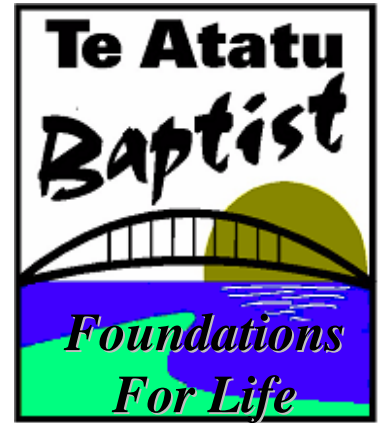


Slide # 1



Into The Blender!



8 weeks of practical, down to earth tools and resources for families, step-families, divorce and remarriage!

Week One

Direction and Strength

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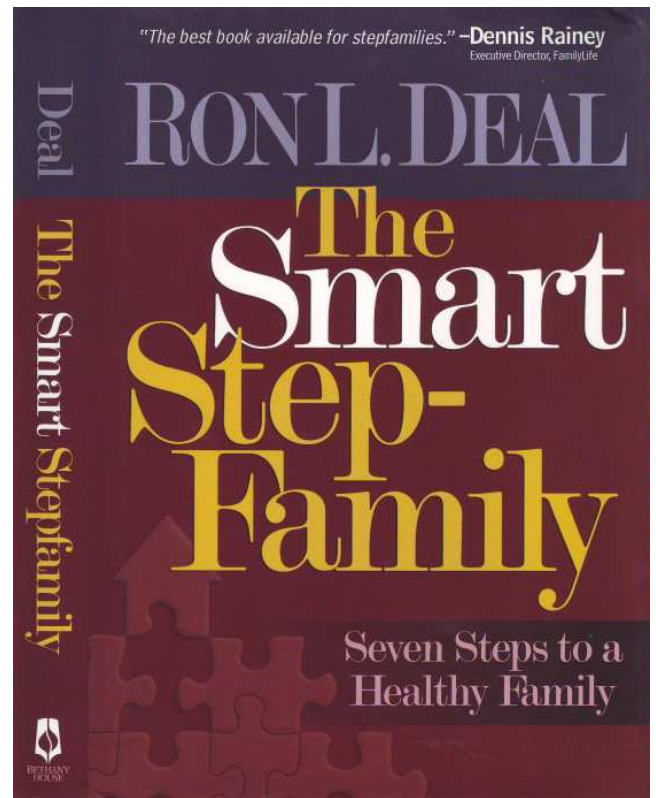
July 22nd 2007

Pastor Roger Spackman
Te Atatu Baptist Church

© Research, References & Credit to:...

- Ron Deal – The Smart Step-Family
- NIV Life Application Study Bible – *Selected Scriptures*

Last year my youngest son became a 'infomercial junkie' – honestly, and he was only 5 years old!



He would sit down just to watch the infomercials – and his favorite one was for the Magic Bullet – a bench-top blender.

Ethan really wanted a Magic Bullet for his birthday, but we thought this was just too strange, so didn't get him one.

He was really disappointed, and so for Christmas, guess what we bought our 5 year old as his main present?

That's right – a Magic Bullet Bench-top Blender!

Ethan saw the beautiful drinks and deserts portrayed on television, how easy and quick it was to 'whip up a beautiful drink in a matter of seconds'.

Well, Christmas came and to his joy and delight, Ethan opened his present, and went running into the kitchen, grabbing all the ingredients like fruit, ice-cream and flavorings, to make himself a quick and refreshing drink, just like he had seen on Television.

Well, I think you might know what happened next.

He poured this slimy gloop into his glass, took a swag, and almost gagged at the disgusting concoction that had congealed itself around the rim of his glass.

He couldn't understand how easy it all looked on television, how quick and simple it was, how everyone was so happy – when in reality, what he had got out of his Magic Bullet Blender, was an utter disaster.

Ethan thought he knew best, and trusted his own instincts – without first reading the instruction manual – after all – I wouldn't expect him to – he's only a six year old kid.

It's hard enough to get a grown man to read an instruction manual, let alone a six year old!!!

You know, life is like that, family life, and especially step-families.

On television it all looks so easy, so simple and happy.

Slide # 2

When the truth is, both you and I know – that the reality is often, exactly the opposite!



People rush into marriage, into family life – thinking it will all be fine and easy.

