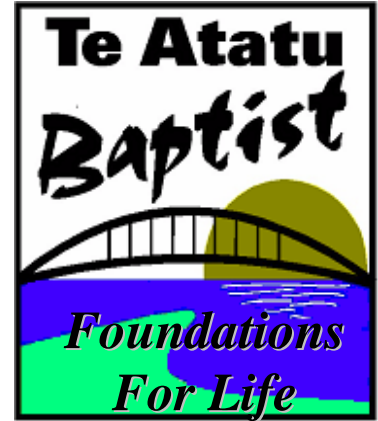


Slide # 1

# Into The Blender!



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

## Week Two

*Stepping Stones*

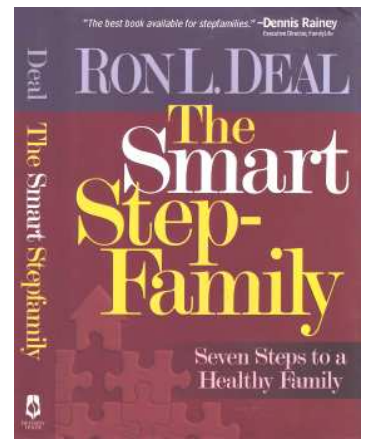
[www.TeAtatuBaptist.com](http://www.TeAtatuBaptist.com)

July 29<sup>th</sup> 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*



During the week, I was thinking, praying and studying for this message today, especially about those *statistics* from last Sunday.

You see, they bother me:

Slide # 2

- 49% of all marriages end in divorce
- 38% of all marriages are remarriages
- The divorce rate of remarriages is 60%
- The divorce rate of remarriages *with* stepchildren is 50% higher than those *without* stepchildren
- 33% of all children under 18 are living within a blended family
- 41% of all NZers are either a stepparent, stepchild, or married to someone who is/was.
- By year 2010, there will be *more* blended families than any other type

Slide # 3

What this *partly* tells me, is that many people have NOT learnt about the *foundations* for relationships, or the *keys* to a healthy marriage and family life.

We haven't learnt them when entering our *first* marriage/family, and for some, still haven't learnt them the second or third time around either!

And just maybe divorce is not *always* the answer<sup>1</sup>, but learning the skills that are *missing* in the first place in order to *heal* the marriage!

If you learn keys of healthy marriage and relationships – divorce is often *unnecessary*!

And even if you are divorced this morning, there IS bright hope and encouragement for the future, for both yourself and your children!

Okay, along these lines, do you know, or want to know the Top Ten reasons for divorce are?<sup>2</sup> (Applies to 1<sup>st</sup> or subsequent marriages)

Slide # 4

1. Infidelity / Unfaithfulness
2. Communication breakdown / Over Familiarity
3. Physical, psychological, or emotional abuse
4. Financial issues
5. Sexual incompatibility
6. Boredom / Growing apart not Together
7. Religious and cultural strains
8. Child rearing
9. Addiction
10. Differences in priorities and expectations

Here's the good news – with the *possible* exception of numbers 1 and 3 – the rest of these issues can, and should be resolved – *saving* the marriage – whether it is your 1<sup>st</sup> or subsequent!

And as I said, most unhappy, sad or dysfunctional marriages DO NOT end in divorce, they end in unhappy, sad and dysfunctional marriages!

---

<sup>1</sup> Divorce or separation IS important for the physical, emotional or spiritual welfare of either spouse!

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.divorceguide.com/overview/the-top-10-reasons-for-divorce.html>

It's time to break the cycle, and learn the skills for healthy relationships – in every area of our hearts and lives!

Then I thought about how *Blended Families* are really just a product of our 21<sup>st</sup> century life – and have been the *exception* rather than the norm.

Within three years, the opposite will be true!

But because it is such a ‘modern day’ occurrence, *maybe* that's why it's so hard to find any *reference* to it within the Bible!

And as I pondered and prayed about the lack of examples of *blended family life* within the Bible, ...

