should not be allowed to behave as if they are biological brothers and sisters; thinking that sexual feelings can go away is not a wise thought. This kind of behavior should be given attention immediately.

The book Women and Stepfamilies: Voices of Anger and Love, edited by Nan Bauer Maglin and Nancy Schniedewind, looks at the emotional lives of various women who worked toward transformation. They cover three major topics: perspectives, stepping out, and transformation. The discussions focus on women, their partners, and children in nuclear and non-biological family settings. Maglin and Schniedewind encourage women to have visions and hope despite the negative associations that still adhere to stepfamilies, especially stepmothers. They share perspectives and encouragement to step out and to be transformed from the inside out. Stepmothers often attempt to live to the norms expected of them—nurturer, responsible for meeting other’s needs, and emotional linchpin—which can end up in defeat, hurts, and pains for many.

Stepmothers experience trauma in fitting with the newly formed family. Women are expected to live in the new family as a traditional instant family. Structural and cultural barriers stand in the way of a thriving stepmother, and it is, therefore, important to recognize these barriers as a first step. Transformation occurs when women stop blaming themselves for

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stepfamily problems and instead direct emotions and actions toward creating a change in the society that imposes these barriers. According to Maglin and Schniedewind, stepmothers should instill hope of becoming collectives of individuals, living cooperatively and democratically together, sharing responsibility, power, and love. Transformation can result when visions are focused on relinquishing the power of motherhood by challenging that of biological motherhood so they can create a diverse form of parenting by replacing “good mother” with mature adult women in autonomous, connected, loving relationships. Stepmothers should avoid unrealistic expectations, such as that stepchildren will not be part of the marriage, or the relationship with stepchildren will be close and familial, or stepchildren will be loved as if they are their own. Educating stepmothers on these issues will help them to have expectations and thinking that are more realistic.

There are many issues present in blended family parenting that impact stepparents and stepchildren that could cause stress, resentment, poor standard of living, and many others that could lead any family member to a dysfunctional state. Parenting is one of the areas that is addressed in Colossian 3:18-21. Educating blended family couples in the area of parenting is just like filling up that missing piece of a pie. Blended families will continue to fail to meet the mandate in Colossians 3:18-21 if parenting is not put in line with Colossians 3:21 precepts.

The Dysfunctional State

Family dysfunction is a serious issue. A dysfunctional family is a family with multiple internal and external conflicts. Internal conflicts can include rivalries among siblings, mental illness, parent-child conflicts, domestic violence, and single parenthood. External conflicts can

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115 Ibid.
include drug or alcohol abuse, gambling, extramarital affairs, and unemployment. Both internal and external conflicts have impacts on meeting the basic needs of the family unit. There are many negative influences of being in a dysfunctional family. Understanding the dynamics of a dysfunctional family can help blended family members move on. Learning about dysfunction in families and its effects on growth is therefore very important. Past experiences of being in a dysfunctional family affect current behavior; many blame their current problems on the family they grew up with.

A family history of dysfunction affects growing children. People tend to copy their parenting styles from their parents; abused children may abuse their own children or become unnecessarily lenient, they may end up being as manipulative as their parents, or they may not have an understanding of teaching healthy ways to their children. These children can, however, learn to be better in parenting, in dealing with issues, and in loving, appreciating, respecting, and dealing with others. The willingness to do what it takes to overcome issues and having a teachable attitude will play a big role in making changes for self-improvement and development. Providing education as proposed would be one of the tools that should help blended family members to be better.

Excessive stress can result in hostility among family members, so learning how to deal with stressors is essential to their well-being. Education that will help blended family members to know how to cope with stressors will help children function in difficult times. It is the behavior problems that make family life more challenging. Excessive stress can jeopardize the family’s security as well, as addictive behaviors are also used to cope with dysfunctional family dynamics. Family members who do not meet their needs can turn to drugs, food, alcohol, or gambling.
Ineffective communication is another attribute of a dysfunctional family. Problems can be managed with honest, healthy communication. One issue that can cause a family to be dysfunctional is an inability or unwillingness to listen to each other. One family member, for example, may resort to talking to someone else in the family to avoid confrontation rather than talking directly to the person who caused the problem. Failing to speak to the involved person directly can cause passive anger and bitterness. It can also result in mistrust for the whole family.

Perfectionism is another behavior that can cause a family to be dysfunctional. It can cause children to have learning difficulties and a lack of self-esteem, and to feel worthless, incompetent, worthless, or inadequate.

Lack of empathy is another characteristic that pushes a family to become dysfunctional, as children feel that their parent's love is conditional. Empathy can help children become compassionate, empathetic adults. Unconditional love, empathy, and open communication help parents constructively work with their children, even when their children make mistakes or poor decisions. Belittling children or instilling shame in them can turn them into a dysfunctional state.

Excessive attempts to control also contribute to a family’s dysfunctional state. A more relaxed environment encourages children to do their best in every situation rather than focusing only on how to appease their parents. Constant criticism is another cause of dysfunctional families, so parents should avoid using insults, being sarcastic, or teasing their children. A lack of privacy and independence causes dysfunctional status, so children have to be allowed to make their own decisions and develop preferences. Otherwise, children are not able to develop their own unique personalities but rather end up imitating their parents.

Addiction is one of the ways family members try to escape feeling being in a dysfunctional family. Enabling addiction or other dysfunctions in an attempt to keep the family
going, making a family member who is a rule-breaker into a scapegoat to maintain the family structure, choosing to be quiet to avoid trouble, trying to be humorous all the time, or using mischief in everyday life to lighten the family’s mood, and covering up dysfunction to look like things are normal are all contributors to a continued dysfunctional family.

The immediate impact of being in a dysfunctional family on a child includes: (1) social isolation or loneliness; (2) observed behavioral disorders; (3) extreme self-criticism; (4) low self-esteem; (5) development of mental health issues such as depression or anxiety; (6) difficulty expressing thoughts and feelings; and (7) the brain becoming wired to respond to stressors in unhealthy ways.\textsuperscript{116} Providing an education that can help family members avoid ending up in a dysfunctional state is even more vital.

**Runaway and Homeless Youth**

According to Nick McRee,\textsuperscript{117} runaways and youth homelessness happen to children who are raised in a single-parent family setting (which can include a blended family setting that only has one person acting as the parent). These children are disadvantaged psychologically, educationally, and economically. Stepfamilies differ from non-divorced two-parent families in many ways, with stepchildren often resenting their new “parents” and stepparents often avoiding the full exercise of their parental responsibilities. Such resentment can also cause youth runaways and homelessness. McRee educates parents that exposing children to a more equal presentation of mothers and fathers leads to positive development and helps lessen runways and homelessness.

\textsuperscript{116} Spears, “Dysfunctional Family.”

Poor Education and Development

According to Donna K. Ginther and Robert A. Pollak, mechanisms such as psychology, economics, and sociology affect educational outcomes for children in different structures. This is because the type of family structure the children are in will dictate the amount of psychological, social, cultural, and economic resources they have. Each discipline claims that children reared in certain family structures will, on average, receive more psychological support or more social, cultural, and economic resources. It is, therefore, necessary that these differences be communicated to blended family units so that they are aware of this distribution. This article will help blended family couples to establish more controls and encourage the involvement of the non-residential biological parent in raising the new spouse’s child. It will also help non-biological parents to be open and not restrict the biological parents’ involvement so that the children continue to have the adequate psychological, economic, sociological, and educational support they need.

Poor Mate Selection

Beverly A. Ogilvie says that typically, a child wants a mother. They long for that hold that only a mother can give. A child who has an unavailable mother will end up with a man who will also be unavailable. A woman can become an accomplice to or co-offender in father-child incest. A typical woman who becomes this type of person is observed to be needy of acceptance or attention and closeness, have unmet needs and low self-esteem and feel isolated. The majority

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120 Ibid., 50.
find their children to be a safe target for such unmet needs or feelings.\textsuperscript{121} Ogilvie’s writing, when conveyed to stepmothers, will help stepmothers to put in place a strategy where they are made aware of children’s needs and the identified needs are met.

**Challenges from Diversity and Complexities**

Jan Pryor,\textsuperscript{122} the editor of *The International Handbook of Stepfamilies*, recognizes the importance of paying attention to stepfamilies because of the challenges brought by diversity and complexities. Pryor points out the importance of boundary establishment, partner satisfaction, and strategies for a wide network of family members, including resident and non-resident parties. The inclusion of this book in the proposed all-inclusive educational counseling resource will educate blended families on how to handle diversity and complexities experienced in the family. Guidance on handling matters for both resident and non-resident parties must therefore be communicated to blended family couples. Children who are living in stepfamilies experience greater rates of negative outcomes such as having more health and behavior problems, leaving home and school earlier, getting involved in sexual activity earlier, and having a greater likelihood of committing criminal activity. Stepchildren are also at greater risk of experiencing both physical and sexual abuse. Many of these negative outcomes result from effects of parental separation, from the disruptive effect of a stepfather entering the household, and from differences in levels of involvement, warmth, supervision, aspirations, and parenting practices between stepfathers and biological fathers. Other causes are usually associated with stepfamily formation, e.g., the impact of changes in residence, changes in schools, disruption of extra-household

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 88.

relationships (such as friends and extended family), differences in employment patterns, and changes in economic circumstances. Couples must be educated for awareness of what can cause these negative outcomes so that they are considered when setting boundaries and creating strategies for quality parenting.

Komal Kumar identifies unique challenges inherent to blended families that are much different from those encountered by nuclear families. Stereotypical thinking that blended families are abnormal and trying to apply the functioning of a nuclear family creates vague roles and a lack of clarity for each of the family members involved. The many strategies that exist to help families are mostly applicable to nuclear family systems and thus are inapplicable to blended families. Educating blended families on issues specific to blended family systems could help members of these families create a successful family unit.

**Loyalty Conflict**

Loyalty conflict occurs when a child attempts to maintain a positive relationship with both parents. More intense loyalty conflict for the child results in greater parental conflict and causes cognitive dissonance for the child (holding two incompatible or contradictory thoughts at the same time). Greater cognitive dissonance results in greater mental discomfort. Some children try to resolve their loyalty conflict by parental alienation, such as siding with parent B and rejecting parent A—a maladaptive manner. This behavior is a newly diagnosed mental condition:


a child affected by parental relationship distress. Couples should be educated on handling loyalty conflicts to negate any mental condition that could surface.

In a 2013 article, Michele Martin-Uzzi and Denise Duval-Tsioles discuss the issue of differing loyalties causing step-spouses to feel that their needs are not being met and the biological parents being caught in the middle. Clarifying roles is emphasized to lessen confusion resulting in frustration and guilt. Couples must be educated on these issues to eliminate the feeling of threat to the couple’s marital satisfaction, keep and maintain commitments, and establish bonds of affection and trust with the new spouse despite struggles with commitment.

**Intrafamilial Physical and Sexual Offending and Abuse**

Intrafamilial sexual abuse involves a perpetrator, which could include parents, siblings, other blood relatives, and stepparents from the child’s family, and who is usually, though not always, living in the same house as the victim. Intrafamilial victims suffer greater physical and emotional injury as oppose to those sexual offending involving outside family settings.

According to the 2008 article “Intrafamilial Adolescent Sex Offenders: Family Functioning and Treatment,” many young offenders are from blended or stepfamilies that are adversarial, disorganized, and uncommunicative. Poorly defined sexual boundaries, family

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126 A perpetrator is “a person who has been determined to have caused or knowingly allowed the maltreatment of a child.” This includes those who commit neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and perpetrators of Munchausen syndrome by proxy (“the most common term used to describe a type of child abuse in which a caregiver exaggerates, fabricates, or induces symptoms of a medical condition in a child that leads to unnecessary and potentially harmful medical care”). Child Welfare Information Gateway, “Perpetrators of Child Abuse & Neglect.” https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/can/perpetrators/.

127 Thornton et al., “Intrafamilial Adolescent Sex Offenders,” 363.

128 Amato, “The Impact of Family Formation Change,” 83.
dysfunction, maternal, sexual victimization, parental rejection, exposure to domestic violence, maternal unavailability, presence of a stepfather, and the absence of a biological parent are factors that can lead to adolescent sexual offending. Poor parenting skills are also observed to cause adolescent sexual offending. This article, when included in the proposed education, will help blended family couples in preventing damages that these referenced behaviors can cause and will help them to recognize the importance of setting and enforcing boundaries, of not pushing the other spouse to exclude the other biological parent from the biological children’s life, and of attending to issues as soon as they are brought up. Doing so will help avoid sexual offending that could surface between stepsiblings and between the stepparent and the stepchild. Educating blended families on intrafamilial sexual offending will help the importance of establishing boundaries and clarifying roles that could prevent sexual offending.

According to a 2015 article by Michael C. Seto, Kelly M. Babchishin, Lesleigh E. Pullman, and Ian V. McPhail, child sexual abuse is a widespread intrafamilial social and health problem, and poor parent-child attachments and family neglect or abuse typically result in intrafamilial offending. This research will help a new blended family couple establish boundaries and better parenting to keep sexual abuse from happening. This research will also help blended family couples not to force a close relationship or any other type of relationship or interaction that could only be appropriate in a nuclear family setting.

Research findings, as Nick McRee discusses in his article “Child Abuse & Neglect,” have shown that youth living in homes with the non-related parent is at high risk of being


130 Ibid.

exposed to physical and sexual abuse. Abuse is also influenced by the non-related parent’s role or function in the family.\textsuperscript{132} McRee’s writing, when conveyed to blended family couples, will help blended families to become aware of symptoms and behaviors that can lead blended family members to feel neglected, which could lead to sexual abuse.