We don't read the instruction book of God's holy Word, and wonder why things go so wrong.

Many enter into step-family life in the same way as Ethan embarked on mixing a fruit drink in the Blender- leaving our young kids without help or instruction, and wonder why they are left with a foul aftertaste in their mouths and hearts for life.

Life is like a Bench-Top Blender – especially family and step-family life.

Into the blender goes all different types and flavors of fruit and ingredients.

If you get it right, and consult the instruction booklet, you will have a soothing, refreshing and life sustaining beverage that leaves you thirsty for more.

Get it wrong, and your temptation will be to let the Blender sit on the shelf, or worse still throw it away in disappointment, not realizing the problem is not with the blender, but with the balance and mix of ingredients put into the blender in the first place.

Such is family life – blended or not – in the 21st century of today!

Putting together or *integrating* a stepfamily – or any family for that matter - is one of the most difficult tasks for any family in New Zealand today.

Integration involves combining two unique family styles, various personalities and preferences, differing traditions, pasts, and loyalties.

Yet most people make the decision to bring two families together without consulting the instructions (i.e., God's Word).

The amazing thing about God's Word, is the wisdom and instruction it offers – especially for family life!

Slide # 3

WORKING SMARTER, NOT HARDER

Working *smarter* means *understanding* the dynamics of stepfamily life and development.

Understanding how you can take individual pieces of fruit and mix them together in such a way that they compliment the flavors of the others, and no longer react against them.

You cannot afford to go into marriage – the first, second third or fourth time, armed only with "better than last time" intentions.

This series will tell you all that you need to know.

Because building a healthy and godly family will impact not just your lives, but the lives of generations to come.

Let the journey begin.

Slide # 4

The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

—EXODUS 2:23b-25

Headed for the Promised Land!

For some four hundred years the Israelites had been oppressed by the Egyptians, held in *bondage* against their will, and forced to live as slaves.

Now the time had finally come *for freedom*.

Imagine the joy, relief, and utter exuberance the Israelites must have felt.

They were going home!

But where, exactly, *was* home?

Moses, *through God's power* had become their leader.

A pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night made it obvious that *God* was leading his people to the Promised Land.

Yet the joy and celebration of being set free was soon *quenched* when the Israelites found themselves hemmed in by the Red Sea on one side and an angry Pharaoh, who had changed his mind about letting them go, *on the other*.

In their terror the Israelites cried out,

"Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? ... It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

(Exodus 14:11-12).

Freedom from slavery was what the Israelites pleaded for, and yet

oppression and bondage actually became attractive to them as soon as the journey became difficult.

Indeed, this wasn't the only occasion in which the *security* of slavery was often more inviting than the *insecurity* of traveling an unmarked road to an unknown destination.

They just hadn't learned how to trust God to give purpose and provision in unfamiliar territory.

Many *stepfamilies* walk this same journey.

Slide # 5

Through Wilderness Wanderings

Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today" (Exodus 14:13).



It is nearly a *universal* experience for the adults in stepfamilies, and it occurs *soon* after re-marriage.

I'm referring to *disillusionment*.

Believing that remarriage will release them from the difficulties and challenges of divorce, loss, loneliness, and painful emotions,

...couples pick up their children and possessions and launch into the *wilderness* toward what they perceive of, as the *Promised Land*.

The wedding seems to mark a *release* from oppression.

At last, they think, I am loved and important again. And my children will have the benefit of a two-parent family. This is going to be great!

But eventually the realities of stepfamily life and *disillusionment* sets in.

Remarriage for most adults seems to be their second (or third) *chance* on life.

Life hasn't worked out the way they planned, and the trip has been painful.

But things are looking up—they've fallen in love *again* and the dream of a normal family life has returned.

A new journey of hope has begun.

The journey, however, almost always takes some unexpected turns.

For example,

- your spouse's dedication to his or her children was noble before the wedding, but now seems to be a *challenge* to the marriage;
- a teenager living in one of the other homes decides to live with you;
- parenting styles differ *more* than you expected, and conflict

erupts frequently.

The trip is filled with uncertainty, and parents realize they feel lost much of the time.

The daily grind continues.

Life seems to go in circles.

It's easy to get *lost* in the wilderness.

Slide # 6

DON'T LOOK NOW; WE'RE BEING PURSUED!