God spoke into my heart and mind – in almost an audible voice. And this is what the Lord Jesus said to me – He said,

Slide # 5

‘I was brought up, and I lived within a blended family - with a father that was not my own – with ‘half’ brothers and sisters!’



Although born to the virgin Mary, Joseph was *not* the father of Jesus, ...and as the family grew, everyone in the family, indeed, in the nation - and for all eternity, *probably* would know that was the case!

Doesn't that give you hope and strength, that Jesus Christ Himself *knows* what it is like to grow up and live within a blended family.

Slide # 6

And if He understands, He can also help.  
And if He can help you as a parent (or  
Grandparent!!!), He can help your children  
(Grandchildren) as well!

That very fact can comfort and encourage many of us to surrender our whole lives and struggles into His loving – and understanding care.

So, these statistics let us know that family life – *blended or not*, parenting and marriage are *difficult* and *challenging!*

In fact, turn with me to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:28b.



Slide # 7

*But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to help you avoid them!*

However, with just a few Biblical ‘tools’, ‘boundaries’ or ‘stepping stones’ to keep you safe – you can turn these negatives around into positives – *first* or *second* time around.

Family life, even *blended* family life appears to be a positive experience for our Lord and Saviour, and with His help, it can be for you as well.

So, God can take you from where you are today:

- single
- married
- divorced
- widowed
- separated
- blended family
- biological family
- solo parent
- parent
- grandparent
- great-grandparent even!!!

And He can help you to be the best person possible – in *any* and *every* social situation!

Towards this goal, I have 6 stepping stones for you to stand upon, and then something practical for you to do:

Slide # 8

1. Spiritual Integrity and Christ-Likeness
2. Listening
3. Understanding
4. Perseverance
5. Commitment
6. Patience

If you apply these principles to whatever relational challenge you are facing today, you can be assured of God's blessing and a positive outcome!

Our first Stepping Stone is the most important foundation to living – not just a victorious family life, *but life itself!*

Slide # 9

## **1 - Spiritual Integrity and Christ-likeness**

This stepping-stone goes straight to the heart of *any* successful family.

We're not talking about religion or 'going to church'.

We're describing an internal, personal commitment to follow Christ and to accept his gracious forgiveness of the sin that separates us from God.

For example, only when we truly understand how much we have been forgiven can we extend forgiveness to those that have hurt us deeply in life.

But, oh how we rebel against Christ's authority in our homes and lives.

I'm told that the following is a radio conversation that took place off the coast of Newfoundland.

*Canadians:* Please divert your course 15 degrees to the south to



avoid a collision.

*Americans:* Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision.

*Canadians:* Negative. You will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid collision.

*Americans:* This the captain of a U.S. Navy ship. I say again, divert your course.

*Canadians:* No. I say again, you divert your course!

*Americans:* **THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS LINCOLN, THE SECOND LARGEST WARSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES ATLANTIC FLEET.** We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers, and numerous support vessels. I demand that you change your course 15 degrees north; I say again, that's one-five degrees north, or countermeasures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship.

*Canadians:* This is the lighthouse. Your call buddy!

Don't we sometimes try to tell Jesus—our Lighthouse—which way is right?

We argue with him about which way is best when we are the ones who need to follow His directions.

But ultimately it *is* our call—whether we will submit to His lordship or undertake our own self-serving countermeasures.

When ANY individuals of any family make this declaration and lives accordingly, they set themselves up for success.

People are not filled with drugs or alcohol, but with the Spirit of the living God.

Parents work to keep their minds from being consumed with material possessions and instead fill their thoughts with things from above (Colossians 3:1-14).

Sexual boundaries are maintained so as to protect against infidelity, pornography, and incest.

Men challenge themselves to be the servant-leaders of their home (Ephesians 5:25) and, in so doing, set a standard of sacrifice for everyone else.

And we continue to study the Scriptures in order to keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25).

