



Week Five: Blended – Study Guide

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“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth [...] Then God said, Let us make man in our image [...] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply [...] And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’ [...] she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband [...] Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. [...] Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—’ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden [...] He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.” - *From Genesis 1-3 (ESV)*

Sometimes looking at the big picture of *how* it all happened can bring more clarity to the *why* in our lives. Purity of our lifestyles, thoughts, and families left us many thousand years ago as sin tainted our world. We can trace it back to that day in Eden, when in God’s kingdom we became separated; orphans without home or family. And it would be many years before God’s son, the Messiah, would offer mankind a way back to the tree of life. It was back then that the blended family was truly birthed. Today, blended families are a way of life, spiritually or naturally; we can’t escape it. This week in Part 5 of *Family Dynamics* we are looking at blended families, living with and living as, the orphan.

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Where Am I Today?

- 1) In today's society, we most commonly refer to blended families as those families consisting of parent(s) with children from current and previous relationships, including children through adoption, fostering, etc. Have you had the experience of living in a blended family, or in close relation to a blended family?

- 2) Are there stereotypes attached to blended families? If yes, list some. Would you say there are more challenges that come along with being a blended family, or just different ones?

- 3) Do you feel blended families can live out a fulfilling family experience of closeness, unity, protection, and love? If no, what do you think they lack?

Into the Bible

- 4) If we're not careful, we can find ourselves living out our life disconnected from God. Not that He is ever more than a whisper away from us, but our hearts have the ability to push Him into the distance. We can even convince ourselves that we have drifted so far from His perfect will, that he can neither relate, nor would desire, to show us His love. Nothing could be further from the truth. One example is the challenges often faced with step-parenting. Although there are variations, to become a step-parent often indicates that there was a failed marriage at some point with either spouse. So in slithers the serpent again with his lies, "You are a step-parent, God has nothing to say about your life now." Although I will admit it is not the most obvious topic in the

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Bible, step-parenting is still in there. Read **Matthew 1:18-25**. Who is the step-parent? Is this enlightening as to the life of Jesus? Do you think this makes it easier for children and parents of blended families to seek Christ for answers?

- 5) Could it be that we have an exaggerated idea of purity? Let me explain. When thinking of something non-blended, we may be inclined to imagine a purer sense of something. This could be in various forms: race, sex, religion, tribe, or blood. Read **John 4:9-10** and **Romans 2:17-29**. How were the ancient Judean views of a Jew different from the reality of how God sees it? In what ways is the family of God blended? List one way it is not.
- 6) Let's talk about the challenges of a blended family. Yes, now we can address the bad stuff and the drama. Animosity, jealousy, hatred, competition, approval, disobedience, rebellion, regret, prior sexual relationships, and envy; the Bible is full of it. Fortunately, we have a single example in the book of Genesis that pretty much takes care of the entire list. Read **Genesis 16:1-6**. This family story could possibly make good reality TV, (if there is such a thing as "good reality TV"). Do you see many of the negative descriptive words listed above played out in Abraham's family? Why do you think Sarah is going through such a rollercoaster of emotion in this situation? Did Sarah fully buy into her role with Abraham's son? Do you see any similar flaws with Adam in the Garden of Eden, and here with Abraham?

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- 7) Forgiveness. Our success requires it. It can be so hard to forgive at times. Blended families often require a level of understanding of forgiveness more than most. Forgiveness of a child's words or actions, forgiveness of a step-parent's words or actions, or forgiveness of a spouse's or ex-spouse's words or actions. This principle absolutely applies to non-blended families as well, however I would like to address something specific. Jesus says in the book of Luke, "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." At what point in our anger can we be sure that we are no longer justified in our anger? When do we realize that while we may have once been the victim, we are now fighting against God? If a wrong is done against you, give an example of how you could go from innocent victim to guilty culprit. Read **Genesis 21:8-21**. How do you think Sarah would have felt if she knew how God was talking to, and taking care of, Hagar and her son?

How Does This Apply?

- 8) God hates divorce. I feel very comfortable in the accuracy of this statement. Neither does He appreciate the practice of children being abandoned. The common denominator for every imaginable scenario of a blended family is this—children. No matter how a family becomes blended, whether it's through remarriage, adoption, or fostering, it is blended because children are involved. However, we know that God loves the business of redemption and restoration. How does the love poured out in blended families relate to our adoption into the family of God? Read **Ephesians 5:1-5, Galatians 3:26 and 1 John 3:2** for more insight.

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9. Maybe you are thinking, "But you have said nothing at all about my dysfunctional blended family. Sure, this all works great for the Brady Bunch families of the world." There are three sides to a triangle of dysfunction: child, parent, and spouse. Let me see if I can name some of the widely known challenges:

"My stepmom/dad is an idiot."

"My stepson/daughter is a brat."

"Your ex-spouse controls our life."

"Why did my REAL parents put me up for adoption?"

"I tried loving YOUR son/daughter, and they continued rejecting me."

"I don't want to go see my mom/dad this weekend."

As creative as I may try to be, I would never get to the end of this list. I have personally experienced the blended family life as far back as my earliest memories, and many of these challenges I have lived out both as a child and a parent. The conclusion of my life experience has all come back to one thing—Jesus. As a parent, be the adult. You cannot allow circumstances to dictate how much love you pour out to your family selflessly every day. As an adult child, pray for your family, forgive and honor them. As a spouse, remember to always love, honor, respect, and forgive. What are the similarities found with the following in how Christ loves us?

- A step-parent continuing to love an ungrateful child?
- A spouse offering forgiveness for the past?
- A child submitting in order to honor their worldly parents?
- An adopted child reassured in their permanent place in the family?
- A husband/wife living out the principle of **Matthew 5:44** toward ex-spouses?

Current Prayer Focus

What we're praying for together as a church:

- Pray for families and marriages in our church family and your community.

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Increase Your Learning on Your Own

10. Unity is a value in the Bible, is a Core Value at The Cove, and should be a value in the home. We see a unique situation in **Genesis 11:1-9** where a people were intentionally “blended” by God. Why was this so? How does God clue us in to the human power of unity? What good can you imagine if a family unified for the cause of Christ? What about a church? A nation?