Just as the Israelites quickly found themselves *caught* between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army, so stepfamilies shortly after remarriage find themselves caught between the *future* and the *past*.

Behind them, pain and loss from the days of bondage are quickly pursuing.

Anger, resentment, rejection, and guilt siphons the energy from people's emotional tanks,



...while losses too numerous to count (especially for children) make for cautious emotional investments in new stepfamilies.

Indeed, the pain of the *past* makes for a tremendous *fear* of the *future*.

Consider these statements from the Thomas family:

BIOLOGICAL MOTHER, JUDY: *"I'm afraid it's not going to work, and we'll get divorced. And then three times I've failed. I'm afraid Frank's [her new husband] going to get aggravated with his stepchildren—my kids—and he's going to walk, 'cause there's only so much he can take. I'm afraid my kids are going to turn against me because they didn't want Frank as their stepfather. It would just be another failure."*

OLDER SON, JOHN (AGE SEVENTEEN): *"I'm afraid of getting close to any-one. I'm not very trusting. With all I've had to live through, I keep waiting for it to happen all over again: the constant blaming and getting stuck in the middle. And I won't let it ever happen again."*

MIDDLE DAUGHTER, SUSAN (AGE FIFTEEN): *"I ain't afraid of nothing. I'm not scared of anything. I mean, if you broke up, it wouldn't be the first time. I might be a little worried where we'd go or something like that. But as far as you breaking up, I mean, two times gets you ready for it to happen at any moment."*

YOUNGER SON, RANDY (AGE FOURTEEN): *"I try to get closer sometimes but then the fear happens and I hide out from doing things with Frank and keep farther apart from him than I should be... I want to get close, but not too close, for fear of something that might happen in the future."*

STEPFATHER, FRANK: *[regarding his marriage] "I'm afraid to be in another relationship where I'm nobody and have no say about*

what's going on in the house. [Regarding the stepchildren] I'm afraid that if we don't change things right away, they're going to grow up and we'll never have a relationship. They'll just be step-kids who come and visit at holidays. I don't want it to be that way."

The pain of their collective past is driving their fears *of the future*, which, in turn, is leading them to be guarded and untrusting in the *present*.

If these heartaches and losses are not successfully resolved for this family and yours, the result will be a tired, disillusioned couple *unable* to draw close to each other,

...let alone meet the emotional needs of their children.

Painful emotions from the past must be *resolved* in order for you and your children to move on.

Slide # 7

FACING A SEA OF OPPOSITION

Looking to the *future* is difficult when the fear of *further* loss looms before you.



Yet a sea of opposition and challenges lie ahead for *most* stepfamilies.

Common uncharted waters include:

- achieving marital intimacy after being hurt;
- parenting and step-parenting roles and rules;
- questions of spiritual integrity and church involvement;
- how to integrate the members of a stepfamily over time;
- dealing with ex-spouses and co-parenting issues;
- helping children emotionally and spiritually;
- issues of authority in the home, the step-father and step-kids;
- dealing with a whole new set on in-laws and involvement;
- issues of money management and financial autonomy;
- mums overprotecting their children from the discipline of the step-father;
- step-fathers not knowing where the boundaries lie in regards to the step-children!

Stepfamily life can be *overwhelming* and *intimidating*.

It's not uncommon for persons to start wondering, much like the Israelites did, if maybe they should *return* to the *familiarity* of divorce or single-parent living.

Sure, it was miserable and unfulfilling, but at least they *knew what they had*.- especially for the mother who has *brought children* into the new step-family!

Disillusionment quickly gives birth to grumbling, complaining, and conflict.

The temptation to *return* to the past, to the *familiar* continues:

"What have I done? Maybe I shouldn't have left being single. Besides, it appears that the God I prayed to for so long has abandoned me (I'm sure I deserve it) and condemned me to flounder on my own."

Wrong!

Slide # 8

If there is one message that stepfamilies need to hear, it's this:

There is a stepfamily Promised Land of marital intimacy, interpersonal connectedness, and spiritual redemption! God has not abandoned you, even though you may have lived a life of sin and shame, or even though you doubt his presence in your life. If you will listen, trust, and continue walking by faith, you will hear him confirming your journey, offering guidance, healing, and providing a path on dry ground. But you must trust him.

Don't be like most remarried couples who end their journey in divorce within the first three years; they quit before ever crossing the Red Sea.