Risk of abuse

Risk factors are characteristics that lead to child abuse and neglect, which may or may not be direct causes. Individual, relational, community, and societal factors contribute to the risk of a child being abused and neglected. Even though children are not responsible for the harm that is inflicted upon them, certain factors lead to an increased risk of abuse and neglect.

Risk factors\textsuperscript{133} for perpetration can be classified as individual risk factors, family risk factors, and community risk factors. Individual risk factors include: (1) parents’ lack of understanding of parenting skills, their child’s needs, and child development; (2) parents’ history of child neglect or abuse; (3) presence of depression, mental issues, and/or substance abuse in the family; (4) parents who are young, have low education, are single, have a large number of dependent children, or are at a low-income level; (5) having nonbiological, transient caregivers in the home, such as the mother’s male partner; and (6) parents who justify or support maltreatment behaviors. Family risk factors include (1) social isolation; (2) presence of family stress, separation or divorce, and violence, including intimate partner violence; and (3) parenting stress, poor parent-child relationships, and negative interactions. Community risk factors include (1) community violence; (2) concentrated neighborhood disadvantage (e.g., high poverty, high

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
unemployment rates, and high density of alcohol outlets); and (3) poor social connections. Blended families should be educated so that strategies can be put in place to minimize exposure to risk factors.

Protective factors

Blended families have to be educated on protective factors to minimize or avoid the realization of these risk factors. Protective factors may lessen the likelihood of children being abused or neglected, so knowing protective factors is as important as knowing the risk factors. Family protective factors include (1) supportive family environment and social networks; (2) concrete support for basic needs; (3) nurturing parenting skills; (4) stable family relationships; (5) household rules and child monitoring; (6) parental employment; (7) parental education; (8) adequate housing; (9) access to health care and social services; and (10) caring adults outside the family who can serve as role models or mentors. Community protective factors would be communities that support parents and take responsibility for preventing abuse.134 Blended families should be educated on the importance of having community support groups and connections.

Emily and John Visher135 point out that risks of abuse are present in households where youths are reported to be living with at least one natural parent. Risk is eminent for both physical and sexual abuse with one additional parent figure in a primary household with different types of blended household members. Many counseling resources available today do not include

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discussions of boundaries, which are important with an incoming new family member. This book points out the need to set a boundary. It is, therefore, necessary that boundary-setting discussions be taught to blended families. This resource will guide blended family couples so that they do not force the new spouse and the stepchild to have an intimate relationship comparable to the relationship that is normally present between the biological child and biological parents. Without this understanding, arguments and inappropriate relationships may surface, which could lead to divorce and cause children to end up in a dysfunctional state. Visher and Visher’s teaching will guide family members in setting boundaries with biological and non-biological members accordingly.

Ron L. Deal points out the importance of being educated and understanding vulnerability. On the Smart Stepfamilies website, he points out an incident where stepsiblings were engaged in sex together. Some of the precautionary steps he shared include: (1) engage as a family in “What-If” conversations related to intrafamilial sex offending; (2) establish clear physical boundaries and consequences to impose, and (3) make sure each parent owns the responsibility for his or her child.136

Colossians 3:18-21’s purpose is for families to follow a biblical model. Deviance to such precepts can lead to any of the blended family members to become in a dysfunctional state. Everyone, both parents and children, are to behave a certain way which is clearly stated in Colossian 3:18-21 so that families are attaining having a relationship just like God (the Father), Jesus (the Son), and the church. That is, the husband is loving the wife as Jesus loves the church, children obeying the parents as Jesus (God’s Son) obeying God (His Father). When the same

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“Father-Son- Church” relationship exists in the “Husband-Son-Wife” relationship, blended families are operating within the Colossian3:18-21 precepts. Blended families have to be educated on issues and behavior that can lead to a dysfunctional state which includes failed marriages.

Blending

A family is blending when all members of the blended family are mingling in harmony. Blending is important because the smooth transition is important towards family development.

Jeanne Segal and Lawrence Robinson\(^ {137} \) share do’s and don’ts for practically strengthening blended families. The authors point out that no matter how it may look difficult at first, mutual respect, open communication, love, and patience with stepchildren can help form a successful blended family. Disappointment, frustration, and confusion can result when trying to make the new blended family a replica of an ideal nuclear family. Some tips Segal and Robinson share include: (1) creating a solid marriage—to grow and mature into the marriage while performing parenting functions; (2) maintaining civility—instead of ignoring or purposely trying to hurt family members, each one can focus on being civil towards one another continuously; (3) respecting family members at all levels; (4) having compassion for everyone’s development—being aware that each person in the family is at varying stages and therefore being mindful of the different needs; and (5) allowing room for growth—instilling the hope that the family will grow and each member will want to spend more time with each other and feel closer with one another. In addition, creating boundaries, quality parenting, and effective communication are important in

strengthening blended families. When each family member has a clear understanding of what they can and cannot do, less confusion and misunderstanding occur. Educating blended families on this list of do’s and don’ts will be an instrument in strengthening blended families.

Patricia L. Papernow’s book offers help to blended families in overcoming difficulties in remarriage. She presents information that will bring clarity and deep insights into the unique and complicated dynamics of blended families, such as in the area of attachments. Papernow lays out the importance of the first stage in building reliable and nourishing relationships between stepchildren and stepparents and between family groups who need to learn to live together with the newly formed family. She also shares practical guidance for dealing with members regarding the different attachments of children towards their biological parents, for stepparents in coping with feelings of being excluded from the biological parent-child bond, and for biological parents in dealing with being torn from the need for intimacy and privacy from each other, including the children’s needs for attention and support. Papernow presents the importance of passing the first three early stages—fantasy, immersion, and awareness—in moving forward towards a successful blended family. The key to getting started is to first learn to let go of the fantasy that the remarriage will immediately become united, but instead, to start with areas that need to be worked on towards family development. On immersion, an example would be for the biological parent to carry out the disciplining of the biological children while the non-biological parent spends time getting to know the children.

Before moving on to structural changes, the new family members should work on self-awareness and getting to know each other. The importance of focusing on the early stages is to attend to these various issues before moving forward: (1) gaps between empathy and “common sense” among members; (2) the presence of indifference, discomfort, or hostility in children that
are brought to their step relationships; (3) feelings of outsider status such as jealousy, resentment, or inadequacy; (4) stepchildren’s impact on the developing new couple’s relationship; (5) the challenge of negotiating inherent to making family decisions; (6) perceived inappropriate traditional parent’s role for the new stepparent; (7) impact of unshared past; (8) children’s loyalty binds; (9) lingering influence of previous extended family and non-resident parent in the new family; and (10) losses incurred by family members in forming the stepfamily. Papernow’s writing will help couples know and understand the different attachments of children to biological parents and stepparents. Such knowledge will help stepparents cope with feelings of being excluded from the biological parent-child bond. Awareness of the attachment issue will help those experiencing the same or similar blended family attachment issues, as well as those who will soon experience such issues. Education will help couples plan for strategies to appropriately manage these issues.

**Communication**

Blended families should be educated on the importance of effective communication, which is especially critical in blended families. Topics such as child support, stepkids, step parenting, ex-spouses, biological kids, alimony, visitation, and many other related blended family issues have to be discussed clearly. Misunderstanding or chaos results in the absence of effective communication. Families in a traditional or nuclear setting may always work themselves out, and family members may be able to get along without exerting much effort. In a blended family, clear understanding is important because of the many issues and divergent demands inherent to stepfamily life that will need to be addressed. Blended family couples

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should be able to discuss everything if they are to be effective in leading the newly formed blended family. If couples cannot openly voice concerns, frustrations, fears, and other emotions that affect stepparents, no one will be able to understand the clear picture, and couples will not know what to expect when problems related to these issues come up. Both spouses should be able to talk about anything and everything, such as in the areas of battling stepsiblings, uncooperative ex-spouses, custodial matters, or other issues that can arise—if not, the blended family can soon spin out of control because neither partner will know where each stands on various issues, and no one will know what to expect when a problem arises.139

Ineffective communication is a characteristic of a dysfunctional family. Problems cannot be resolved without honest, open, and healthy communication. One common issue in dysfunctional families is the unwillingness or inability to listen to each other. An individual may choose not to directly communicate with the person who caused the problem but rather confides in other family members in an attempt to avoid confrontation. Indirect communication can cause aggressive behavior or bitterness. It can also cause a lack of trust within the family unit.140

In the 2001 article “Becoming a Family’: Developmental Processes Represented in Blended Family Discourse,”141 the authors recognize the heightened need to address the complexities experienced by blended families, which are different from traditional or nuclear families. Blended families undergo developmental processes on boundaries, solidarity, and


140 Spears, “Dysfunctional Family.”

change adaptability. Individuals who experience constructive trajectories and desire success are flexible in boundary management. The ability to negotiate impacts smooth transition, but the demarcation of bloodlines and generations results in stagnating pathways. Boundaries, therefore, are critical to family development. On the other hand, pushing for family solidarity causes tension and conflict as families strive to be what they are not. Those who can constructively confront conflict and deal with constant changes end up with more positive experiences and are better able to cope with ups and downs. Blended family members must focus on managing communication on conflicts, change adjustment, and negotiation within and outside families. Adaptability to change is the turning point towards development progress while hanging on to traditional family roles causes struggles when pressured to replace such roles. Identity and roles take time to develop. Educating blended families with this research will help them with the different complexities that they will experience as well as the effective resolution of these issues.

Margaret Robinson,142 in her book titled *Family Transformation Through Divorce and Remarriage*, emphasizes clear boundaries, decision-making responsibilities, and sexuality-incest boundaries in blended families. According to Robinson, clear communication, recognition of loyalty conflicts, and confrontation are necessary for a successfully re-formed family. Loyalty and confrontation are topics that are avoided or misunderstood but are common in a blended family setting. It is necessary to discuss problems as they occur and have built-in space, time, and privacy for everyone involved.

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In her book, Beth A. Le Poire\textsuperscript{143} shares various approaches to understanding the value of communication. Communication influences the family’s nurture and control aspects, which are two central functions. She highlights communication as a coping mechanism for dealing with changing roles, rules, and systems within the new family. Role changes and nurture are two subjects that should be emphasized because they impact the blended family significantly. Clarification of various roles can bring a positive impact on nurture. Communication avoidance usually occurs when a family member decides to withdraw because of feeling ignored and having a sense of hopelessness. Educating blended families on Le Poire’s writing will encourage family members not to avoid communication.

**Clarifying Roles**

John MacArthur’s book *Divine Design: God’s Complementary Roles for Men and Women*\textsuperscript{144} clears up cultural misconceptions on marriage. He points out the importance of fostering love, balance, and security. MacArthur’s writing, when shared with blended family couples, will help set clear roles for each member of the family regardless of the family structure.

An article on the Good Therapy website acknowledges the many challenges in blended families, sharing guidance on relationships between siblings, ex-stepparents, and stepparents. According to this article, family members need to learn their new roles for the smooth functioning of the newly formed family.\textsuperscript{145} This information, when conveyed to blended


families, will help members of the newly formed family, including ex-partners, with how to deal with each other.

According to Paul R. Amato,\textsuperscript{146} children learn that parents’ authority is not arbitrary when parents support each other’s decisions and agree on rules. When parents agree, children experience consistent decisions and discipline. Such learned good examples help children to develop positive relationships with others and in their intimate relationships at a later stage in life. Amato’s research, when communicated to blended families, will help couples with issues that can contribute to children’s stability. Incorporating this into the proposed specialized education for blended families will help new blended family couples know that it is important to have a consistent agreement with each other and that doing so can minimize children’s feelings of instability.

**Developing New Self-Concepts**

Jessica Lippman and Paddy Lewis\textsuperscript{147} state that to help both adults and children, it is important for those who have been divorced to develop a new self-concept. A new life begins with marriage dissolution, and therefore, changes in the family result: a different mother, father, and children. Parents should be alert to any changes in children’s behavior following a divorce. Lippman and Lewis note that it is important that everybody’s feelings are blending. This writing educates blended family members to be aware that competition and jealousy can exist in a blended family. Advance knowledge through education will help blended families to avoid practices that could provoke competition or jealousy.

\textsuperscript{146} Amato, “The Impact of Family Formation Change,” 76.

The Complexity of Change

Pauline I. Erera\textsuperscript{148} shares information on both children’s and adults’ development in her book titled \textit{Family Diversity: Continuity and Change in the Contemporary Family}. She recognizes the difficulty of having additional family members after disrupting the old family. Erera points out the importance of setting up clear behavioral guidelines that will guide couples on each other’s performance and stepparenting role. Understanding the items below will help in the family development:

- See the creation of a new family as an affirmation of family life that fits each member’s needs and choices, rather than seeing it as a threat.
- Do not take on a “one size fits all” mentality and assume that one family structure is good for everybody. Blended families are too diverse to fit into one single model.
- There is no one universal or best family-style. Each family-style has its unique strengths, resilience, and advantages, as well as its challenges. Accepting diversity will contribute to an enhanced life in whatever form the family may take.
- Viewing family life through a traditional family lens promotes less acceptance and support. It makes all other families seem problematic, deviant, and second best, and it restricts the opportunity to accept and appreciate other families. It is also wrong and harmful to equate family structure with family functioning.
- Avoid focusing on problems alone. Doing so gives a distorted perspective. It is also important to pay attention to each family member’s strengths, achievements, and contributions.

