

# HOME • LIFE • RELATIONSHIPS

## “BLENDED FAMILIES” LESSON 3

☰ Ephesians 4:17-5:2

### POINT

Blended families are becoming more and more popular in contemporary culture. While the Bible is mostly silent about true blended families, it is loaded with lessons learned from dysfunctional families. God truly has a sympathetic heart for families trying to make it work. The Scriptures contain helpful advice that can strengthen the family unit, blend two homes into a smooth blend in Christ Jesus, and also become a means to display God’s power and grace to others.

**NOTE:** Throughout the study guide, the questions have been tailored around the three emphases of LifeBridge: Discover Grace (Acts 2:47), Grow in Grace (Col. 1:28), Live Gracefully (Eph. 2:10). Having questions from the text and also tailored to these three emphases is an attempt to help your group to both absorb the principles to each person’s life, and to also consider how to transfer them into another’s life.

**TIP:** As the leader you have latitude to mold this lesson to your group and the time you’ve budgeted to study together. For any question you ask, consider ways you might need to ask a follow-up question that fits your group. This is just a guide for you to adapt to the people in your group. Enjoy!



Blending families can work.

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# DIG

Were there blended families in the Bible? Well, if you're thinking about polygamous families, the answer is "Yes." There are enormous differences between blended families and polygamous families. Sure, they both involve several adults and children, resulting in sibling rivalries and delicate spousal dynamics that are challenging to navigate. But that is where any similarity ends.

The Old Testament is full of stories about families who practiced polygamy: Jacob had 4 wives and at least 14 children; David had at least 8 wives and scores of children; and Solomon was reputed to have had 700 wives and 300 concubines—of course Solomon's foreign policy was to marry, or sleep with, the daughters of all the other rulers of nearby countries. However, when you read these stories you will find that these families were not happy or healthy. Busy, perhaps, but not happy. And more to the point, they were not blended.

Blended families as we know them were not common during Biblical times. Marriages were very rarely based on love or choice—most of them were arranged and were for the purpose of producing children. In the Hebrew culture of the Old Testament, men had multiple wives and could divorce their wives, but not the other way around. There was a certain stigma attached to divorce, so most men didn't bother. They just married someone else. If a divorce did occur, both parties were free to remarry, but they were under no obligation to raise another person's children. By the time of the Greek and Roman influence (in the New Testament), monogamy was becoming more fashionable, and divorce could be initiated by either party, but again, there was a social stigma. We see this in the "serial monogamy" story of the woman at the well in John 4: she had 5 husbands and was living with a 6th man, but she was shunned by the other people in town.

It is possible that the only true blended family in the Bible was Jesus' family. Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit when she was engaged to Joseph, who married her, becoming a stepfather to Jesus (in literal terms). Mary and Joseph later had children the old fashioned way (James, Joseph, Simon, Judas and several daughters), meaning that Jesus grew up in a blended family. We are in good company and He understands.

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## DISCOVER

**What should a blended family do with children and holidays if the partners are from different faiths?**

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## GROW

**What can you learn from the way Jesus respected his step-father Joseph (see Mark 6:1-6) and his siblings (Luke 8:19-21)?**

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# APPLY

Consider the practical words of advice the apostle Paul issued to the believers in Ephesus, words that not only are applicable to relationships in general but also to blended families.

### Top 10 Virtues for Life Together (Ephesians 4:17-5:2)

- 1. Deal in honesty.** Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body (v. 25).
- 2. Get angry at injustice.** "In your anger do not sin" (v. 26).
- 3. Be civil in disagreements.** Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry (v. 26).
- 4. Thwart evil wherever it is.** Do not give the devil a foothold (v. 27).
- 5. Be gainfully employed.** He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands that he may have something to share with those in need (v. 28).
- 6. Recognize the power of words to affirm and encourage.** 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 (v. 29).
- 7. Value Holy Spiritual life.** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (v. 30).
- 8. Avoid hate speech.** Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling (not violence, but 'shouting') and slander, along with every form of malice (v. 31).
- 9. Remember the importance of neighborly kindness.** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (v. 32).
- 10. Regard love as the ultimate virtue governing our behavior.** Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (v. 1-2).



### GROW

Which one of these ten do you think could be positively impact your family if applied this very week? Which would be the most difficult or challenging to apply to your family dynamic?

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### GROW

Words are a powerful tool as demonstrated in this passage. When discussing spiritual things with an unbelieving spouse, or child, or relative how would you describe your tone, words, or language? Which of the top ten virtues are present or absent?

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**Here are some other suggestions for success in blended families:**

- >>Treat each other with kindness, patience and respect—the way you like to be treated.
- >>Refrain from speaking ill of their other natural parent at all cost.
- >>Addressing conflicts when they arise and understanding the other’s feelings is necessary and critical.
- >>DO NOT disagree with each other in front of the children.
- >>DO NOT just stand up for your own child and point a finger at the stepchild.
- >>DO NOT accuse your spouse of unbalanced discipline toward your child.
- >>Present a united front to your children and offer real stability of relationships in contrast to any feelings of change and uncertainty.
- >>Back up your spouse in public!
- >>Be sensitive to the children’s need for quality time with their natural parent.
- >>Parents, don’t neglect to make time for the two of you without the kids! (i.e., a “date night”)
- >>Give stepchildren and natural children a consistent balance of love and discipline.

**ACTION POINT**

Spend some time discussing these things with your Lord and with your mate.

Families who converge from different paths must find a deep common origin in Jesus Christ. He is the source of life for all of us, especially when blending families. The Lord sustains us independently when we feel isolated, and He sustains us as a family when we are united in a struggle. Sure, it is possible for blending families to survive without the Lord, but the premium-blended family has, at its core, the Lord.



**GROW**

As you read through the suggestions above, how did you imagine they would be of help to the blended families you are familiar with or have a connection with?

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**LIVE**

Which one of the above rose to the top for you when you saw/heard them? How will you put it into practice this week?

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