There are, of course, thousands of Scripture texts that address relationships and cast a spotlight on godly living.

Let's sample just a few:

As we read them, think about how life would be different for you and your family if you implemented and followed them:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:5)

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And

over all these virtues put on love, which binds them together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:12-14)

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a)

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:29)

The application of these texts can be *profound* for your family.

For instance, you might find it much more difficult to argue with your ex-spouse if you "don't keep a record of wrongs."

Compassion can help you to be sensitive to your spouse who feels caught between love for you and love for his or her own children.

Gentleness with a child who has made it perfectly clear he doesn't want you around, *is a high calling*, but will eventually help open the door to that child's heart.

Finding and focusing on what is "praiseworthy"—instead of rehashing what is upsetting—helps create energy for problem solving and gives

you hope for the future.

And finally, not letting your children hear "unwholesome talk" about the others is a gift, just as "building up" your children's stepparents (especially the stepparent in the other home) is a gift.

We should all be reminded that God's way *really* does work best.

We can argue with his directions or comply with the Lighthouse.

Which are you doing?

Well, let's 'unpack' some of the Bible verses we just read, and apply them *practically* to marriage and family life.

Slide # 10 - Heading and Photo

## 2- Listening

The second stepping-stone involves one of the *hardest* skills in relationships—*listening*.

If family members are not willing to hear one another, they can't know how to *love* and *honor* one another.

Listening is a process by which persons set aside their own agendas long enough to tune in to someone else's.

This allows you to see another perspective and gain insight into that person's feelings, desires, and goals.



In contrast, an unwillingness to listen and value the perspective of another person results in feelings of invalidation and unimportance.

Even though opinions will differ, everyone in all relationships has the need *to be heard*.

When conflict erupts, the biblical admonition to "be quick to listen and slow to become angry" is of tremendous value (James 1:19).

During conflict, most persons want so badly to be heard that they *talk over* others, or are devising their next comment when they're supposed to be listening.

Proverbs 18:13 reminds us that, "he who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame."

It takes great discipline, but people who can apply the principle of *listening first to understand the other before trying to be understood*, will find their conflicts de-escalating and more productive.

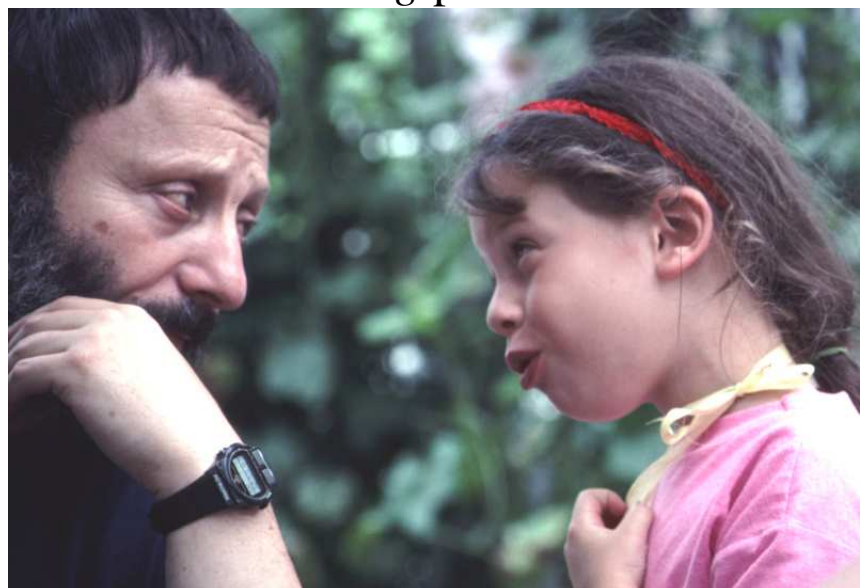
Slide # 11

### 3 - Understanding

Listening is the skill that makes *understanding* possible.

It can be difficult to fully understand someone else's perspective,

...but standing in another's shoes in order to see the world from that person's point of view is a good first step.