• Keep in mind the diversity within the family.

Blended families need to know these guidelines to help each family member deal with the complexity of the change.

**Clearing Root Problems**

Jane Hurwitz emphasizes the importance of talking about expectations with all family members so problems can be prevented. She points out the importance of knowing and understanding the roots that can cause problems to surface. Family members will learn the importance of clearing the roots of the problems so that the same problems do not surface again.

Avoiding participating in overcoming obstacles and creating new bonds contributes to difficulties for the family while taking an active role will ease the transition and help the family take control in varying situations. The ability to communicate and negotiate is a good skill to have and improve. Family members should learn new skills and share in the family traditions and experiences. Listening and learning to listen will result in family strength. Family members should confront matters ahead. Hurwitz also points out that blended family myths are destructive, and it is important for families to go over the myths and discuss and clear out those that relate to them. Some common myths include:

- Happiness is the sole responsibility of parents
- Stepparents are not as good as biological parents
- The grieving process is over for some family members
- Blended family members have no special reasons to ever feel embarrassed or guilty
- The money provided by the ex-spouse will be used fairly in the family

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- The children’s other parents will never sue for child custody

This information will help avoid issues that typically cause problems to surface.

Adapting New and Different “Rules”

Kelley and Trepper teach various ways stepfamilies can function well by adapting new and different “rules” specifically applicable to fit their structure. According to these authors, stepfamily can function with the development of new traditions and coping strategies that are different from the first family marriage. Unique strategies should be developed in the areas of discipline, family roles, money management, and relationship management. Kelley and Trepper only concentrate on the positive aspects while leaving out negative ones to help dim stepfamilies’ problematic image and instill hope in stepfamilies by normalizing their differences from biologically formed families. Their intention for writing is to provide information and help family structures understand how stepfamilies function so that these families can be helped, including by their relatives and friends.\(^{150}\) This book substantiates the fact that there is still a need for educating blended family couples in dealing with negative issues.

Hanging on to Chaos

In an article on Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar as a blended family, David J. Zucker and Moshe Reiss\(^ {151}\) say that blended families do not have a set of instructions on how to handle different issues that they experience. The authors highlight the importance of learning from others’ experiences, referring to the lives of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac and discussing the lessons that blended families can learn from their stories. Since people go through

\(^{150}\) Kelley and Trepper, *Developing Healthy Stepfamilies*, 39–41.

different struggles, there will always be a need for new knowledge that can help blended families face new emerging issues. Zucker and Reis add that blended families are common today, and their nature and dynamics are more complicated than traditional family configurations. This statement further supports the desperate need for blended families to be educated on blended family issues. This writing, when conveyed to blended family couples, will help them set clear instructions in handling issues related to this family structure. The authors also point out that knowing the issues of others, such as those present in Abraham’s life with Sarah, Hagar, and Ishmael, will help blended family members face similar experiences that they will encounter in the future. Abraham chose to let Hagar and Ishmael go because it was causing too much contention in his wife’s life. This was something hard for Abraham that many men today would be hesitant to do, such as letting a biological child go and choosing to follow God’s instructions in exchange for a peaceful family. Abraham chose to listen to God rather than hanging on to his child but experienced the reward of reconciliation at the end. Knowing others’ struggles and how they handled similar situations can be accomplished by providing an education that covers the various issues faced by blended families. This article supports providing education that covers the various issues blended families experience to help present and future blended family problems.

**Betrayal and Jealousy**

Psychology Today defines jealousy to be:

A complex emotion that encompasses feelings ranging from suspicion to rage to fear to humiliation. It strikes people of all ages, genders, and sexual orientations, and is most typically aroused when a person

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perceives a threat to a valued relationship from a third party. The threat may be real or imagined.

Betrayal, on the other hand, could mean to expose someone, to disclose a secret, to break a promise, to be disloyal to a person’s trust, or to disappoint an expectation.\textsuperscript{153}

In her 1996 book on blended families, Elizabeth Weitzman\textsuperscript{154} presents many “to do” tips in an attempt to help family members minimize the feeling of betrayal and jealousy and earn respect in a blended family environment. She points out the importance of learning to avoid negative feelings because of new emotions that result from transitioning to a blended family setting. Talking things out when feeling jealous or out of place helps to avoid negative feelings. Telling the children why rules are created will help clarify unanswered questions. Focusing on the positives (e.g., a new sister or brother) and sharing feelings with someone will help ease any stress. Being open to change and knowing that it will take time to get to know others will help lighten frustrations and disappointments. Weitzman’s writing will guide family members in their day-to-day dealings with each other.

According to Kelly Spears, to turn from being a dysfunctional family to a healthy one, family members should communicate compassionately, freely, and openly; try to have every family member’s needs met; listen to one another despite differing opinions; resolve conflicts directly; not hold grudges; show unconditional love for each other in every aspect; work together to reach mutual goals; and encourage each other to develop preferences, interests, and a unique personality.

\textsuperscript{153} Collins Dictionary, “Betrayal”. collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/betray

Those who were in a dysfunctional family should start healing old, internal wounds. The proposed education can be used as one of the tools that will help expose and heal those old wounds. It is necessary to learn and practice new skills such as communication, independence, empathetic listening, and direct problem-solving. Family members must learn to be more comfortable in mind, body, and emotions, as well as in making choices. It is good to practice being more self-confident, self-accepting, and self-assured. It is also important to start trusting more and to maintain a safe home environment. In addition to utilizing the proposed education as one of the tools for self-healing and self-improvement, reading self-help books and talking to someone trained to teach people how to overcome the destructive effects of being in a dysfunctional family will help. Despite pains, family members can have a better life with the right help tools.155

The result of educating blended family units should lead to blending. This means that blended families are progressing towards becoming a biblically founded family model practicing a lifestyle that aligns with Colossians 3:18-21. This also means that each family member knows and understand their role in family formation and their placement in the family structure, exercising faith and spirituality, possess the advance knowledge that helps each one to be proactive, open to changes, and participating in family strengthening and maintenance; couple’s intimacy is present and improving, parents are working together on parenting, support and living arrangement at home are enriching and building for every member of the family, that everyone is being equipped to being a healthy member both within the family and outside the home.

155 Spears, “Dysfunctional Family.”
Theological Basis

Genesis 1-2 lays out God’s creation of man and woman and the call for these two created beings to be one flesh and to procreate. God first created Adam, then Eve, by taking one of Adam’s ribs, intending for Eve to be Adam’s helper (Gen 1:26-28). With the Fall of man, humans were imputed with the sin that Adam and Eve committed and thus caused human death. Christ’s coming to earth has given every human being a chance to be restored so that, once again, humans can have eternal life through Jesus Christ. Greg Magee writes:

While God made humans in his image, humans also need to be restored to the image of God in Christ (Rom 8:29; Col 3:10), since Christ is the true image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15). This is made possible when believers become a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and grow into this new creation reality by putting off the old self and putting on the new self, which is “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:21-24; Colossians 3:9-10). The image of God reflects the perfection of what humans were called to be.

The call to become a new creation in Christ is also a call to have a marriage that follows Christ’s teaching in Colossians 3:8-21, which differs from how marriage operated before Christ.

In Genesis 2, Adam is to work the garden of Eden (Gen 2:15). In Genesis 2:18, God created Eve, a woman, to be Adam’s helper—“a helper fit/suitable for him.” For all marital unions, God’s intention is for the man to leave his father and mother, hold fast to his wife, and become one flesh (see also Matt 19:5, Mark 10:7, Eph 5:31). “Becoming one flesh” is to be unified as “becoming one family” (NET). Genesis 2 reveals God’s purpose in creating a woman: to be alongside and in a relationship with a man in a marital union. “Jesus combines Genesis

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156 “God gave Adam the primeval Garden of Eden to tend but, on penalty of death, commanded him not to eat the fruit of the ‘tree of knowledge of good and evil.’ … Eve yielded to the temptations of the evil serpent and Adam joined her in eating the forbidden fruit.” Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Adam and Eve,” https://www.britannica.com/biography/Adam-and-Eve-biblical-literary-figures#ref254371

1:27 (creation of male and female) with Genesis 2:24 (God’s design for marriage)” in Matthew 19:3-12 and Mark 10:2-12 to describe God’s purpose for marriage.\footnote{Ibid.}

In Ephesians 5, Paul references Genesis 2 in his teaching on marriage when he quotes God’s original plan for marriage (Genesis 2:24). This passage also connects marriage to Christ’s relationship with the church: the wife’s submission to her husband is compared to the church’s submission to Christ, while the husband’s sacrificial love is compared to Christ’s love for the church. Ephesians 5:32 also makes this connection between the marriage relationship and Christ and the church.\footnote{Ibid.} Simon Turpin adds, “Marriage is the union of only two people—a male and female (Matthew 19:5)—for covenantal companionship (Genesis 2:18, Malachi 2:14) and the raising up of godly offspring (Genesis 1:28, Malachi 2:15).”\footnote{Simon Turpin, “Genesis 2—The Foundation of Marriage,” Answers in Genesis, April 4, 2016, https://answersingenesis.org/blogs/simon-turpin/2016/04/04/genesis-2-foundation-marriage/}

Alongside Genesis chapters 1-2, Colossians 3:18-21 addresses God’s instructions for a biblical model of marriage. According to this passage, wives are to submit to husbands, husbands are not to be harsh to wives, children are to obey the parents, and fathers are not to embitter children. Many biblical verses intertwine in this precept to make it possible for this biblical family model to come to fruition. As this study uncovers, other Bible verses that are not being practiced in a blended family setting, creating barriers for blended families in having a family that follows Colossians 3:18-21, include:

1. 1 Timothy 3:4 (household management and children’s submissiveness). While this verse is addressed to elders or pastors (terms used interchangeably), it also points to the husband in the sense that the husband has to manage his home and children. In a blended
family, this precept may not be happening because of loyalty conflict, over-protection, fear, and many other reasons, which will be addressed in this paper.

2. Ephesians 5:25 (loving the wife as Christ loved and gave Himself for the church). Many husbands fail to extend this kind of love to their wives, as seen in the loyalty conflict and biological tie scenarios that will be discussed in the later pages of this paper.

3. Proverbs 6:20 (not forsaking mother’s teaching). This occurs when, due to biological ties, the biological parent protects the biological child from being disciplined.

4. Ephesians 6:1-3 (children to obey and honor parents). This teaching is violated when the biological parent condones the biological child’s not listening to the stepparent due to the fear that the child might leave when disciplined, which could cause the biological resident parent to pay child support.

5. Ephesians 5:33 (loving wife as himself). Violation of this precept is a known issue due to the increasing number of divorces. Many divorces happen because the “self” did not get his way. This behavior can be present in wives also.


7. Colossians 3:19 (not to be harsh to wives).

8. 1 Corinthians 13:13 and 1 Peter 3:7 (living with wives in an understanding way and honoring them as the weaker vessel). This is automatically violated when the husband misunderstands the wife’s submissiveness as exerting control.


10. Genesis 21:8-21, in which Abraham has to resolve family conflict by removing his family from those who are creating problems for his wife.
In the many topics that will be covered in this paper, the new wife suffers, as in the case of stepmothers, bearing the pain and hurts in being obligated to mother a stepchild and yet not being supported by the biological father. This last verse is exceedingly difficult for anybody to adhere to because of biological ties. For example, the biological parent will not place the biological child with the nonresident spouse but will instead have the stepmother bear the burden, pains, and hurts that result from being expected to attend to the non-biological child. We see from these verses that parents and children fall short in adhering to what is expected from them, as the Bible teaches. All of these verses are not fully followed in a blended family setting, as substantiated by many presentations and discussions in this paper.

Many of the blended issues that have surfaced and continue to surface are because of deviation from God’s precepts as to how a family should be managed. In addition, blended family members fail to carry out their God-given roles because of a lack of knowledge. When God’s precepts are observed and practiced, blended families can become that family God designs (Col 3:18-21). Colossians 3:18-21 gives a picture of how a family should be structured and how family members should function: having a husband who loves the wife, a wife who is submissive to the husband, and children who are obedient to the parents.

When it comes to submission, maintaining unity between the husband and the wife should be intact. Even though man and woman are created equal, God places the man as the head while the wife submits, just like Jesus, the Son, submits to His Father, God. This type of head-submissiveness relationship does not make the wife inferior to the husband but rather happens in the context of the husband’s love for the wife, as in God’s love for His Son. Using 1 John 4:8 for illustrative purposes concerning “love,” out of this loving relationship, the wife

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161 Brown, “God’s Design for The Family.”
submits. On the other hand, the husband does not force the wife to submit by resorting to rule and trying to dominate her, but rather should express love, care, and serve her, which should invite submission (Col 3:19). The wife should continue to submit, pray, and love her husband (Pet 3:1-2). 162 While the wife is encouraged to continue to maintain a gentle spirit in supporting the husband in his leadership role even if she is not loved, she is not to submit if the act required of her is not “fitting for the Lord.” 163

The husband is to love the wife just as Christ loves the church (Rom 5:8). When a husband disregards his wife’s rightful desire over his biological child’s selfish need, it is not loving her because it destroys the wife’s emotional being. When the husband favors the ex-wife more on what needs to be done in his home despite the new wife’s wishes, to avoid child support, it destroys the wife. Such action is not an act of love toward his new spouse. When the biological parent condones the non-biological child’s refusal to follow the stepmother’s or stepfather’s instructions because of loyalty conflict, this already deviates against God’s instruction in Colossians 3:18 for children to be obedient to their parents. A wife does not submit to her husband when she takes over the leadership in the family or when she tries to take control of her husband’s leadership by employing deceptive, nagging, or manipulating tactics. 164

162 Ibid.

163 “Fitting for the Lord” refers to a godly husband who loves his wife and is gentle with her (Colossians 3:19) as opposed to having his wife participate or bask in the sins which typically trap unbelievers, such as sexual immorality, revenge, slander, and jealousy, which should not be part of any Christian’s lifestyle. BibleRef, Colossians 3:18, accessed April 1, 2021, https://www.bibleref.com/Colossians/3/Colossians-3-18.html. In the case of marital infidelity, the wife may have little choice but to leave the relationship, absent repentance or sincere promise for not repeating unfaithfulness; Norman Wise, “Dealing with Infidelity,” Living Water Christian Counseling, October 26, 2017, accessed April 1, 2021, https://livingwaterchristiancounseling.org/dealing-with-infidelity/.

