

Premium Blend

Blending families can work.

by Andrew Stenhouse

I was divorced! How could I allow this to happen? My family was shattered. Now, too much was at stake: my daughters' and my heart. I would protect them with everything I had.

But then God, the Lord of restoration and new beginnings, had a different journey in store. I reconnected with a former co-worker who had been a good friend and associate. Now, 10 years later, we were both single parents and fell in love while attending church together. How could this possibly work? How were we going to blend our families (her 12-year-old daughter, my 12- and 14-year-old girls) and make it work?

With God it could work. He helped us discover how to combine our two homes. We found that a smooth blend requires five conditions.

1. Common ground

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.

2. Quality brew

While independent prayer and Scripture reading are important, family devotions are critical. Each night that the girls are with us, we read Devotions for Girls. Each segment ends with a call to action, "How about you?" in which they get to focus on their own hearts. Sometimes the concluding prayer is merely a hurdle so we can get to bed. Other times, though, it is a sincere time of personal reflection, like Lindsay's prayer from the other night: "Lord, help me be patient with others, especially my stepsisters." Little is said after prayers like that — just hugs, kisses, "good-night," and "I love you."

3. Free of residue

Past pain, anger and heartache can leak into blended families. Add it to the daily build-up of sin, and forgiveness becomes paramount. Forgiveness is conscious and continual. We forgive because we love. We forgive because we have been forgiven. It frees us from the residue of the past.

4. Refined by fire

Consider the most critical component of good coffee: roasting. Without the roasting process, coffee would be bitter and intolerable. We are no different. When things heat up, we must not give up. Instead, we must remember that we are growing stronger as a family. Families who experience tough times together become stronger if they turn to one another rather than against each other.

5. Poured for others

A few months ago, my daughters and I went to see a friend of mine who was going through a divorce. He and I were visiting in the living room while our kids were hanging out in the kitchen. When I went in for more coffee, I overheard my daughter Taryn talking to my friend's kids. "Oh, I know," she genuinely empathized. "I was

confused too. I didn't know what was happening. But it gets better, really."

As I quietly slipped back into the living room, my heart ached yet rejoiced. I was so sorry that my daughter had experienced such pain but so grateful that she was able to minister to someone else because of it. She went on to console her friend as only a fellow struggler can. She was kind, understanding and compassionate. She was empathetic and wise. She was 14.

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As families desiring a premium blend, we must put Christ first, pray together, forgive one another, commit to one another, serve each other and serve together.

Andrew Stenhouse helps single parents and blended families through BetaFamily ministries