During the conflicts that all pastors/leaders face, I have come to realize that people who ‘attack’ or ‘criticize’ us – or try to ruin our ministry - do so because they *honestly* believe they are *right* and need to do it.

Understanding this – and listening to them, goes a long way towards resolving/disarming the conflict.

To put yourself in the shoes of the other persons in your family is a tremendous act of courage and maturity.

And you need to do it.

You may find, for example, that a child or stepchild’s resentment of you is not farfetched given how they have been hurt by others in the past.

Or you may discover that your husband's style of discipline makes sense once you understand what he experienced in his first marriage or family of origin.

The key is to put yourself in the shoes of another and wonder what it must be like to be that person.

Ask yourself.

- What events in this person’s life has cumulated to make them the unique person they are today?
- What losses has he or she experienced through life?
- How do the other members of our family treat this person?

- How do I treat him or her?
- If I were this person, how would I like to be treated by someone in my position?
- What burdens or responsibilities are they carrying?

Such understanding will help you develop empathy for each member of your family, which in turn helps you relate more effectively.

Slide # 12

## 4 - Perseverance



Life is filled with trials, tribulations, and challenges – especially, according to the Bible – *married life!* (Remember 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:28b)

It is the norm for all types of families (biological, single parent, and stepfamily) to experiment uncertainty, disillusionment, and discouragement for the first few years of marriages or family life.

But the stepping-stone of *perseverance* can carry you through these difficult times.

The *heart* of your perseverance will be, and is, your relationship and commitment to the Lord, and His relationship and commitment to you in return.

What I'm talking about is being *determined* and sticking with your marriage and family when the going gets tough.

It is a determination to stick with the marriage even though you don't want to.

However, you should not stick around when abuse, physical – emotional or spiritual bondage or danger *is a reality*.

But it's *your* choice to forgive your spouse if they are unfaithful towards you.

I can tell you that forgiveness IS possible, and that I personally know of many couples who have worked through unfaithfulness and now have a healthy, stable and strong marriage.

Sometimes though, you aren't given the option, and your spouse leaves, or for the above reasons, you need to leave yourself.

In effect, determination says, "Trusting God to be faithful as the Lord of Possibilities, I will be faithful and persevere in my marital responsibilities even if this marriage and family is not what I want it to be."

Determination, then, can be quite costly, but it also paves the way for a growing relationship.

Slide # 13

## **5- Commitment**

Determination, when combined with the decision to persevere, results in a strong *commitment* to building your family.



The bedrock of this commitment is dedication to your Lord, and to your spouse.

I remember when Debbie and I were first married, and people would ask us *what it was like*.

We would respond, 'It's awesome! It's the *second* best thing we've ever done!'

The first – *best* thing was submitting our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ!

But sometimes we need to be reminded that our marital vows were not multiple-choice questions.

The preacher probably didn't let you choose: "I'll take richer, for better, and in health—but I won't commit to poorer, for worse, or in sickness."

A few years ago I heard about a young man who approached the minister during the wedding rehearsal and made him an offer.

"Look, I'll give you \$100 if you'll change the wedding vows. When you get to me and the part where I'm to promise to 'love, honor, and obey' and 'forsaking all others, be faithful to her forever,' I'd appreciate it if you'd just leave that part out."

He then gave the minister the money and walked away.

At the wedding, when it came time for the groom to state his vows, the minister looked him straight in the eye and said, "Will you promise to prostrate yourself before her, obey her every command and wish, serve her breakfast in bed every morning of your life, and swear eternally before God and your lovely wife that you will not ever even look at another woman, as long as you both shall live?"

The groom gulped, looked around, and of course said, "Yes." He then leaned toward the minister and hissed, "I thought we had a deal." As the minister slipped the \$100 bill back into the groom's hand, he whispered,

"She made me a much better offer!"

Commitment means remaining dedicated to the vows we expressed on your wedding day.

