

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your correspondence to the Al Denson Show and for tuning in every week to our program. My prayer for you is to be encouraged in your daily walk with Christ through the words of this booklet. Our hope is that in turn you will tell others of what God is doing through our ministry to youth and parents on TV. I am convinced you will not find another program on any network anywhere that deals with issues today's youth and their parents are facing, and provides answers from a Godly perspective.

In addition, we would love for you to help us by going to our web site at www.aldenson.com. Here you can write to us, order additional material like this booklet, check out all my music, have a daily bible study, and stay up to date on the ministry. You can also send us a prayer request and questions for the TV show. But more importantly, please continue to be in prayer with us as we work together to help those that are in need.

Thanks for watching and God Bless!

Sincerely,



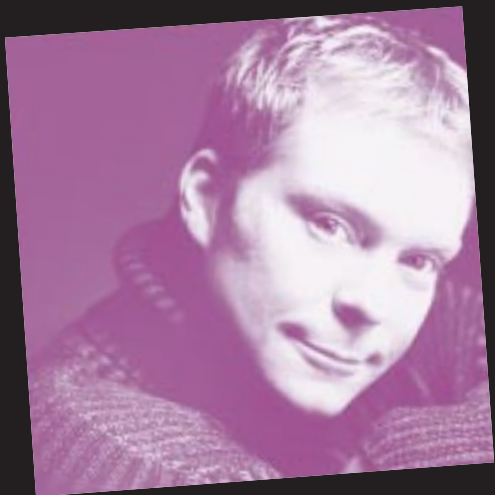
An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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Blended Families:



Yours, Mine and Ours



Most artists create for only a brief moment in time. That phenomenon was once known as “15 minutes of fame”. Yet even in a fickle world, there still emerge a talented few that transcends time and trends. With nearly 15 years as a major label recording artist and seven hit

albums to his credit, Al Denson is that kind of artist.

But the attention and acclaim his artistry has brought him over the years are anything but the routine rewards of worldly success. Rather, they are the fruits of a life of purpose and passion, and a mission that has always reached far beyond merely making music.

The millions of young people Al has performed for, befriended, counseled, consoled and clowned around with in his career already know that. And thousands more are finding out every day.

This past year has seen Al expand his efforts to a global audience through the reach of his daily syndicated television production, “The Al Denson Show.” “You’ve got to reach out to people where they are with the most powerful means and this form of media allows you to build trust and a rapport,” says Al. “This has all been so amazing. I can’t imagine what lies in store when the Lord finally calls me home, but I don’t have to wait for heaven to receive rewards. I get them every time a kid comes up to me and says, ‘I heard what you said, and I accepted Christ.’ You can’t ask for anything more or better than that.”

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BLENDED FAMILIES: Yours, Mine, And Ours

A little girl went to see “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” for the first time. When she got back home, she was telling her mother all about the movie. The child asked her mother if she knew how the story ended. Her mother said, “Of course I do—Snow White and the Prince lived happily ever after.” The little girl was quick to correct her mother. “No, they didn’t. They got married!”

If you live in a blended family that story may sound too much like your life to be funny because, most of the time, happy blended families are the exception, not the rule. In the book, *The*

Blended Family, Tom and Adrienne Frydenger write this: “In nuclear families, family life is usually a reflection of the couple’s relationship. In blended families, the couple’s relationship is most often a reflection of family life.” Anyone who has had a blended family would probably agree that the unique stresses that life, in such a family, puts on a couple can be overwhelming. Research has concluded that the divorce rate in second marriages is substantially higher than in first marriages, and that the number one cause for divorce in second marriages is conflict over child rearing.

The blended family is very different from the biological family. In the biological family the couple had a period of time together before the child came along. The child entered the

family as an infant and the couple learned to parent together over time. Things are not the same in the blended family. The couple seldom has an extended time to be alone, and children, in various sizes, are immediately a part of the family.