God calls us all to remain persistent and see our families through to the Promised Land.

There is a great reward to be gained.

But you must hold God's hand and walk through your sea of oppositions.

IS THE JOURNEY DIFFICULT FOR ALL STEPFAMILIES?

Stepfamilies vary greatly.

Some have children from just *one* spouse and involve only *one* household if, for example, the death of a parent ended the first biological family.



Other stepfamilies are much more complex with "yours, mine, and ours" children, two or more ex-spouses, and plenty of step-parents and step-grandparents.

It is important to remember that once you say, "I do," that's it – for life – even if this is the second time!

A man once drove six hours to talk with a pastor about his stepchildren and marriage.

He hoped that once the pastor heard him describe the sea of oppositions he was facing, he would give him "permission" to leave

the marriage.

The pastor did nothing of the sort! (and the man was terribly annoyed).

What the Pastor did do - was agree with him that the marriage, in its present condition, was *not* something anyone should keep, nor was God honored by an angry, resentful relationship.

The Pastor suggested that with *guided help* he could choose to work on his marriage and remain open to how the God of the impossible might intervene on their behalf.

When the tools that are taught within this series are shared with those people within families or step-families, they typically say,

"Why didn't anyone ever tell us these things before we married? We could have saved ourselves a lot of grief if we would have only known."

You'll have to work *diligently* to reach the Promised Land.

But remember, it's not just about you and your spouse – you have a *whole other generation* watching and learning from you!

So, please, do yourself and your children a favor—find out *everything* you can about family, and stepfamily life and parenting!

Slide # 10

THE GOD WHO HEALS

Shortly after delivering Moses and the Israelites from Pharaoh's army, the Israelites journeyed through the Desert of Shur.



For three days they traveled, and the only water they found was bitter and not fit for consumption.

Again the people complained, and again God *provided* for his people.

God had Moses throw a piece of wood into the unpalatable water, turning it sweet.

In reference to the miracle, God then refers to himself as Jehovah-Rophe, the

"Lord who heals you" (Exodus 15:26).

In so doing, God declares a promise.

If his people will listen to his voice and do what is right in his eyes, he will heal—he will make the bitter waters of their life sweet again.

That same promise is available to stepfamilies – *for all families!*

The chance to heal your past hurts and to alleviate *all* that pursues you.

He will provide *strength* and *wisdom* to overcome the obstacles that lie ahead.

But you can't rely on yourself and what you '*think* is best'.

Depend on Him and He will clear a path.

Slide # 11

IS IT WORTH ALL THE EFFORT?

Tim was remarried, but after three years he was just beginning to understand how *difficult* the journey was going to be.

One day, this thirty-eight-year-old upright man asked an honest question:

"I'm just not sure it's worth all the work. I mean, I'm beginning to think the payoff can't be worth all this hard work. It feels like I'm married to my wife, and she's still married to her kids. That makes it very hard for me to work at liking and accepting them. Is it really worth the effort?"

This man speaks for many people who silently wonder if they're heading down a *dead-end street*.

My answer to such doubt is, it's *not* a dead-end street.

It is worth the effort.



The Israelites discovered the Promised Land to be *everything* they dreamed.

Slide # 12

PROMISED LAND PAYOFFS

With hard work and commitment it is possible to achieve many of the following Promised Land Payoffs within a blended, or any family situation!

Slide # 13

- Marital Satisfaction
- Healthy Marriage Models for Children
- Adult Role Models for Children
- Restored Well-Being in Children
- Adaptability and Flexibility
- Mistakes, Lessons Learned, and Healing
- Personal Growth and Spiritual Commitment

Slide # 14

Marital Satisfaction

Couples can create mutually satisfying, intimate, God-honoring marriages *within* stepfamilies.

Undoubtedly there are a number of barriers to overcome, but remarriages *can* be healthy relationships.



Families that ‘hang tough’ through the difficulties of the journey, frequently have a *bond* that is powerful enough to withstand anything.

And how long does it take for couples to find an increase of satisfaction?

E. Mavis Hetherington reports, in her highly scientific book *For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered*, that it takes most couples five to seven years to get through the tensions of stepfamily life, such that their stress level declines to match that of a husband and wife in a first marriage.

Marital satisfaction is a process.

Keep pursuing it.