Couples then make a decision every day of their life whether or not they will live up to those words.

If they choose not to, their family – or step family - will not survive the journey.

Slide # 14

## 6 - Patience

Family integration – between a husband wife, siblings or blended families hardly ever happens as *quickly* as adults want it to.

It just doesn't happen on their timetable.

Stepfamily researcher James Bray discovered that stepfamilies don't begin to think or act like a family until the end of the second or third year.



Furthermore, Patricia Papernow, author of the book *Becoming a Stepfamily*, discovered that it takes the average stepfamily seven years to integrate sufficiently to experience intimacy and authenticity in step relationships.'

Fast families can accomplish this in four years, if the children are young and the adults are intentional about bringing their family together.

However, slow families, according to Papernow, can take nine or more years.

In my experience, very few adults come into their stepfamily – or marriage - believing it will take this long.

They want a quick, painless blending process.

In fact, if they had known the journey would take so long, they might not have *signed on* in the first place.

When you consider the relational dynamics within a family, or a blended family – no wonder it can take so long!

In an average family of two parents and two kids, do you know how many possible relationships there are? Answer: **6**

With a family like my own, now with **9** members, there is a possibility of **36** relationships!

In a larger, or blended family, with step-parents, and step-Grandparents, there can easily be around **16** people involved in the immediate family – that equates to **120** possible relationships!!!

It's been said that blended families don't have a 'family tree', they have a family forest!

*This complex forest simply takes time to integrate.*

Just as a side note: Within a ‘blended Spiritual family’ such as meets here today, with around 120 adults and children, do you know the total amount of possible relationships?

Answer: **7149** possible relationships!

## KEEP STEPPING

The journey to the Promised Land – marriage or family - is not always an easy one, but then again, what in life is easy?

In this workshop, we’re suggested that maintaining key attitudes and *qualities—stepping-stones—will* advance your journey in the Lord.

Slide # 15

- *Spiritual integrity* demands that we allow Jesus to be Lord over our heart and home.
- *Listening* and *understanding* help family members develop compassion and empathy for one another.
- *Perseverance* will help you stay the course when the going gets tough.
- *Commitment* expresses itself in dedication to fulfilling your marital vows.
- *Patience* means enjoying your stepfamily as it is, instead of pushing everyone to arrive at the Promised Land on your schedule.

I have sought in this chapter to give you *hope* on your journey.

In the next workshop we will examine seven smart steps that nearly all families must take to reach the Promised Land.

Slide # 16

The dynamics of relationships can be challenging, but they are not impossible.

Keep at it!



# Work-Book

## FOR ALL COUPLES/FAMILIES/MARRIAGES

1. Have you talked with your spouse/family members about their 'life journey' heading up to today? What did you learn?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. What is one of your chief frustrations or complaints about your family/stepfamily/marriage/relationship right now?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the highest), rate your personal level of spiritual integrity. What spiritual challenges stand in front of you and how are you addressing them?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4. Describe a time when you tried to force your will on God. What was the outcome?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

5. Choose one of the Scripture passages from this workshop and share how applying that verse will help your family/stepfamily/marriage/relationship to grow.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

6. If you asked your children and your spouse whether they felt you were a good listener, what would they say? In what ways does defensiveness keep you from listening well?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

7. Identify the person you have the most conflict with or the child to whom you are the least bonded. Share what you think it would be like to be that member of your family/stepfamily. Consider his or her losses, sense of belonging, fears, responsibilities, and hurts.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

8. Read James 1:2-4. If the testing of our faith produces perseverance (which in turn helps us mature), how has the testing of your family/stepfamily/marriage helped you grow as an individual?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

9. List three things you could do this week to express your dedication (commitment) to your spouse/children

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

10. In what ways have you been impatient with the status of your family/stepfamily/marriage bonds? How have you tried to force or pressure people to love one another?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

11. In what ways is your stepfamily different than a biological family? Share some of the flexible solutions you've already discovered that help.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....