The literature presented herein discusses how the God-designed family structure is altered by the many behaviors that blended families are engaged in, which results in blended families failing to be aligned with what God designed the family to be. Blended families’ deviance from God’s design for how families should operate needs to be given prompt attention and resolution.

This section of the paper will cover what family members do and how their actions affect other family members, which in turn negatively impacts the family itself, breaking God’s precepts of having a family that aligns with Colossians 3:18-21. This paper will argue, with supporting cases and examples, that blended families do not follow their God-given roles, such that attaining a biblical founded family becomes difficult to accomplish. When writings such as Segal and Robinson’s “Blended Family and Step-Parenting Tips” \(^{165}\) are communicated to blended families attending church, members of such families will be able to address various issues faced by blended family units that are hindering them from becoming that family that adheres to Colossians 3:18-21. As blended families start to be transformed in becoming a biblical family model, a new culture for blended families will start to emerge, preserving God’s desired family model, which can be passed on to the next blended family generations.

The Family

Within the context of Colossians 3:18-21, the husband is instructed to love his wife, and children are instructed to be obedient. When the children are not obedient, the stepmother could end up feeling unloved, as in the case of a biological child in a loyalty conflict scenario. So, within the context of having obedient children, the Bible instructs the husband to bring them up

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\(^{165}\) Segal and Robinson, “Blended Family and Step-Parenting Tips.”
in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4), command them to keep the way of the 
Lord (Gen 18:19) and teach them with a sound doctrine (Titus 2:1-15). When it comes to the 
family as a whole, the husband is given the responsibility to bring order to his family by loving 
his wife and having obedient children. 1 Timothy 3:4 can also apply to the husband’s leadership 
in a home as with men who are serving as elders or pastors in a church who are instructed to 
manage their households. While Timothy 3:4 is addressed to those who hold the office of an 
elder or a pastor (the terms are used interchangeably), there are implications for husbands and 
fathers who may not be in the role of elder, in the sense that husbands must manage their 
households. When the children are tolerated to not obey set boundaries or are allowed too much 
permeability, family chaos results. One area that can end up problematic would be sexual 
offenses that can result due to boundary issues between step-siblings and stepparents. On the 
other hand, when favoritism is practiced, bitterness results. We see the damages that favoritism 
causes in the story of Joseph in Genesis 37, where his brothers ended up hating him because of 
their father’s favoritism toward him. Joseph’s brothers ended up doing wrong by selling Joseph 
as a slave and alienating him from his father. In this story, everyone suffered emotionally and 
physically. One good principle of household management is not to practice favoritism (Gen 37:4, 
Prov 28:21, Eph 6:4, Titus 1:6). In the examples above, favoritism and sexual offenses can result 
when the husband mismanages his household.

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166 Sexual offenses are discussed in Seto et al., “The Puzzle of Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse”; Thornton 
et al., “Intrafamilial Adolescent Sex Offenders”; McRee, “Child Abuse in Blended Households”; Robinson, Family 
Transformation Through Divorce and Remarriage; and Visher and Visher, How to Win as a Stepfamily.
The Husband

When the husband fails to carry out God’s teaching, the new wife is hurt, and in some cases, this results in withdrawal. In situations where the husband is favoring and tolerating the biological child, the husband is going against the teaching of God that instructs that he love his wife as Christ loved and gave himself for the church (Eph 5:25), love his wife as himself (Eph 5:33), not be harsh with his wife (Col 3:19), and live with his wife in an understanding way, honoring her as the weaker vessel (1 Cor 13:13; 1 Pet 3:7). Ricardo McCrimmon acknowledges that “the church has an erroneous view about how to love a wife” and that men like to dominate their wives with the use of God’s Word for their benefit. He further says that men and women are equal before God, bearing the same image of God and that men need to be open with their affection for their wives. In the context of Colossians 3:18-21, a husband fails to love his wife by not being sensitive to her emotional state and by allowing his biological son to dishonor her. The husband, in this case, has failed to teach his son in the ways of the Lord (Titus 2:1-5).

The Wife

When the husband has a controlling attitude (Eph 5:21, 23, 28-29; 1 Cor 11:3) and fails to treat his wife in an understanding and honoring way and see her as the weaker vessel (1 Pet 3:7), the wife ends up feeling abandoned and unsupported emotionally, spiritually, and physically. These actions are not acts of love for the wife, and the resulting feelings can cause a stepmother (wife) to withdraw and commit stepparent-stepsibling sexual offenses. When this happens, the wife breaks 1 Peter 3:1, which calls for the wife to conduct herself in such a way that she can

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167 Stepmothers are discussed in Deal and Petherbridge, The Smart Stepmom; Martin, Stepmonster; Ginny S. Warren, Blended, Not Shaken: Support for Stepparents (Bloomington, IL: WestBow Press, 2015); and Lipp and Boley, But I’m NOT a Wicked Stepmother.

win her husband rather than committing a sexual offense with the stepson. She also violates Ephesians 5:33, which calls for wives to respect their husbands. In the context of Colossians 3:18-21, the wife failed to do her part and caused more chaos at home.

The Children

When the children are permitted to disrespect, disobey, or not listen to non-biological parents, boundaries are not enforced, which could result in inter-sibling sexual offenses, step-parents can end up withdrawing, and they can all end up dysfunctional for life. These cases can happen when the residential parents fail to heed to God’s teaching in raising children who obey and honor parents (Eph 6:1-3), in bringing up children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:1-4), and in managing the household with dignity and keeping children submissive (1 Tim 3:4). In the context of Colossians 3:18-21, the husband, in this case, failed to teach his children as the Bible commands, and the absence of such knowledge causes children to disobey because they will not know the right thing to do (Prov 22:6).

Theoretical Basis

Part of the reason why blended families continue to experience problems is because of existing family theories. For example, there is a theory that is currently circulating that a blended family operates the same as a nuclear family. With this theory, no attempt will be made to make the necessary adjustments in blended family settings. On the other hand, according to Family Systems Theory, simply knowing how to encode and decode relationships from communication content will help resolve family problems since relationships with others are based on and

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169 Causes of dysfunctional states are discussed in Basem Abbas Al Ubaidi, “Cost of Growing Up in Dysfunctional Family,” *Journal of Family Medicine and Disease Prevention* 3, no. 3.
regulated by communicating with others.\textsuperscript{170} The Bowen Family Systems Theory states that the reciprocal functioning of all members of a family contributes to the emotional intensity of a family member. The emotional symptoms of the individual are an expression of the emotional symptoms of a family, which are often embedded in the patterns of behaviors from past generations.\textsuperscript{171} According to Katherine R. Allen and Angela C. Henderson, when change occurs, interrelated individuals in families are affected. The change will affect the interaction and emotional issues of all members of the family and will echo across generations in the extended family. Each family member knows his or her role in helping the family to run smoothly, which is assumed even when the family structure changes, as in transitioning to a blended family structure. Such an assumption then becomes a problem because, instead of addressing role assumption issues, the tendency is to blame or scapegoat while ignoring the need to find out what contributes to the problem.\textsuperscript{172}

HBHM believes in the Colossians 3:18-21 biblical model. Other clergy members interviewed, such as Pastor Price, Sr. (personal communication, January 31, 2021), Pastor Green (telephone communication, January 17, 2021), and Pastor Johnson (telephone communication, January 20, 2021), believe the same. They all shared that when counseling their members, they can only point to Bible verses that they believe can relate to the issues that they are currently experiencing. They are not able to employ a deeper conversation that may help target specific problem resolution because of the lack of knowledge on other blended family issues. They,


therefore, cannot relate more effectively because of a lack of knowledge of what blended families go through deep within themselves. These members of the clergy expressed the need to know more about blended family issues. This paper will substantiate that blended families are different from traditional or nuclear families and thus will require more process rather than just communication. In addition, more issues surface in blended families, not just past experiences. All of these will require more coordinated efforts, one of which is gathering information about the issues that hinder blended families from becoming that biblical model and providing them with the information that will clear those barriers.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Results

This section will discuss the methodology used to gather the data needed to prove that a biblically grounded education specific to blended families is needed at HBHM and can also be implemented in other churches. Following the methodology discussion will be the presentation of the survey results, which will address the ten areas of focus: (1) family formation; (2) family structure; (3) faith and spirituality; (4) advance preparation; (5) family strengthening and maintenance; (6) couples’ intimacy; (7) parenting, stepparenting, step fathering and step mothering; (8) the dysfunctional state, which includes poor education, poor mate selection, diversities and complexities, loyalty conflict, intrafamilial sexual offending, and many other concerns; (9) blending; and (10) the need for educating blended families, as expressed by the individuals interviewed.

Methodology

Taking surveys from blended families was the chosen method to gather the data needed for the ten focus topics listed above to substantiate the need for blended family education at HBHM. Gathering data through surveys was the best method because it offers flexibility to be done anonymously or in person, which could be very useful if a change in the survey method is necessary at a later point.

Through the data gathered from the survey, this study will attempt to prove that the failure of the husband to take leadership at home results in the wife feeling unloved and also causes the children to not obey, leading to the failure to meet the mandate in Colossians 3:18-21 for a biblically formed family. The questions in the survey were designed to touch on the ten focus areas listed above, each of which connects to Colossians 3:18-21. The questions are designed to uncover why family members do what they do, the consequences of their actions,
and the impact of these ten focus areas on the family as a whole to Colossians 3:18-21. The purpose of the gathered results is to determine whether an education that is specifically designed for blended families can help such families to align with the biblical model as stated in Colossians 3:18-21 and if so, to develop the educational tool so that it can be used to educate blended families.

Another purpose of the survey is to prove that today, the continuity of marriage is in a continuous state of the threat of dissolution, and blended families continue to fail to function as a biblical family model because of a lack of education that is specifically designed for such families. In addition, the survey data will also be used to substantiate that family members continue to experience behaviors and treatment that could lead to being in a dysfunctional state. The gathered data will also be used to prove that the failure of family members to carry out their God-given roles forms a barrier against having a biblical model for the family, as stated in Colossians 3:18-21.

The final goal is to develop an educational tool that can be used to educate blended families. The educational tool will be representative of blended family issues. Each family issue will need to be communicated to blended families so that repeated divorces due to unresolved blended family issues are stopped or lessened, and the blended family members do not end up in a dysfunctional state. For this purpose, a survey was formulated comprising sixty-eight questions to demonstrate that the ten focus areas are negatively impacted when a family does not follow Colossians 3:18-21 teaching.

Surveys were distributed to participants. Each interview took approximately 10 to 15 minutes. In some interviews with couples right before the pandemic, the couples would fight because one person did not choose the answer expected by his or her spouse. Other couples
would manage to stay calm during the interview but argue afterward for the same reason. In some instances, spouses of participants would not want to be interviewed, and some who were interviewed would not sign the hard copy due to fear that their signatures would cause them harm. Therefore, a change in the survey process had to be made to have just one spouse sign the hard copy of the survey questionnaire. During the coronavirus pandemic, couples who expressed interest in participating in the survey could not find an agreeable time to talk over the telephone with the other spouse and the interviewer, so an additional change to the survey process was made to allow for the hard copy to be mailed to these individuals. A $25 compensation was also offered to incentivize and attract busy projected participants to take the survey. The results of the survey are presented below in charts with accompanying narratives. The expected result is to implement the proposed education at HBHM as soon as possible. The same education is expected to be implemented in churches and other ministry settings.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, flyers were to be distributed to individuals in public places for individuals to participate in the survey. With the emergence of restrictions imposed by the State of Virginia, i.e., to practice social distancing and avoid touching surfaces and items (such as papers) to prevent coronavirus transmission, the target population was decreased in size. A consent form had to be signed first before a telephone interview could be made. The interviewer, who is the doctoral candidate, was to ask the survey participant the 68 survey questions, then mark the questionnaire for the survey participant’s answers.