If there are teenagers involved in the blended family, the normal struggles that come with trying to develop their own sense of independence and self-identity are greatly intensified. These heightened struggles can lead to resentment and if not dealt with properly, bitterness and rebellion. At the same time, parents often enter second

marriages with overwhelming fears about destroying their teenager’s lives. Many times these fears will cause the biological parent to forget the basic principles of discipline.

Discipline is usually a struggle in a blended family because both parents had a history with another family before they became a part of a blended family. Even most biological parents don’t always agree on how to discipline children, so it is easy to see why this could be a major issue in a blended family. Teenagers need to be a part of the process in deciding what the rules are in a blended family. Of course the parents will have the final word, but teenagers need to help decide what the consequences will be if the rules are broken.

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It is probably a good idea in the first year of the blended family, for the biological parent to be the enforcing parent when it comes to discipline. After the stepparent has had time to bond with the children and their relationship is more firmly established, then either parent can enforce consequences. Consistency in enforcing consequences is imperative in any family, but especially in a blended family.

Dr. Gary Chapman says that a good rule of thumb is, “minimal changes make for maximum acceptance in the early stages of the blended family.” He also advises that family forums need to be established early so that any family member can call a meeting when he or she feels there is something that needs to be changed or discussed. If these forums are taken seriously, then there will be an atmosphere created where conflicts can be resolved.

Stepparents often have many conflicting emotions and fears when it comes to relating to their new stepchildren. They may emotionally

withdraw if they are fearful of another divorce and don't want to see the child hurt again. The stepparent may also feel guilty if there is not a close relationship with their own biological children. There may also be some jealousy on the part of the stepparent because of the time and attention the children get from their spouse. Stepparents who do not face and deal with their own negative feelings will never build a loving relationship with their stepchildren. The other extreme would be when stepparents attempt to take the place of the biological parent of the same sex. This should never happen and the stepparent should never make derogatory remarks about the teen's biological parent. The children should always be encouraged to love and spend time with their biological parent whenever possible.

Many times there will be tension between teenagers and their stepparents because the teen is unresponsive to the stepparent's love. There may be honest reaching out on the part of the stepparent and when those expressions of love are not even acknowledged, it is hard for the stepparent not to take the rejection personally. Teenagers will often be slow in responding to the love of a stepparent for many different reasons. After having suffered through the trauma of parental rejection when his parents divorced, the teen may fear that he might be hurt again, so he doesn't allow the new stepparent to get too close. The teen may

be jealous of the relationship the stepparent has with his biological parent or of the attention that the stepparent pays to his biological children. The teenager could also feel that he is being disloyal to his biological parent if he responds to the love of a stepmother or stepfather. If the teen enjoyed a measure of independence before his biological parent remarried, he may now feel that he had lost that independence.

Stepparents need to give teenagers the freedom to be who they are. The teen must have the freedom to express his emotions and fears. Good parents will never try to talk a

teenager out of his thoughts and feelings. When the teen chooses to talk, parents should listen carefully and affirm his emotions. As Dr. Chapman wisely points out, all teenagers will express a certain amount of rebellion in their search for self-identity and independence. However, in a blended family there may be hurt, grief, and depression underlying the rebellious behavior. If you judge the behavior without considering the emotions that may be involved, you will misjudge the teenager. If you remember this, it will be easier to respond with compassion and mercy.

...“minimal changes make for maximum acceptance in the early stages of the blended family.”



A stepparent cannot love their spouse and fail to love her/his children. Parental love will not allow the two to be separated. Building a strong and loving relationship with a stepchild is one of the best things that can be done for a marriage. All parents love their biological children, and when they see a spouse consistently trying to also love their stepchildren, their love for the spouse will grow. Gary Chapman reminds stepparents that they will always reap what they sow. Love, and eventually you will be loved. Give, and it will be given to you. Success in the blended family is not found in getting rid of the children. It is found in loving the children toward maturity. It takes a minimum of eighteen months to two years for the teenager and stepparent to form a loving relationship, so patience must reign.

Many times the other biological parent's family can be a source of conflict in a blended family. Often there will be unresolved issues between the parents left over from their precious marriage. Anger, bitterness, and even hatred on the part of one or both of the biological parents may

create a real challenge for the new blended family. The biological parents will sometimes blame each other for any emotional or behavioral problems the children are exhibiting. All of these can make "visitation" times extremely stressful for the entire family.