Slide # 15



Healthy Marriage Models for Children

A strong *remarriage* is critical for the *relational development* of the children – who need to witness and re-learn from a *healthy* marital relationship.

This *counteracts* the negative and destructive patterns of their parent's previous marriage (and since the divorce).

Children desperately need *positive marital* role models.

If not, they are likely to repeat destructive relationship patterns.

Indeed, children of divorce have a much higher risk of divorce in their own adult relationships.

However, positive relationship models can *counteract* destructive ones.

Some time ago a woman sent me an anniversary card she received from her *step-daughter*.

It made her realize just how much her stepdaughter was watching and learning from her *new* marriage.

This was the handwritten note inside the card:

"Happy Anniversary! I just wanted to thank you for the wonderful Christian example of how a marriage should work. The way you solve conflict with humor is fun to watch. When the time comes for the Lord to bless me with a mate, I hope I am as lucky as the two of you are! I love you both, Kara."

Now, that's what I call a Promised Land Payoff.

Let it be said that a stable *marital* relationship is the backbone to a stable *stepfamily* journey.

Slide # 16

Role Models

Many stepfamily children have at least *four* role



models, while others have even more (if grandparents, uncles, stepparents, etc. are part of the parental team).

When the adults of the parental team are living responsible, God-fearing lives,

...stepchildren actually have *more* positive family role models than children of nuclear (biological) families.

For example, contrary to the popular "wicked stepparent" myth, stepchildren don't always hold stepparents in contempt.

Listen to the words of one boy who nominated his stepfather for a Fathering Hall of Fame award:

My daddy's name is Jimmy. He is my step-dad, but he has always been there for me since I was very tiny. He has a job and works every day. He takes me fishing and swimming. He even gives me my bath every night. I think he is very special, and I love him a whole bunch. He does more for me than anybody—he is a super daddy. He heals my cuts with medicine and bandages. He even cooks for me sometimes. And puts me in my bed at night and covers me up. I love my daddy 'cause he is a super dad.

Another example is a photo of a son's high school graduation photo.

The son is being hugged on one side by his father and stepmother and on the other by his mother and stepfather.

The picture not only symbolized this *young man's* achievement but it also told the story of two ex-spouses and two new spouses who worked hard for six years to create a cooperative relationship on behalf of their son.

The result was a well-adjusted eighteen-year-old who could openly love both his parents and his stepparents without fearing hurt feelings from any of them.

What a blessed child!

Slide # 17



Restored Well-Being in Children

In 1998 James Bray published research culminating the first ten-year longitudinal study of stepfamilies.

His research revealed that a loving, well-functioning stepfamily *over time* can reverse many of the detrimental psychological impacts of divorce on children.

In addition, Bray says a "strong, stable stepfamily is *as* capable of nurturing healthy development as a nuclear family. It can install values, affirm limits and boundaries, and provide a structure in which rules for living a moral and productive life are made, transmitted, tested, rebelled against, and ultimately affirmed.

The key here is a "strong, stable stepfamily."

This isn't created overnight, but affirms that dedication to healthy stepfamily integration has significant rewards for children.

If that's not a reason to endure the journey to the Promised Land, I don't know what is.

Slide # 18

Adaptability and Flexibility

Learning to be *flexible* is a must for stepfamilies.

This ability to *adapt* can become a valuable characteristic that individuals carry with them throughout life.

Our world is changing at remarkable speeds given today's technological advances.

The ability to change and *go with the flow* is a skill that can be used in many areas of one's life.



Slide # 19

Mistakes, Lessons Learned, and Healing

Without question, stepfamily life offers people a *second* chance.

Learning from our mistakes and then applying ourselves to new relationships are *qualities* of



successful people.

In stepfamilies, children get to see their parents grow as persons, spouses are challenged to greater personal responsibility in their marriages, and individuals are invited to wrestle with difficult emotions.

Lessons are learned and healing takes place.

For example, one key emotion in stepfamilies is *grief*.

Most persons enter remarriage before they or their children have sufficiently *grieved* the losses of the past.

Stepfamilies who grant permission for *grief expression* help bring healing to the hurting.

Indeed, you might think of stepfamilies as grief support groups, with each person carrying some measure of grief.

Finding support, openness, and acceptance within the stepfamily home despite feelings of hurt, anger, or sadness is a healing phenomenon reflective of the biblical admonition to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).