To qualify, either or both spouses should have brought in one or more children to the family and have at least one ex-spouse who interacted with the blended family members. The participants are from both churched and unchurched populations. The participants’ names are retained to document participation, but their names are replaced by pseudonyms for
confidentiality purposes. The survey results, in addition to the research, are used to support the argument that currently, there is no education offered in churches that are specifically designed for blended families, which include issues representative of what blended families experience. The lack of this type of resource leaves blended families with inadequate help on issues at hand. It is also worth noting that without this specifically designed education, many blended family issues will remain unresolved. The questions that will be raised will relate to such issues as family formation and structure, spirituality and faith, advance preparation, family strengthening and maintenance, couples’ intimacy, stepparenting, the dysfunctional state, blending, and the need for biblically sound education specifically designed for blended families. Each interview took around 10-15 minutes. For supplies, only paper, printer ink, stamps, and mailing envelopes were needed, which were purchased by the doctoral candidate. No video or audio recording occurred. Participants were encouraged to call or email the doctoral candidate or the attending mentor for any question or help in completing the survey. After the survey, the doctoral candidate compiled the data and prepared a narrative summary of the results of the survey. Charts or graphs were presented along with the narrative report of the findings. The expected result is that the proposed education will be put in place at HBHM as soon as possible. The same education is expected to be implemented in churches and other ministry settings.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the survey population was decreased in size to abide by the governing bodies’ order to stay home, practice social distancing, and avoid touching objects that could carry the coronavirus and spread it to others. One object that participants showed concern about was taking a hardcopy survey from public distribution. With this in mind, it was necessary to decrease the target population to accommodate these imposed regulations. Therefore, survey participants were set to 6-9 couples with heterosexual (opposite sex) partners.
It was necessary to limit the survey to opposite-sex marriage because God’s design for marriage is for a biologically born man and woman.

During the survey and interview process, a new population was discovered that would best benefit from blended family education because their marriages failed due to blended family issues. The inputs of this newly discovered target population will be very influential in proving the need for blended family education because they were divorced or separated for lack of blended family education. This added population will further substantiate the destructive effect on marriage when a family is not structured based on Colossians 3:18-21 because they were divorced due to having a family that did not align with the teachings of Colossians 3:18-21. Therefore, the target population mix was altered to include individuals who were separated or divorced due to unresolved blended family issues and who are not currently living with partners.

For family formation, the questions asked focused on oneness, causes of feeling like one is in a dysfunctional state, issues that are hindering families from blending, couples’ intimacy, parenting or stepparenting, child support or financial issues, church or spiritual issues, and perceived needs necessary in forming a family structure that aligns with Colossians 3:18-21. These questions impact family formation. Therefore, information gathered from the survey will help blended family couples and members know what they need to do to remove the barriers that hinder the formation of a family that aligns with God’s design on family structure.

For family structure, the questions asked relate to biological parent(s) and biological child(ren)’s relationship and behavior toward the non-biological parent(s) and child(ren). The couple was also asked about their spiritual knowledge on what constitutes a spiritual family because the practice can only become realized when knowledge is present. Knowing the spiritual knowledge of blended family couples will help prove if a lack of education on spiritual
formation is the reason why blended families are failing to establish a family structure that aligns with God’s teaching in Colossians 3:18-21.

For faith and spirituality, questions asked focus on the blended family couple’s knowledge of God’s part and function in the family and the couple’s accountability to God’s given responsibility for each. When blended family couples are aware of what God wants them to do and how they should conduct and run the family and are convicted on the area of accountability, the same will be passed on to the rest of the blended family members. The data that will be gathered from the survey will help in knowing what to emphasize in blended family education. For example, is it the lack of knowledge? Is it lacking at the practice and accountability level? Is faith being impacted because of continuing struggle on blended family issues? These questions should help design an education that will strengthen and bring alive spirituality and faith in the blended family home.

For advance preparation, questions asked will help in determining if advance preparation would have helped blended family couples in deciding whether to marry someone that would lead to a blended family arrangement. Questions herein will also help in knowing if blended family couples would have been more prepared in dealing with blended family issues with advance knowledge on such issues. Data collected will justify the need for advance education before entering a marriage that could lead to a blended family relationship.

For family strengthening and maintenance, questions are focused on finding out issues that are hindering blended family relationships so that the educational content can best be designed to pinpoint weaknesses for marriage strengthening. Some questions will touch on the couple’s level, while other questions will address the parent-child relationship level. Data collected in this area will help pinpoint specific weaknesses for family discussion follow-up.
For couples’ intimacy, questions will focus on issues that impact couples’ intimacy because lack of intimacy creates a communication barrier. Close intimacy promotes openness and cooperation between spouses. Data collected will substantiate the need for spouse education in this area and will also help in determining topic inclusion in the education material.

For parenting, stepparenting, step-fathering, and step-mothering, questions asked in the survey will not only help substantiate the need to educate blended family couples but will also help design the content that will best help blended families. The data that will be gathered will address family members’ behavior that negatively impacts the non-biological child and the non-biological parent. For example, the presence of loyalty conflict, which is typically present in a biological child and biological parent, can lead to marriage failure or the stepmother’s submissiveness, and it is, therefore, necessary to address parenting topics in the proposed education specifically designed for blended families.

For dysfunctional states, questions focus on finding out whether blended families are on the brink of becoming dysfunctional or are already in the midst of it. Data gathered will help in determining where that problem is occurring and what specific action is needed. Such knowledge will help pinpoint the area within the family structure that needs to be fixed or help families in refraining from practices that could lead to a dysfunctional state.

For blending, the data gathered here will reveal causes and practices that are barriers to blending. The purpose of obtaining this information is to specifically address current practices that restrict blending and the need to educate blended families on the importance of blending and how to achieve this goal.

For the need for educating blended families as expressed by interviewed individuals, the questions here are focused on the perceived need of blended families for education that is
specifically designed for such families. This area of the survey will play a major role in determining the need and the importance of educating blended families.

Results

The survey was designed to support the thesis that blended families experience repeated divorce and contribute to the growth of dysfunctional families because churches do not have a dedicated biblically sound education that is specifically designed for blended families. In addition to research, the survey has been performed to further substantiate that the same is experienced today. Having an education that addresses the various issues experienced by blended family units will help establish blended families that are structured and have a lifestyle that aligns with God’s teaching as stated in Colossians 3:18-21, with a wife who is submissive, a husband who is loving, and children who are obedient. A biblically founded blended family will help lessen or stop repeated divorce and the growth of dysfunctional families.

Below are the findings from the survey performed. It is important to review the data gathered from the survey to see if the survey results support the thesis. Each topic that has been selected for further study will be analyzed regarding the participants’ behavior and the relationship of the responses to Colossians 3:18-21. The results of the survey or interviews are grouped into the main issues presented in the methodology section: (1) family formation; (2) family structure; (3) faith and spirituality; (4) advance preparation; (5) family strengthening and maintenance; (6) couples’ intimacy; (7) parenting, stepparenting, step fathering, and step mothering; (8) the dysfunctional state, which includes poor education, poor mate selection, diversities and complexities, loyalty conflict, intrafamilial sexual offending, and many other concerns; (9) blending; and (10) the need for educating blended families, as expressed by the individuals interviewed. The presentation of the results will conclude by answering the question
of whether the need for an education specifically designed for blended families, discussing the various issues experienced by such families, is justified.

Data Presentation

Section I – Family Formation and Structure

Family formation and structure are the backbones of a family. Colossians 3:18 identifies how a family should be structured and formed, with the presence of a husband, a wife, and the child(ren). Each of these has a function as God intended them to, which is also defined in Colossians 3:18-21.

Family formation

The purpose of families is to maintain the well-being of their members. God’s plan for His children is to have a happy family. The man and the woman, or the husband and the wife, are to be united as one flesh (Gen 1:27-28; 2:23-24). As one formed flesh, the new blended family couple must train their children in the way of truth and holiness (Deut 11:19; Prov 22:6). Family members should be mutually supportive, caring, respectful, and willing to share responsibilities. It is therefore important that the blended family couple know how God sees family so they can form their new family as such and guide their children according to God’s plan.

According to the survey, and as presented in the chart below, a few participants know a little about how God wants the family to be formed, while others have an idea of what it should be, but no one really knows how a family should be formed according to God’s design as stated in Colossians 3:18-21. A challenge, therefore, exists in forming a biblically structured family for

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173 Focus on the Family, “What the Bible Says About Family.”
blended family units. One strong reason for this struggle can be seen from the survey result for those couples who have not consulted counseling help from a professional general counselor(s). These families do not know what a biblically structured family is. A good question to raise is, how can a family be biblically structured if they lack the knowledge on how to form such a structure? Even those families surveyed who consulted counseling help from a professional general counselor(s) did not show that they possess all or at least the major knowledge on what a biblically structured family is. The survey result reveals that one out of three families surveyed only knows partially what a biblically structured family is. “Partially” means that they did not know for sure what constitutes a family structure built around biblical principles. They could not quote the Bible verses that teach what constitutes a biblically structured family. They also do not know all the verses that point to biblical formation. Some quoted knowledge was derived from word-of-mouth from friends, while some are from Bible class conversations. One couple was noted to stand on a principle that is not even biblical but more of a preference or is leaning more towards a culture-based biased principle. The same weak knowledge is observed in couples who sought counseling assistance from a professional counselor(s) who claimed to be “blended family experts.” For this group of families, one was noted to be more knowledgeable than the other two but still did not know all the scriptures that reference building a biblically formed family. Also, some scriptures, though quoted correctly, were translated discriminatorily to benefit self-interest. “Discriminatorily” means that the interpreter, rendering a biased interpretation, intended to favor self.
Figure 1. Couples who know what a biblically healthy family is

Family structure

God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit work in harmony together. They each have a role that allows them to operate in order. That is, God leads, Christ submits, and the Holy Spirit works with God and Jesus to accomplish God’s agenda. Applying this relationship in a human sense, the husband leads in love, the wife submits, and the children obey the parents. When this is followed, then Colossians 3:18-21 is fulfilled: the wife submits because the husband is loving, the husband is able to lead because the wife is submissive, and the children are obedient because the husband and wife are both in the same mindset as one flesh and the child is not getting differing instructions from each parent. When the husband, the wife, and the child are functioning similar to how God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit function, the decision-making does not leave one out and include the other, so it results in less friction.

As presented in the chart below, for all surveyed couples, the result shows that there have been very few instances where the non-biological child did not affect the resident biological
parent’s decision-making on the blended family’s scheduling, event planning, and prioritization. This alone already breaks God’s instruction that the couple be one flesh because the child is between the couple (Matt 19:6). This includes the day-to-day family activities both within and outside the home. For the couples in the survey who did not seek the help of a counselor, the non-biological child often impacts the resident parent’s decision. For couples who met with a professional general counselor, the ratio is 2:1, where 2 represents to have been impacted by the non-biological child on the resident parent’s decision-making and 1 represents to have the decision-making of the parents slightly been impacted by the non-biological child, while for couples who have seen a blended family “claimed expert,” the ratio is 3:0; 3 impacted out of 3 surveyed participants. A biological parent admitted siding with the biological child when making decisions for the family as a whole to win the child’s favor to stay with the resident biological parent. For the couples who sought the help of a “blended family expert” professional counselor, the non-biological resident parent used Bible verses in demand to make the main decision-making at the couple level (oneness).
Figure 2. The non-biological parent feels that the non-biological child drives the decision-making of the spouse

Section II - Spirituality and Faith

Spirituality and faith are important factors in the survey because of the nature and subject matter of this paper: applying God’s Word as the guide in the formation and structure of blended families per Colossians 3:18-21. Spiritual awareness is necessary so that couples know what God says when it comes to families.

Spiritual awareness

Answers to survey questions that relate to spiritual awareness show that only a few families are aware of what constitutes a spiritually healthy family. The awareness of what a spiritually healthy family is drives couples to seek further counseling in an attempt to be a spiritually healthy family. Other couples who sought counseling and who lack knowledge of what a healthy family should look and feel like sought help out of pain, hurts, and desperation.
for a family that they believe to be “spiritually normal,” but they could not verbalize what they considered “spiritually normal families.” All the couples who have not seen a professional counselor (or any counselor at all) wanted to have a spiritually healthy family, but they do not possess the knowledge on how to become one. Two out of the three families who sought the help of a general professional counselor have some idea of what a spiritually healthy family should look like, while one couple had a clear idea. Two of the couples who have seen a professional counselor who claimed to be an expert on blended family matters have a clear idea of what a spiritually healthy family should be, while one couple did not. Seeing a blended-family expert counselor was an attempt to get second counseling because the general counselor they had met with did not address their blended family issue(s).

![Bar Chart]

Figure 3. Spiritual health awareness
Faith

In terms of the impact on resident parents’ faith, couples who did not meet with counselors showed a ratio of 1:1:2. The first number represents “faith is impacted,” while the second number represents “faith is sometimes impacted,” and the third represents “faith not impacted” by blended family issues. For couples who met with a professional general counselor, the ratio is 1:2:0, and for couples who have seen a blended family “claimed expert,” the ratio is 1:1:1. The couples who have not sought the help of professional counselors do not really believe in counseling; they believe that God is sufficient to resolve their blended family problems. These behaviors explain the impact on faith as it relates to blended family issues. Some families sought the counsel of a general professional counselor in their stage two attempt to resolve blended family problems; they faithfully believed that their blended family issues would subside as they continued in faith, but, at a later point, they felt the need to see a professional counselor. Some individuals, at this stage, have questioned the efficacy of their faith since no resolution has taken place yet. The couples who have consulted with a claimed “blended-family expert” are those who continued to experience blended family issues. Two out of the three couples questioned the quality of their faith because of repeated issues in addition to new ones creeping up. One of the three couples maintained an unwavering faith; this couple also believed that what is being experienced is God-appointed and of God’s will, though it was observed that despite holding to faith, overwhelming loneliness in addition to pains and hurts was manifested during the interview. Most couples profess faith in an attempt to resolve family issues. Some couples expressed increasing faith as blended family issues heighten, while others were observed to be
weakening in their faith, some of whom expressed an increasing no-choice desire to withdraw physically while staying in the marriage, while others resorted to ending the marriage.