Problems between families can also arise when the moral values of the other family conflict with your own. The types of movies, videos, television programs the children are allowed to watch in one family may be strictly forbidden in the other. Religious beliefs, church attendance, inconsistent or no discipline; all of these can be areas of conflict. Unfortunately, unless the activities are illegal, the custodial parent cannot control what takes place when the children are with the other parent. You can't regulate what your children will be exposed to, but making sure that they are feeling loved and secure in your family is the best way to help insure that they will embrace your values. Children's loyalties will be with the parent from whom they feel unconditional, genuine love.

Blended families are very complex because they have two households directly, and one or two other households indirectly, involved in the system. There are three or four parent figures, "yours, mine, and ours" when it comes to the children, two, four, or more sets of grandparents, and a multitude of relatives. It is easy to see why the blended family has the potential for resentment and conflict. Many family members live in blended families with unresolved anger, feelings of rejection, loss, and insecurity. Blended families can also face fighting

between stepchildren, conflicts over household rules between the biological parent and the stepparent.

Because of all of these factors and more, blended families do not have the same unity that even dysfunctional nuclear families have. The roles and responsibilities of the members of a blended family are vague at best. Questions about rules, obligations, and discipline for biological parents and children, stepparents and stepchildren can be difficult to answer.

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Each member in the blended family has probably experienced a loss...

In the book, *Stepfamily Problems*, Tom and Adrienne Frydenger give a list of other issues that may cause resentments in blended families. Some of these issues may include:

- Visitation and scheduling.
- The continual shift in household composition.
- Different values, lifestyles and styles of discipline between households.
- Children living in and moving freely between two households while adults do not.
- Co-parenting (or the lack of it) with the non-custodial parent(s).
- Possible custody changes.
- Shifts in the children's birth order from one household to the next.
- Both the children's and mate's relationships with the non-custodial parent(s).
- The ongoing influence and felt presence of the non-custodial parent(s) in a household.

These are just a few of the issues that can cause very serious problems for a blended family. It then goes without saying that most blended families are full of stress. Unfortunately, these stresses never end. They will lessen when the children grow up, get married, or get on their

own, but they are still biological or stepchildren relating to their biological parent(s) or step-parent(s). They will always be members of two separate households with different values, lifestyles, and multiple parenting figures to deal with.

The Frydengers compare the members beginning a blended family to an alien entering a foreign land. Everyone entering the new system feels as though he is in unfamiliar territory. The family members are self-conscious about their own actions, and at the same time very aware of the actions of other family members. Everyone seems to have their 'antennas' up and this leads to judging, blaming, anger, and resentment.

Each member in the blended family has probably experienced a loss and has brought that hurt into the new family system, along with the fear of experiencing more hurt and rejection. Feeling like a victim because of a loss of control is common among each member, as well. There is also a loss of identity among the family members as everyone seems to be asking, "Who am I?"

Change seems to be the "norm" for the blended family. Changes in routines, living accommodations, relationships, and sometimes

even a change in school, church, and friends. Everything may be strange and unsettling, and this can cause even the most stable family member to feel he has lost his sense of well-being. Blended family members are often caught in loyalty conflicts—torn between two people or in competition for the attention, affection, or allegiance of another. These feelings of loss, sorrow, and conflicting loyalties are always more pronounced on birthdays, holidays, graduations, weddings, and other family functions.

Even though the picture of the blended family that has been painted seems bleak, God can give the strength, grace, wisdom, and understanding to make any blended family healthy and functional. The place to start is to honestly decide if you and your mate are committed to loving each other unconditionally and to having a Christian marriage. If so, the place for each family member to begin is with forgiveness.