This is why stepfamilies need to view this Promised Land Payoff as part of their spiritual ministry to one another.

Slide # 20

Personal Growth and Spiritual Commitment



Sometimes the stepfamily journey is filled with great discouragement.

What results is an opportunity to *deepen our faith* and rely on God's Spirit.

One stepmother put it this way: *"I don't know how I would have made it without God's unending power and this fellowship of people to encourage me."*

The biblical author James noted the benefits of struggles as well:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4).

The stepfamily journey can be a spiritual trial of great magnitude.

Holding tightly to God's hand throughout the journey results in a closer relationship with the Father and a greater trust in his power to lead.

The Israelites experienced many periods of doubt; perhaps you do too.

Slide # 21

But undoubtedly, when they stopped to look back, they could see the hand



of God and how many times He had acted on their behalf.

Perhaps you haven't looked back recently.

Perhaps the barriers that stand in front of you now are fueling your doubt and pessimism.

Stop for a few moments.

What has God done to help you navigate your journey?

In what ways has his Word provided insight for decisions and encouragement for patience?

How has trusting in His truths about marital fidelity, kindness toward your enemies (perhaps your ex-spouse or stepchildren), and having a servant's heart helped you and your family to overcome obstacles along the way?

Is there a Promised Land for stepfamilies who don't quit, who faithfully follow their Lord, and who learn all they can about navigating the journey?

Absolutely.

And it's well worth the effort!

Questions for Discussion

Work through the following questions on your own before sharing them with your spouse.

Some of the questions are appropriate for children as well.

Before talking with your children or stepchildren, take into consideration their ages and your overall relationship with them.

In addition to discussing these questions with your spouse (or dating partner) and children, share your answers with your discussion group.

FOR ALL COUPLES

1. What aspects of your past did you hope remarriage would "cure"?

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2. Which of the following emotions have you felt in the past? Which still haunt you from time to time? Anger. Bitterness. Depression. Sadness. Longing. Hurt. Resentment. Guilt. Fear. Pain. Rejection.

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3. In what ways did you experience disillusionment, and at what point did you realize things weren't working out like you expected? How have you adjusted your expectations?

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4. In what ways was your remarriage another loss for your children? How can you be sensitive to that loss without being guilt-ridden (or easily manipulated because you feel guilty)?

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5. In what ways have you or your stepfamily members experienced God's leading or his healing hand? Be sure to share with your stepfamily how you see him at work in your lives.

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6. What Scriptures have been helpful or inspiring to you recently? If you haven't been reading the Bible much lately, how can you begin to do so again?

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7. Share a time with your spouse when you weren't sure the work was worth the effort. If that time is now, what do you need to help you stay determined? If you trusted God to bring you through, what would you be doing differently than you are now to work in that direction?

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8. Which, if any, of the Promised Land Payoffs have you experienced to some degree already?

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CASE STUDY IN STEPFAMILY FEARS

Read again the fears from the Thomas family in the message, and then answer the following questions. Remember that when fears are left to govern your behavior, you will find yourself limited in your range of responses. An integrating stepfamily cannot afford to be controlled by fear.

1. Which fears of the biological and/or stepparent can you relate to and why?

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2. What are you doing to prevent these fears from becoming a reality?

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3. Think through your previous losses and painful family experiences (either family of origin or first marriage). How do your current fears connect with those experiences? How have they sensitized you to avoiding more pain in current relationships?

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4. If you weren't hamstrung by the past, how would you be different in the present?

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5. Consider the fears mentioned by the children. Which might your children also feel?

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6. What have you done to try to prevent your children's fears from becoming a reality? In what ways could these protective efforts be sabotaging new relationships?

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FOR PRE-REMARITAL COUPLES

1. In what ways do you feel intimidated and frightened after reading this chapter?

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2. What might this new relationship be rescuing you from?

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3. What challenges are you beginning to see that you had not thought about before?

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Think of a stepfamily couple that you can interview. Ask them the following questions. If possible, start attending a stepfamily support group to help you make a more informed decision about remarriage.

1. What do you wish you had known before you remarried?

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2. What are your three greatest challenges?

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3. How could you have better prepared yourselves for stepfamily living?

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4. What painful emotions from the past did you not resolve prior to remarriage?

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5. How long have you been traveling this journey?

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6. What blessings have you experienced and at what price?

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