![Figure 4. Impact of blended family issues on faith](image)

**Section III – Advance Preparedness**

As shown in figure 5 below, there is an overwhelmingly positive response among the surveyed couples on the importance of being prepared in advance before entering a blended family marriage. All surveyed individuals emphasize the importance of education on blended family issues before entering marriage, i.e., what issues could arise and how they can be handled when they come up. Several mentioned that education should include shared experiences on how others confronted such issues and any consequences or rewards that resulted from responding in certain ways. Some also mentioned that education should include making known to the other party any issues that will be brought into the marriage. Surveyed individuals said that being aware of blended family issues will help in being prepared to confront issues that will surface.
On the other hand, knowing what the other person will bring into the marriage will help in being prepared mentally and emotionally and in being proactive when confronted with incoming issues. In other words, there will be an expectation of issues arising, and along expectation are “what if” resolutions. One said that unpreparedness creates surprises that lead to unexpected reactions that further lead to more chaos. Another said that it is even worst when a known issue is unshared; it can make the other person feel betrayed. Table 6 below shows the overwhelming support for advance education on blended family issues.

![Figure 5. Participants who favor advance education on blended family issues](image)

All surveyed families agree that they would have less stress in facing blended family issues if they had known in advance what they could have faced and how issues can best be handled. Advance knowledge as shared by survey participants will help individuals to be proactive by being prepared for how an individual will adapt to matters that cannot be controlled. For example, an individual will obtain knowledge in advance on (1) how to spot when a stressor can surface; (2) how to respond when a stressor surfaces; and (3) having a thought process to pay attention to circumstances that could spark stress. In other words, advance preparedness will help
control stress, such as by adapting some feelings, attitudes, or behavior when stress starts to surface.\textsuperscript{174}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Advance_Education_impact_on_stress_levels.png}
\caption{Advance Education’s Impact On Stress Levels}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Section IV – Family Strengthening Maintenance}

On family strengthening maintenance, 85\% of the total participants felt that the resident biological parents spend more time with their biological child. The time here refers to both at home and when the biological child is with the other biological parent. One participant shared that while heading to a special dinner date, the husband hurriedly left to see his ex-wife attend to an issue with their child that she was dealing with. The participant added that it is even painful when her husband’s ex-wife knew that she always gets her way with her husband because they have a child together. Another participant shared that she never has enough time with her

husband to talk things out because they are always with the other family; i.e., the husband demands that she be with the other family to socialize, especially on events such as birthdays, graduations, or mingling with the non-biological children at the ex-spouse’s home. Such regular close association also causes them to avoid discussing certain issues with the family members to keep from yelling at each other. She\textsuperscript{175} expressed that the more time is spent with her alone, the less they will argue because there will be less negative influence from ex-family members, while she and her spouse will have more quality time to talk and sort things out. Two out of three couples in all groups expressed the need for quality, but these are for individuals who do not have demanding, lengthy hours at work. Participants who spend many hours at work expressed that they would want to, but not necessarily. These individuals are also more focused on providing for the family and achieving a better life for the whole family.

Blended families feel the need to be educated regarding the importance of having quality time together. They feel the importance of quality time to talk things out without the children around, but also the need to set aside time with the children for bonding purposes. They believe that quality time helps maintain family strengthening because it develops family bonds. The surveyed families overwhelmingly agree on the importance of spending time with both the spouse and the non-biological child(ren). This result is supported by the 3:3 ratio survey result. This means that three participants out of each of the three population groups—couples who did not see a professional counselor, couples who met with the general professional counselor(s), and couples who consulted with a so-called expert on blended family issues—agreed that quality time together is important.

\textsuperscript{175} Witmer, “How to Strengthen Family Bonds.”
Section V – Couples’ Intimacy

All surveyed individuals in all groups shared that the oneness and intimacy of the new couple are negatively impacted by loyalty conflicts and the involvement of ex-spouses. Couples shared that intimacy is negatively impacted by loyalty conflict, high parenting expectations with less help in enforcing disciplinary action, the vagueness of roles, and the lack of boundaries. Oneness is negatively impacted by perceived preference to ex-spouses due to having a child together. In some cases, oneness is also impacted due to discriminatory siding by the biological resident parent towards the biological child. This type of behavior results in jealousy and a severely deteriorating relationship between the non-biological child and the incoming parent. On the other hand, the spouse who is the non-biological parent feels disrespected, not valued, and in many cases may withdraw. Those who chose not to withdraw continue to struggle mentally, emotionally, and physically, and experience excessive stress. When decision-making and planning become heavily influenced by the non-biological child and the ex-spouse, the new incoming spouse feels out of place and second-hand. Non-resident parents feel that they have a stronger voice against the ex-spouse’s new family when they have one or more children together.
Non-resident parents were observed using the child(ren) to win favor from the ex-spouse when sharing in raising their biological child. The incoming spouse tends to withdraw from involvement and stay in such a state of behavior. The incoming non-biological parent typically feels insulted and abandoned emotionally and spiritually when the spouse sides with the ex-spouse and the biological child. Blended families, therefore, have to be educated on matters impacting intimacy. Parents expressed that they should not allow their children to play with their emotions and manipulate them but rather should always prioritize the marriage, which is the mass core on which the family is built. Otherwise, God’s design for the family is altered.176

![Ex-Spouse and Non-Biological Child(ren)’s Impact On Intimacy](image)

Figure 9. Ex-spouse and non-biological child(ren)’s impact on intimacy

Section VI – Stepparenting

Child support causes many battles for couples and ex-spouses. Some families expect child support to be partly used for family expenses like rent/mortgage or utilities. One participant shared that he hides the amount of money that he gives to his ex-spouse because otherwise, it

176 Brown, “God’s Design for the Family.”
will cause fights and arguments. There are times when he gives more money when he makes more money from his job and would like to give more for his biological child. Another participant shared that she would save money to buy her biological child, who does not live with her a pair of socks. Other participants misconstrued that the spouse is trying to help their ex-spouse rather than the child.

Surveyed non-biological parents complain about how the biological parents are allowing their biological children to disobey and not be disciplined. The biological parent, on the other hand, fears that the child will move to the non-resident with excessive discipline, so he or she resorts to the permeability of boundaries. This is a noted prevalent behavior between the biological child and biological parent.

Child support expectation

As discussed in the previous pages, children’s social and economic condition affects mental and developmental growth. Biological parents feel the need for their spouse to be educated regarding the impact of finances on the child’s growth and development so that non-biological parents understand and are open to discussing this issue and being more flexible on child support. Those who participated in the survey shared that resident parents often accuse the resident parent of using child support for the resident parent’s household expenses. Biological non-resident parents typically expect the child's support to be used for the child’s expenses only. In situations like this, when child support is solely used for the child’s expenses, some of the surveyed participants proposed that good practice is to keep a list of expenses showing how the child support was spent on the child.

However, allowing a child to get away from disciplinary action, thinking that enforcement of discipline will cause the child to move to the non-resident for fear that the current
resident biological parent will end up paying the non-resident biological parent-child support, can impact the child’s lifestyle as they go out there in the real world—people get fired when they do not follow directions. Children will grow up thinking that they can do whatever without consequences. Issues also occur when the non-biological parent wants the child's support to be used for household expenses, which negatively impacts intimacy. Intimacy is a major key to keeping the marriage because intimacy promotes conversation on issues and cooperation for both spouses in the home. Table 10 below shows that there is a high expectation for couples who have not seen a professional counselor use child support to pay for household expenses. There is, however, less expectation for couples who have seen professional counselors. This is because of the counselor’s impact on helping couples understand child support. There are no noted differences for those couples who are spiritual and non-spiritual on the issue of using child support to pay for household expenses. Both displayed the same mixed behavior notwithstanding spirituality; some expect child support to be used for household expenses while some do not care. Figure 11 below shows couples’ behavior in compromising on child(ren)’s disciplinary action to avoid paying child support. The results of the survey reveal that parents compromise on child(ren)’s discipline to avoid paying child support.
Figure 10. Couples who expect child support to be spent towards household expenses

Figure 11. Spouses who compromise child’s disciplinary action(s) due to child support
Stepfathering

Surveyed stepfathers feel burdened by high expectations in fathering and providing for the non-biological child(ren). Many mothers are still living with a myth that men have to provide for the family. Men feel burdened supporting their biological child plus being expected to support the non-biological child(ren). The burden increases when non-biological children disregard the stepfather’s discipline while providing, and when the biological mother condones misbehaviors due to blood ties or an attempt to protect the biological child. Other causes of problematic blended family issues that exist in stepfathering, as in stepmothering, include existing loyalty conflicts, increased permeability, overprotection of the biological parent in an attempt to protect the biological child from repeating bad experiences suffered in childhood, and the biological parent’s overarching desire to give the biological child a better life according to what he thinks is better for his child, to the point that he does not want any involvement of the stepfather.

Figure 12. Some reasons stepfathers feel overwhelmed by step fathering
Stepmothering

Surveyed stepmothers feel burdened by high expectations in raising a non-biological child but not being supported by their spouse in enforcing issues necessary in rearing the non-biological child. The reasons shared mirror the same reasoning shared by stepfathers, i.e., existing loyalty conflicts, increased permeability, overprotection of the biological parent in an attempt to protect the biological child from repeating bad experiences suffered in childhood, and the biological parent’s overarching desire to give the biological child a better life according to what he thinks is better for his child, to the point that he does not want any stepmother’s involvement.

Stepmothers often struggle with being expected to mother the non-biological child but not having the support from the biological resident father. Stepmothers find it difficult to have the non-biological children obey when the children see that the father is shielding them from the stepmother.

![Figure 13. Issues experienced in stepmothering](image-url)
Section VII – The Dysfunctional State

Questions in the survey relate to issues and situations that blended families experience that threaten to lead or have led family members, to be in a dysfunctional state. Ninety percent of the couples avoid discussing issues that caused major disagreements in past conversations and led to a big fight. Some couples prefer not to say anything but rather stay silent, which contributes to continuous resentment. Few couples chose to continue to express their thoughts and risk fighting while expressing continued disappointment but still valuing the marriage. The same pattern seems to follow for ex-spouse’s felt intrusion on non-biological parenting issues and financial support, schedule changes, and non-biological ex-spouse prioritization. Similar behavior, however, was noted for both couples: jealousy over the non-biological child and demand for one-on-one attention and quality time.

Stepparents shared that they find it easier for younger children to blend in into the newly formed family. It is harder for teens to blend into the family, however, or at least it takes time, as shared by some participants. Issues that are prevalent in teens include resistance to discipline by the non-biological parent, and the non-biological parent feeling disrespected because of not being able to discipline their non-biological children, which typically results in spousal arguments, withdrawal, and threats of separation. Children tend to use their influence on their biological parents to purposely not listen to the non-biological parent. One participant shared how his non-biological children would listen to him, but as soon as the biological mother comes home, they would run to their mom and purposely not listen to him and treat him as if he does not exist.
When it comes to non-biological parents associating with non-biological child(ren), the ratio for couples who have not seen a professional counselor is 1:2:0, for those who sought the help of a professional general counselor, the ratio is 2:1:0, while for those who have seen a so-called blended family “expert is 1:2:0. The first number in the ratio represents avoiding the non-biological child(ren) at all to avoid arguments, the second number in the ratio represents non-biological spouses who would only get near the non-biological child(ren) when necessary, while the last number in the ratio are those non-biological parents who have a great relationship with the non-biological child(ren). Those who have not seen a professional counselor have more interaction with the non-biological child(ren) than couples who have seen a professional general counselor. This is because the latter couple was educated by the counselor on the consequences of reacting badly during arguments involving the non-biological child. For couples who have seen a blended family counselor, the higher ratio towards associating with the non-biological
when necessary is influenced by the professional counselor’s advice to try to associate with
given guidance aimed towards a better stepparent - stepchild relationship. No participants,
however, expressed having an excellent relationship with their non-biological child(ren), which
warrants further education using the proposed education tool.

![chart]

Figure 15. Stepparent’s relationship with the non-biological child(ren)

Intrafamilial sexual offending

None of the surveyed individuals had any idea that sexual offending can happen between
stepsiblings or between a stepchild and stepparent. Blended families surveyed tend to live with
the myth that blended families should operate like nuclear families. For example, many family
members seem to be okay with girls sitting on the stepfather’s lap. Couples expressed acceptance
of a new incoming stepfather bathing the non-biological female stepchild or the nonbiological
female child sleeping alone with the stepparent. Many participants surveyed think that it is okay
for stepdaughters and stepsons to have unsupervised sitting or lying with their bodies close
together playing or sitting on top of each other’s lap, like what biological brothers and sisters do.
This is highly inappropriate, as noted in previous discussions. Below is one example extracted from the Smart Stepfamilies website\(^\text{177}\) that can serve as a strong argument for why blended families need to be educated on intrafamilial sex offending.

We are going through a storm and need some guidance. Marsha and I have been married for four years with four children and feel we have a healthy family situation. That’s why we cannot understand why this has happened. My son, Ian (age 17) and Marsha’s daughter, Monica (age 15), had sex last Sunday night. They have been like brothers and sisters throughout our marriage, and now they have lost their virginity to one another. I’m just glad guilt took over, and they confessed within a day.