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Even in nuclear families, family time for most people will always be the best of times and the worst of times. Life is a mixed bag of hurts and helps, and the only way to deal with all of this and get on with your life is to forgive. Hurt will happen—that a fact of life. The only way those hurts can be healed is through forgiveness. This is the key to dealing with your pain and anger in a healthy, constructive way. Here are some facts about forgiveness that you need to know:

1. Forgiveness is not a feeling. It is a decision you make with an act of your will. It has nothing to do with the person who has offended you—it is first done for your own good. Forgiveness is an emotional and spiritual release that must happen before there can be healing in your life.

2. Forgiveness is undeserved pardon and an undeserved release. If you think forgiveness is only for those who ask for your forgiveness or deserve your forgiveness, then you don't understand forgiveness at all.

3. Forgiveness is not denying, or excusing, or minimizing what happened. It is being honest and objective about the offense, the pain, and the consequences caused by the offender.

Perhaps you have a hard time with forgiveness because you believe that if you forgive, you will be excusing the behavior of another person. Nothing could be further from the truth. Forgiveness is acknowledging that what was done is wrong and inexcusable, but choosing to show others the same kind of forgiveness God has shown you. Colossians 3:13 says, "Bear with each other and FORGIVE whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as God forgave you." The forgiveness that Jesus offers is unconditional and complete. You don't deserve it, and He provided it before you ever asked for it or even knew you needed it.

Forgiving is not a suggestion, it is a commandment. God gives it to you for your own well-being. When you have been offended, you experience the pain of the offense when it happens. But the initial pain of the wrong done to you is usually small compared to the pain of reliving the offense over and over again in your minds. Unforgiveness is like a tape recorder on automatic rewind that plays the hurtful experience again and again.

God knows that unforgiveness is also the soil in which bitterness grows. Bitterness is a

poisonous plant with deadly fruit like depression, anger, hostility, resentment, rage, physical, mental and emotional disorders, and the inability to love and trust others. Bitterness will make you extremely vulnerable to unwise decisions and destructive patterns of living. It can keep you from being able to love and be loved unconditionally. It can cause you to doubt your salvation. It can keep you from being able to pray effectively and make it impossible for you to live a consistent Christian life. In short, it is like a cancer of the soul that will go on to destroy you physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. Bitterness is a highly contagious

condition that will spread down through generations if left unchecked.

When you choose to forgive you are simply saying, "I refuse to allow the actions of another person to control and destroy my life. Life is precious and not to be wasted in anger and bitterness. Satan may have meant this for evil in my life, but I choose to use it for good. Satan may have meant it to destroy me, but I choose to let it grow me instead. Satan may have meant it to tear me down, but I choose to let it help make me stronger, wiser and more mature."

Life is a mixed bag of hurts and helps, and the only way to deal with all of this and get on with your life is to forgive.

Remember, no matter how horribly you have been treated, it could never compare with how horrible you treated God. Your sin drove the nails through the hands and feet of His only Son, and yet He forgave you completely while you were still in your sin. Don't let unforgiveness keep you from being in fellowship with God, and from being able to live a consistent, godly life. You can't control what others do, but you can decide not to allow the actions of others to control or destroy your life. God loves you, and wants you to live life full and free. You need to understand that while forgiveness will be hard, it is not an impossibility because God never asks you to do the impossible.

If the thought of forgiving truly seems impossible to you, it could be that you have never known real forgiveness yourself, so you can't give what you have never received. Maybe the place where you need to start is by admitting to your Heavenly Father that you are a sinner and in need of His forgiveness. You can become His child by accepting Jesus' death on the cross as payment for your sin, by asking Him to forgive you and to save you. You simply must be willing to open wide your life for Him to come in and take control. The Bible

says at the moment you do that, that the "old" you dies, and a "new" you is born in your place. The new you is completely and totally forgiven. Once you have received God's forgiveness you will be able to pass that same forgiveness along to everyone who has hurt or offended you.

If you are going to have a functional, healthy family, then resentments must be released. Your family can't move forward if it is living in the past. Even if the children are not responsive to the idea of forgiving and releasing their anger, they need to hear both their biological parent and stepparent ask for their forgiveness. For most families, these kinds of confrontations are uncharted waters and not easy to navigate. The help and guidance of a professional Christian counselor can be invaluable to help your family start all over again.

The problems in a blended family can be very complex but it is possible to have a healthy blended family if its members can learn to communicate love effectively. In a loving atmosphere conflicts can be resolved. But when the emotional need for love is not met, then the family can easily become antagonistic towards each other.

Dr. Chapman gives four basic ingredients for a healthy blended family:

1. Unconditional Love. He emphasizes that parents must take the lead in showing unconditional love to each other and to all the children in the family. The message they need to send is, "We will love you no matter what." Anything less, is not love. Love is a choice. It is choosing to look out for the other person's best interests, while seeking to meet their needs. It is extremely important to find each family member's "love language" and learn to find ways to make each one feel loved.

2. Fairness. This is not sameness. Each child in your home is different. What makes one feel loved will not necessarily communicate love to another. Fairness simply means that you are seeking to equally meet the unique needs of each child.

3. Attentiveness. This means being informed about what is going on and expressing an interest

in your child or teenager's world. Going to school activities, showing an interest in and listening to their ideas, dreams, desires, and feelings.

4. Discipline. Providing loving boundaries that will protect the child or teenager and help guide them towards responsible self-control.

You can't control what others do, but you can decide not to allow the actions of others control or destroy your life.

When parents in blended families commit themselves to these fundamental, they can create and enjoy a healthy blended family. Happy, healthy, functional families, whether nuclear or blended, just don't happen. They take commitment, time, hard work, and much prayer. Just because your family is having problems, doesn't mean it is doomed to fail. Tom and Adrienne Frydenger share a recipe for a blended family that is straight from the Bible (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:16-21; and I Peter 3:1-9.) When this recipe is followed, the results will produce wonderful results for any blended family. The ingredients are:

A Husband and Wife Who:

- Love each other.
- Have become one.
- Are submitted to God and to each other.
- Accept their roles as parents and the responsibilities that come with those roles.

A Husband Who:

- Is not harsh with his wife.
- Treats his wife with respect.
- Is considerate of his wife.

A Wife Who:

- Submits to her husband.
- Respects her husband.
- Is considerate of her husband.

Children Who:

- Respect,
- Honor,
- And obey their parents.

Parents Who:

- Love,
- Teach,
- Train,
- Nurture,
- Provide for,
- And manage their children.
- Fathers Who Do Not Exasperate Their Children.

Family Members Who:

- Are sympathetic, compassionate, and humble.
- Work to live in harmony.
- Do not repay evil with evil, but with blessing.

This is a condensed version of the Biblical model for the family. The Frydengers go on to give us the guidelines for a healthy family that come out of this model:

1. Family members have a strong Christian orientation.
2. Family relationships are prioritized with God first, mate second, and children third.
3. Family members display an ability to show appreciation and to receive compliments from other family members.
4. Family members commit their time to being together as a family.
5. Family members sense a healthy, God-ordered control over their lives.
6. Family members are compliant.
7. Family members talk to one another using good communication skills.
8. Family members are empathetic toward each other.
9. Family members are committed to the family unit.
10. Family members show their love and affection freely toward one another in verbal, nonverbal, and material expressions.
11. The family as a unit has good conflict resolution skills.

**Happy, healthy,
functional families,
whether nuclear or blended,
just don't happen.**

The family is the most powerful influence...

The Frydengers warn that when giving the Biblical structure to follow for family living, it is first assumed that both the adults involved in the blended family are emotionally stable. This assumption must also include that neither the biological parent nor the stepparent has an explosive personality disorder, a passive aggressive disorder, a problem with drugs, alcohol, wife or child abuse, or pedophilia. There must also be an understanding that any abusive action on the part of a husband or father is unbiblical, immoral, unhealthy, and completely outside moral limits. Immoral behavior of any kind is never to be submitted to. The rule for every wife should be, "Never accept what God calls unacceptable!"

The family is the most powerful influence in shaping the personality of a child. If you are going to raise healthy children, then you must have a healthy family. Hurt, unresolved conflict, and disappointment do not have to be a part of everyday life in a blended family. God can bring hope and healing, and make your blended family a healthy one. All He needs are people who are committed to doing things His way.