![Figure 16. Couples’ knowledge on intrafamilial sexual offending](image)

\(^{177}\) Quoted in Deal, “What Do We Do Now?”
Section VIII – Blending

The data collected are used to determine if blended families are blending progressively, and if not, the reasons why they are not. Various subtopics will further be studied to see why they are not working toward blending. Blended families find blending to be difficult to implement when there is no consistency in enforcing boundaries and discipline with both the biological and non-biological parent within the home. When a resolution is not achieved or when the non-biological parent continues to struggle and feel excluded withdrawal results.

Blended families find that communication plays a big role in the lack of or slow progress of blended family blending. Blended families noted that the adjustment period could be smoother when potential problems are proactively addressed. Lack of communication or setting it aside until a later time can cause problems to intensify. Spouses feel that they have to implement ongoing communication on stepparenting, stepkids, biological kids, ex-spouses, visitation, child support, alimony, and other issues that will affect the blended family as a whole. As many grow
up, feelings, concerns, needs, or wishes are not discussed openly. Blended families state that they need to clearly understand and address the divergent demands inherent to stepfamily life.

Blended family couples believe it is important to be able to discuss anything and everything if they are to be effective leaders of their blended family. Otherwise, the blended family can soon spin out of control.\textsuperscript{178} Blended family members feel that they can work on blending by clarifying what is expected from everyone, how the discipline will be carried out, and the process to follow for conflicts. A list of do’s and don’ts would be a good tool to move forward.

Roles and boundaries

For all family types surveyed, increasing permeability was noted in blended families. The degree of permeability is comparable in all three blended family groups, largely because the resident spouse is attempting to avoid paying financial support to the ex-spouse, so disciplinary action for the biological child is lightly enforced to win the child’s residency.\textsuperscript{179} The other reason for permeability is the biological parent’s attempt to protect the biological child, mostly due to blood ties and sometimes due to poor childhood experiences. Other parents try to give their children more permeability, thinking that it makes their children happy and able to enjoy more things, including things that the parents missed or did not have growing up.

\textsuperscript{178} Jaehnig, “The Importance of Building Intimacy in Marriage.”

\textsuperscript{179} Weinberger Divorce & Family Group, “Kids, Divorce, and Manipulation.”
Figure 18. Barriers in blending

Relationship or blending barriers

Typical answers given by surveyed participants lean mostly to favoring one’s biological child. Reasons include loyalty conflict, blood ties, attempts for protection, and lack of understanding of the impact of family changes on blended family members. Biological parents, for example, would intervene in an attempt at discipline or in enforcing boundaries to protect the biological child.
Figure 19. Relationship or blending barriers
Other barriers to blending include vague roles, unenforced boundary issues, lack of accountability, and living in myths, as sown in Figure 20 below.

![Graph showing factors that can lessen the relationship of blending barriers](image)

**Figure 20. Factors that can lessen the relationship of blending barriers**

High stressors that impact blending

There are high stressors found to be barriers toward blending. Frequently noted stressors include:

1. Spouse involvement, schedule interruptions, biological parents’ continued fighting over biological child’s living arrangement, financial issues such as using child support to support the family, or extra spending over allotted support.

2. Loyalty conflict and blood ties causing non-enforcement of the non-biological child’s inappropriate behavior.

3. Sensing favoritism for the biological child over the non-biological child.
4. Ongoing resentment about a lack of initiative to try to clear root problems.

Figure 21. Stressors that negatively impact blending

All surveyed families agree that ongoing communication should be maintained if blending is to be achieved. Surveyed participants found it hard to confront and resolve issues as they occur, clarify everyone’s roles, enforce boundaries when found to be lax, and continue to adjust to other issues that affect blending. Blended families struggle with being able to talk about battling issues between spouses, ex-spouses, and stepsiblings; willingness to listen; and confrontation. These are just a few examples of what needs to be communicated that blended families fail to address.
Section IX – The Need for Education Specifically Designed for Blended Families

The results of the survey show that people prefer to go to a church that offers an education that is specifically designed for blended families. Both unchurched and churched participants expressed the desperate need for an education specifically designed for blended families. The result of the survey aligns with various authors’ suggestions, as presented in the earlier pages, that there is a great need for blended family education.

Everyone interviewed unanimously agreed that pastors should be more open to using blended family terminologies and discussing the same from the pulpit. One individual who has been separated because of blended family issues has thought of moving into another church that has a blended family counseling and education program. All surveyed individuals, both churched and unchurched, expressed the need to be educated on blended family issues.
Figure 23. Couples who prefer a church with blended family education

**Unresolved Issues**

All survey participants shared that they had experienced unresolved blended family issues, as shown in the chart below. To date, many chose to withdraw while preferring to stay in the marriage; some continue to struggle in dealing with day-to-day issues but are not able to say if they are planning to move out or continue to stay with the current situation, while others chose to leave the marriage.

Many surveyed participants shared about being continually and negatively impacted by unresolved blended family issues. One participant shared how the yelling conversation starts as he steps in the house, while others find ways to avoid confrontation: making excuses to stay at a friend’s house, working for longer hours, staying behind doors. Some choose not to have their biological kids over, while others just totally withdraw from conversations and from participating in disciplinary actions. One participant would purposely come home late to avoid
facing repetitive situations that cause stress, while another participant expressed less desire for physical intimacy despite the spouse’s expressed need. One example shared that impacted intimacy is that the spouse would mock the husband or the non-biological child when the non-biological child is disciplined by the biological parent. Some shared that unresolved blended family issues were the cause for previous separation and divorce. These are just a few examples of what can result due to unresolved blended family issues.

Figure 24. Blended families left with unresolved issues

The survey participants believe that the education must start before entering into a blended family marriage and continue while in the blended family marriage, for reasons including marriage strengthening, improved couples’ intimacy, children’s development, for family members to avoid ending up in a dysfunctional state within the family and out in the community, and to save the marriage from falling apart.
Figure 25. Participants who expressed the need for education

Summary of Findings

On family formation, blended families struggle due to the lack of knowledge or weak knowledge of how God wants a family to be formed. A challenge, then, exists in forming a blended family that follows a biblical model in accordance with Colossians 3:18-21.

On the family structure, the couple’s oneness is negatively impacted by the non-biological child and the intrusion of the ex-spouse(s) in the marriage. Since putting the couple’s needs first is important in forming a successful marriage, allowing the non-biological child or the ex-spouse to be in between the couple creates a problem in reaching that oneness that the couple needs for the marriage to work. Faith, on the other hand, can be misunderstood and victimize the weaker spouse. Many couples are not fully knowledgeable of what constitutes a spiritually healthy family.
On advance preparedness, many have shared the importance of being prepared in advance before entering a blended family marriage. Such knowledge will help in planning proactively for what could arise and will help spouses in being prepared mentally and emotionally. On family strengthening maintenance, quality time is a big factor because less time with the spouse means not having enough time to talk things out, and quality time are necessary to bond with the child. Couples’ intimacy, on the other hand, is negatively impacted by loyalty conflict, high parenting expectation, vague and the lack of boundary. When it comes to parenting, stepparents feel overburdened by stepparenting expectations.

To date, unresolved blended family issues continue to exist, which cause spouse withdrawal, separation, divorce, or loneliness for those who stay in the marriage and could result in family members being in a dysfunctional state, i.e., poor education, poor mate selection, living in diversities and complexities, loyalty conflict, and intrafamilial sexual offending. Blended families struggle in trying to blend. Survey participants prefer to go to a church that has education for blended families, and they overwhelmingly believe that education addressing blended family issues should be put in place. Survey participants expressed how these focus topics have negatively impacted God’s calling for the husband to love the wife, for the non-biological child to honor and obey the parents, and for the wife to submit to her husband. In summation, based on the data gathered from the survey, blended families have caused divorces, separations, and withdrawal, while others ended up in a dysfunctional state. The proposed education would address these issues as they relate to having a biblical family model that aligns with Colossians 3:18-21.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

This thesis has pointed out that blended families experience repeated divorce and contribute to the growth of dysfunctional families because churches do not have a dedicated biblically sound education that addresses issues representative of what goes on in blended family units. Having an education that addresses these issues will help establish blended families that are structured and have a lifestyle that aligns with God’s teaching as stated in Colossians 3:18-21, with a wife who is submissive, a husband who is loving, and children who are obedient. It is expected that a biblically founded blended family will help lessen or stop repeated divorce and the growth of dysfunctional families. Colossians 3:18-21 is the biblical model that God sets as a guide on how families should be formed, structured, and function regardless of family type, i.e., traditional family or blended family. However, there are many barriers in the way for blended families to attain this biblical model. Both the literature presented in this paper and the results of the survey point out the reasons why blended families are struggling to be that family that God designed as stated in Colossians 3:8-21. Ten areas of focus were chosen for the study, each of which should be included in the education agenda (tool) used to educate blended families. These items affect the formulation of the biblical family model and should therefore be emphasized in the education tool.

There are many factors that occur in blended families that stand in the way of conforming with Colossians 3:18-21. This finding is supported by the relevant literature and further substantiated by the survey results. Not only is this occurring, but it will continue to be present in blended families if action is not taken now, such as providing a specially designed education for blended families addressing the many issues such families face.
A problem has been proven to exist, through various writings as researched and from the survey data, that blended family units do not fully practice a family structure that aligns with God’s design as stated in Colossians 3:18-21, where the wife is instructed to submit to her husband and the husband to love his wife, while the children are to obey their parents. The blended families’ failure to align with what the Bible mandates in Colossians 3:18-21 impacts couples’ ability to work on issues together, as discussed in the section on couples’ intimacy. It has also been established from this study that other biblical mandates that directly impact Colossians 3:18-21 are not practiced. For example, when the biological child is given preference by the biological resident parent over the stepmother, the Bible’s mandate that spouses be one (Gen 2:24) is not followed. When the stepmother is hurt because the spouse is not supporting her to discipline the stepchild (Prov 22:6; Heb 12:11), the husband is not loving her. When the child does not obey the stepmother in cases of loyalty conflict, the Bible’s command that parents be obeyed is not practiced. These issues also impact couples’ intimacy, which affects the couple’s ability to work together, as further discussed below. When blended family couples cannot work together as one, the main foundation that will make possible a family that aligns with Colossians 3:18-21 is paralyzed, which then results in repeated divorce and family members ending up in a dysfunctional state.

A biblically sound education specifically designed for blended families that can be used in churches and other ministerial places such as HBHM will help blended family members know what the do’s and don’ts are. Such awareness will help each family member live a lifestyle that aligns with God’s precepts. The need for a biblically sound education representative of blended family issues is evidenced by the growing number of re-marriages with children. Nuclear families have been the primary focus of currently available counseling guidelines and theories; a
biblically sound education needs to be established that focuses on blended family issues in order to help members of these families deal with the unique challenges experienced by blended families. Making blended family members aware of key issues and the danger that can result from not confronting problems will help in dealing with unique blended family issues. A biblically sound education presenting various blended family issues will help stop or minimize the dilemmas of repeated divorce and increasing numbers of dysfunctional family members. This will also give children in blended family units a greater ability to face challenges later in life because their education on blended family issues will help them to cope with their unique situation.

As discussed, there are many issues that surface in a blended family unit that are not experienced in a traditional or nuclear family unit. Such differences need to be given special attention if blended families are to survive and family members are to avoid ending up in a dysfunctional state. The findings from the survey focused on ten topics: 1) family formation; (2) family structure; (3) faith and spirituality; (4) advance preparation; (5) family strengthening and maintenance; (6) couples’ intimacy; (7) parenting, stepparenting, step fathering, and step mothering; (8) the dysfunctional state, which includes poor education, poor mate selection, diversities and complexities, loyalty conflict, intrafamilial sexual offending, and many other concerns; (9) blending; and (10) the need for educating blended families, as expressed by the individuals interviewed. The results revealed that blended families need and desire a biblically sound education that addresses these issues and is specifically designed for blended families.

On family formation, the result of the survey lines up with Ronald Lee Beck’s acknowledgment of the need to educate blended families so that ideal Christian values can be
realized in blended family structures.\textsuperscript{180} Being aware of Christian values, knowing how they can be put in place, and understanding what is expected from each blended family member to make possible a family structure that aligns with God’s precepts will help blended families know the “what” and the “how” aspects of building a biblically founded family structure. As Natalie Nichols Gillespie notes, education will give guidance on how blended families can work on blending.\textsuperscript{181} Prioritizing and protecting the marriage first, as expressed in MarriageToday, starts by equipping blended family members with knowledge.\textsuperscript{182}

On the \textit{family structure}, the heavyweight placed on the biological child when making a decision that involves the new blended family will always be a barrier in putting in place a structure that aligns with God’s precepts. The Bible teaches that the couple should be one, and there is no oneness when there is a third person who is preventing the couple from being one. A successful marriage places priority on the couple’s needs first. The perspective in this blog post on the Focus on the Family website was not found in any of the couples surveyed, but it is worth noting because of its importance to building a biblically healthy blended family:

\begin{quote}
We put each other’s needs above our ex’s. As much as an amicable relationship between divorced parents is preferred, everyone has to draw the line somewhere. My husband does not cancel dinner plans with me if his ex suddenly needs him to take the kids. Likewise, I don’t leave my husband out of a text conversation about how everyone will spend vacations. My spouse gets first say—and compromises are reached as a married unit.\textsuperscript{183}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{180} Beck, “Effective Blended Family Ministry.”
\textsuperscript{181} Gillespie, “Life Changes: Blended Families.”
\textsuperscript{182} MarriageToday, “Blended Family Success.”
\textsuperscript{183} Parsons, “Making Marriage a Priority in Your Blended Family.”
\end{flushright}
Gregory Brown further says that the parent-child relationship must be altered before the marriage relationship can be established, i.e., the cord must be cut. This does not mean cutting off contact with or abandoning the child. When a couple builds the marriage around their children, serious problems surface. Marriage should be a triangle relationship: husband, wife, and God. There is a great need to educate blended family couples to reach the point where the marriage structure is as it should be, i.e., the husband and the wife being on top of the hierarchy of the family structure, above the child. This need is strongly established by the practices noted among the surveyed couples and further supported by cited articles. As Virginia Pelley states, “Parents live on cultural bias toward favoring the needs of children above everyone else. People are playing with fire when they put careers and kids first and don’t pay attention to their romantic partnerships.”