Have you ever seen two rivers flowing smoothly and quietly along until they meet and join to form one new river? When this happens they clash and hurl themselves at each other. However, in time as the river flows downstream, it gradually quiets down and flows smoothly again. So it is in a blended family, the coming together may be turbulent, but when the union is completed, the results can be far better than either family was alone.

~ The Question Stepchildren Ask Most Often ~

My mother got remarried and I don't like my stepfather. What do I do?

You may have just gotten used to the idea of your parents being divorced, and you may have been enjoying having your mother all to yourself. If your parents' marriage was a very unhappy one, you may even have a sense of relief or may be enjoying the lack of tension and fighting. Now another big change has come into your life, and once again, it is a change over which you had no control.

First, you need to decide why you don't like this man. Be honest—is it because you resent sharing your mother? Is it because you are angry over having no control over a situation that affects you so greatly? Is it because you think that this man is trying to take your dad's place?

You need to understand that no one can take your dad's place in your life or in your heart. For the sake of all involved you need to make every effort to get to know him and accept him, even though he may be very different from your dad. Trying to blend two families is awkward and painful at times. The thought of being a part of a new family may be very hard for you to take, but with God's help, you can do it.

You must decide how you are going to see your life. Some kids have no family and no one

to love them. You now have an expanded family with many opportunities more for love and relationships. You must decide whether you are going to live in the past, the land of "what ifs" and "what might have been" and make yourself and everyone else miserable, or move forward. Paul says in Philippians 3:13b, "But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind, I reach forward to what lies ahead."

You must be willing to let go of the past. Past events can hold you captive. Unless you are willing to be free from the bondage of the past, you will never be able to experience all God has for you. You'll never be able to look to the future if you are focused on the wounds, hurts, struggles, and pain of the past. You can't run the race God has for you by running backwards!

... in shaping the personality of a child.

You also need to realize that it takes time to build relationships, so keep your expectations low. It may take years to really feel like a family. That doesn't mean that you can't be friendly and kind in the meantime. Treat your stepfather as a friend, not a parent. Look for things that you have in common and be willing to spend time developing the friendship just as you would with any new friend. Most of the time you will find what you look for. If you are only looking for negative things, you are most likely to find them. But if you look for the positive in your stepfather you will probably find that, too. Give the guy a chance. If he is kind and loving to your mother, be grateful.

One other thing, don't feel that you are being disloyal to your real dad by accepting your stepdad. Again, the divorce was not your idea or in your control. Neither was your mom's remarriage. All you can do now is make the best of it and move on. If your dad has a hard time with your mother's remarriage or your stepfather, that will have to be his problem to deal with. Don't allow the hurt from your parents wrong choices to continue to spill over into your life. The thoughts you think, the words you say, the attitude you have, and the way you choose to live today will determine what is on the other side of tomorrow for you.

Your family has been broken. The pain and anger have been exposed and expressed. Is life ever the same again? No. That doesn't mean that life has to be bad, just different. It is like a man who has had a leg amputated. For a long time there is a fierce and continuous pain. If treated properly, the stump where his leg was will heal. Eventually, he will regain enough strength to function with a wooden leg. He will still continue to have pain occasionally, and will have some good days and some bad days. In time, the man will be able to do almost all of the things he did before he lost his leg, but there will never be a time when things won't be different. Getting up, sitting down, bathing, dressing, will all be different, because his life has been changed. The scar will remain, but health will replace the pain if the healing process is allowed to take place.

You have been through one of the most painful experiences in life—a divorce. There may be bitter memories that need to be forgiven and laid aside. There may be wounds that need to heal and remembered no more. You need a new beginning and you need hope. Christians have a solid reason for hope and it is the person of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is "...a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). He is your hope and that hope will get you through. If you are feeling hopeless about your life, your family, and your future, you can make a choice to take your eyes off the hurt and the problems in your life and put them on Jesus. You can make the choice to trust God to take all the pieces of your shattered, broken family and make something beautiful again. When you do, hope will follow.

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from your parents
wrong choices ...**

**...to continue to spill over
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