On the faith issue, the results of the survey justify the need to educate blended family couples as to when faith must stop being used as a justification to stay in an abusive relationship that endangers the spouse’s life. It is not healthy to choose to stay in marriage despite abusive treatment, thinking that such behavior is God-appointed and must be persevered and that the abusive situation will eventually change, using faith as a defense. There have been instances in the faith community where the wife killed her spouse because of a prolonged abusive relationship. Signs of abuse that will lead to life endangerment need to be conveyed to couples. Couples need to be educated about when it is time to separate if the situation does not change.

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184 Brown, “God’s Design for the Family.”

On spiritual awareness, the survey results align with the researched data that blended families need the education that will make members of these families aware of how to have a lifestyle that is centered on faith and daily trusting in God, knowing and believing in His Word. A spiritual family looks up to God for guidance, and individuals have self-maturity and reach out for support from others. A spiritual family encourages building bonds and helps to repair insecure attachments. The presence of God in all aspects of life brings unity with joy, such as receiving as one’s own those who are not one in nature—created by spiritual adoption—which results in forming a family bond with God and becoming connected. A spiritual family does not just provide a means of building bonds but also makes possible secure attachments for other family members. The things that must be learned are not inherent from birth and thus must be conveyed to blended family members. As Gillespie notes, family members must be aware of what God’s expectations are for each member of the blended family.186

When it comes to advance preparedness, preparing individuals before entering into a blended family relationship will help couples to be prepared in facing issues that could arise. The concerns shared by the survey participants are supported by Dupuis; conceptualize struggles as experienced.187 Advance knowledge gained from being educated on blended family issues will help incoming spouses to be mentally, emotionally, and resolution ready, as revealed in the survey responses. The need for advance preparation as expressed by the surveyed individuals aligns with Gonzales, who acknowledges that each blended family needs education on common problems that blended families experience and should plan for appropriate proactive solutions.188

187 Dupuis, “Examining the Blended Family.”
188 Gonzales, “Prefamily Counseling.”
This need is further supported by the APA’s recommendation that blended families should have knowledge on various blended family issues, which should be discussed when planning for remarriage in order to plan for how new couples should handle such issues once married.\(^{189}\) As Christy Aloisio states, clear expectations are very important in any marriage or relationship and are particularly vital in blended families.\(^{190}\) Advance expectations help others understand and come up with a plan for how to agree on issues when confronted with them, as well as the “who” and “what” aspects of accountability in the new relationship. Doing so will decrease the ability of others to manipulate or take advantage of situations. Spelled-out expectations help with conflicts that will arise. With advance preparation, proactive expectations will have proactive courses of action, and family members will be better able to control stress.

**On family strengthening maintenance**, blended families should be educated regarding the importance of having quality time together. Couples need quality time to talk things out without the children around, but quality time should also be set aside with the children for bonding purposes. As Witmer points out, quality time helps maintain family strengthening because it develops family bonds.\(^{191}\) The participants’ expressed need for quality time is in line with Witmer’s statement and, therefore, should be emphasized to blended family couples.

**Couples’ intimacy**, when severed, becomes a barrier to establishing a family that follows the biblical model because the couple’s closeness is the basic foundation of the family. When the couple’s closeness is not achieved, decision-making and planning become difficult because the other spouse ends up not being open and is less cooperative. Blended families must therefore be

\(^{189}\) American Psychological Association, “Making Stepfamilies Work.”


\(^{191}\) Witmer, “How to Strengthen Family Bonds.”
educated on matters impacting intimacy. Parents should not allow their children to play with their emotions and manipulate them such that the couple’s intimacy is negatively impacted; rather, they should always prioritize the marriage, which is the mass core that builds the family. Otherwise, God’s design for the family is altered.

On **child support** expectations, as discussed previously, children’s social and economic conditions affect mental and development growth. Educating parents regarding the impacts of finances on the child’s growth and development should help them be more understanding and open to discussion and to be more flexible on financial issues.

On **step-fathering and step-mothering**, the issues faced by stepparents impact couples’ intimacy, which is a major key to keeping the marriage. Therefore, these noted issues should be discussed, and plans or strategies should be made for how they can best be managed. The proposed education, which should include the issues of parenting and couples’ intimacy, should help blended family couples to design an effective strategy.

On the **dysfunctional state**, there are many factors that lead to dysfunctionality, as discussed above. Any person can trigger dysfunctionality as well. The knowledge of how dysfunction can occur and how it can be stopped is very important. Having an education on dysfunctionality will enable blended families to be proactive by designing strategies that will detect and proactively stop dysfunctionality from occurring. In particular, not many of the participants knew about intrafamilial sexual offending. Therefore, education should be a must for this subject. Couples encourage inter-sibling and stepparent-stepchild closeness, which goes against the findings in the researched data. Excessive permeability and unenforced boundaries were noted. The trust among blended family members is overestimated, and children’s security and safety are compromised. Jealousy and competition are very common in a blended family.
setting. Blended families need to set boundaries for incoming new members to avoid sexual offending. Being aware that intrafamilial sex can occur in a family and setting clear boundaries with accountability can help avoid intrafamilial sex offending, one example of which is the stepfather-stepsibling sex offense. Ron L. Deal supports setting boundaries together, with each parent taking the responsibility for their child, deciding together what consequences to impose, and making sure physical boundaries are present.¹⁹²

On blending, there are many factors identified called high stressors that make it difficult to implement when there is no consistency, one of which is boundary and discipline enforcement for both the biological and non-biological parents within the home. When a resolution is not achieved or when the non-biological parent continues to struggle and feel excluded withdrawal results. Communication, for example, plays a big role in the lack of or slow progress of blended family blending. The need for ongoing communication is further supported by Couples and Family Therapy in Clinical Practice, which states that the adjustment period can be smoother when potential problems are proactively addressed.¹⁹³ Delaying or avoiding communication can cause problems to intensify. Spouses have to implement ongoing communication on stepparenting and on stepkids, biological kids, ex-spouses, visitation, child support, alimony, and other issues that will affect the blended family as a whole. As many grow up, feelings, concerns, needs, or wishes are not discussed openly. The blended family needs to clearly understand and address the divergent demands inherent to stepfamily life. Blended family couples ought to be able to discuss anything and everything if they are to be effective leaders in their home. Otherwise, the blended family can soon spin out of control. Blended family members, for

¹⁹² Deal, “What Do We Do Now?”

¹⁹³ Glick et al., Couples and Family Therapy in Clinical Practice.
example, can work on blending by clarifying what is expected from everyone, how the discipline will be carried out, and the process to implement when conflicts occur. A list of do’s and don’ts would be good for everyone to have.

On further education, both churched and unchurched survey participants strongly support educating blended families utilizing an education that is specifically designed for such families and contains issues that are representative of what blended families experience. Continuous pastoral teaching and ongoing ministerial education on issues addressed in the proposed education tool must be established and maintained because it can take two to five years to adapt to continuous blended family changes. It will be difficult for blended families in the first few years, but continuous education throughout the years should promote a smooth transition. For example, it will take time for the different family members to bond, to learn how to respect each other, and to accept differences between the old and new family. Continuous education and pastoral support will help guide family members to get to the point where everyone is blending.

On blended families with unresolved issues, the many ongoing struggles, stresses, and pains of continuing to be in a blended family warrant an education that is specifically designed for such families. Another finding, as presented in the previous pages, reveals that notwithstanding the expertise in blended families a counselor may claim to hold, unresolved issues continue to surface. This additional finding further substantiates the need for the proposed education. The end result should help establish a family that is formed and structured according to the biblical family model God desires, as laid out in Colossians 3:18-21, with a wife who is submissive, a husband who is loving, and children who are obedient. The proposed education will help in the following ways:
1. Blended family couples will better understand family formation and structure and be equipped to establish one that promotes God’s precepts outlined in Colossians 3:18-21.

2. Family members will become more aware of how to carry out their roles within God’s precepts.

3. Those who are entering a blended family through marriage will be prepared to handle blended family issues by becoming proactive in designing “What-If” solutions.

4. Family members will be equipped to build a family bond and to know the “what” and “how” aspects of being in a state where their family wants to be.

5. Blended family couples will understand how important couples’ intimacy is in keeping the family together and how to keep the intimacy going.

6. Couples will know the challenges they will face in parenting and the adjustments necessary to overcome challenges.

7. Couples will know what can cause a marriage to fail, including the factors that can result in family members being in a dysfunctional state and how being in such a state can be avoided.

8. Family members will have a better understanding of how to blend.

The survey data shows that there is a lot of work needed for blended families to be in the state of becoming a family that is formed, structured, and functioning as the Bible mandates in Colossians 3:18-21. HBHM has to implement an education using an educational tool that is specifically designed for blended families, addressing issues that are representative of what these families experience. The educational tool has to include the ten areas of focus referenced herein. The education has to start at the pastoral and counselor levels and then trickle down to members
and attendees. Once the education is implemented within HBHM, it is expected that the whole community and its neighboring communities will be impacted as well. HBHM members are very active in the community and have been noted to practice and share what they learn outside the church. It has been observed that HBHM members’ lives are being transformed continuously from Bible teachings. People from neighboring communities are attending HBHM just to hear God’s Word. The strong influx of visitors at HBHM only means that once the proposed education is implemented there, its positive impact will quickly spread throughout the community and neighboring places. There is no doubt that the new knowledge that HBHM members will learn as to how to have a family that aligns with Colossians 3:18-21 will be impactful and transformational. It can be expected, therefore, that the same will be experienced by other churches and communities as they utilize the proposed educational tool.

It has been substantiated that there is a need for the proposed education in today’s society. Blended families continue to be negatively impacted by myths and dilemmas that hinder them from becoming a family that aligns with the biblical mandate in Colossians 3:18-21. This project of educating blended families using the proposed educational tool will educate blended family members on important and impactful blended family issues identified and addressed by experts in the field and will help resolve some of the issues and dilemmas referenced. Furthermore, this project will seek to (1) demonstrate and quantify the need for such an educational tool/model and (2) identify those areas most important and in need of a sound biblical counseling model for blended families.

Educating family members on the danger and consequences that can result from failure to attend to various blended family issues can convict family members to change. The many “help” strategies today are based on traditional family structures, so the blended family unit is not
transformed to become a unit where roles and practices align with the teaching of God in accordance with Colossians 3:18-21 and related verses covered in this paper. Biblically sound education specific to blended family units will help members of such families resolve blended family issues and promote unity and growth toward a biblically healthy family. This will help blended family members understand and resolve situations that need to be handled differently in a blended family than in a traditional family.

Putting in place an education that is designed for blended families and that covers the many issues such families experience will help lessen or avoid divorce and family members ending up in a dysfunctional state. The desperate need for such education is supported by both the literature review and the results of the various topics surveyed using questions that relate to blended family issues such as family formation and structure, spirituality and faith, advance preparation, family strengthening and maintenance, couples’ intimacy, stepparenting, the dysfunctional state, blending, and the need for education specifically designed for blended families.

The need for education specifically designed for blended families has been strongly supported by various writings and by the surveyed participants, and thus, it needs to be put in place and made available to blended families as soon as possible. An educational tool containing the ten focus topics must therefore be developed. This tool should then be used to educate blended families attending HBHM, and the same tool should also be available for use in other churches and ministry places. As Craig Everett notes, the lack of blended family resources warrants further work.\(^{194}\) This is where the proposed education comes in. The implementation of education, including the topics discussed in this paper, will contribute to the emergence of a

\(^{194}\) Everett, *The Stepfamily Puzzle.*
blended family culture that will be in line with what God intended for how a family should be formed, structured, and function. The expected result should be in line with the portion of the thesis statement that repeated divorce and family members ending up in a dysfunctional state can be avoided or lessened. As culture continues to evolve and human behavior is subject to change, continuous research on the ten focused topics must be maintained. New related findings and new blended family issues that will emerge in the future should be incorporated into the education curriculum.

This paper has proven the need to develop an educational tool that can be used to train pastors and volunteers at HBHM to educate its blended family attendees. This means that blended families attending HBHM will be helped. It is expected that the proposed education will also be used by other churches, making it possible for blended families to follow the biblical model as stated in Colossians 3:18-21 and thus saving blended families from repeated divorce and family members from ending up in a dysfunctional state.
Bibliography


Appendix A: IRB Approval

April 10, 2020
Canuta Price

IRB Exemption 4163.041020: There Is a Need for An All-In-One Counseling Model for Developing Healthy Blended Families

Dear Canuta Price,

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 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 46:101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and 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.