Part 1:  
A Biblical Foundation  
&  
Personal Expectations  

Personal Reflection  
1. What are some of the joys of having a blended family?  
2. What are some of the challenges of having a blended family?  
3. Does Scripture have any people or principles that apply to the blended family?  

Laying a Biblical Foundation  
- The Patriarchs  
  All families experience dysfunction  
  
  **Abraham** - Abraham's family definitely had some dysfunctional moments. Abraham pretended that Sarah was his sister. Later Abraham had a child with another woman. Then there was that whole ordeal where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac. Certainly that was the purist form of faith on the part of Abraham as he responded to the Lord’s command, even believing that if Isaac did die that God would raise him from the dead to honor His promise to Abraham (Heb. 11:19). But one can’t help but think that Isaac may have endured some emotional trauma. Maybe not, but we certainly would need counseling---or would have been removed from the family tent by child protective services.  

  **Lot** - At one point Lot offers his daughters to rapists. If that isn't dysfunctional enough for you, then how about a little incest, too?  

  **Isaac** - Isaac loved his son Esau more than his other son Jacob. His wife Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau. The mother and Jacob plotted against Esau and the father and eventually Jacob had to run away. This is more dysfunctional than a family that has an Arizona State father and a University of Arizona mother.  

  **Jacob's family** - Jacob had thirteen kids. Okay, that's not too dysfunctional but he had those thirteen kids with four different women. Jacob favored one son over the others, and those other brothers threw him down a well, sold him to slavery and then told their father he was dead.  

- Others Examples
Adam and Eve - Adam's family began with blame and ended in murder. Adam was both passive participant (by not stopping Eve) as well as an action participant when he, too, ate from the forbidden tree and was banished from Eden. And he still blamed Eve. Their bickering probably continued for many years and was probably a bad example for their kids Cain and Abel. The dysfunctional family then became worse when Cain got jealous of his brother Abel and murdered him.

Eli - the prophet was Samuel's teacher, had inferior disciples in his sons Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam. 2-4). They became priests who abused their authority to gain material and sexual favors. God rebuked Eli for his lack of parental discipline, saying, "Why do you honor your sons more than me?" (2:29). Eli's permissiveness resulted in death for all three and stands as a warning to us.

David – his adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband Uriah planted seeds for similar behavior in his sons. Second Samuel 12 tells how David's eldest son Amnon was overcome with lust for his half-sister Tamar and took her by force, as his father had taken Bathsheba. Tamar's full brother Absalom took revenge, murdering Amnon. David's lack of parental intervention allowed this private conflict to escalate into political warfare, culminating in Absalom's death. Later David's son Adonijah, apparently out of contempt for his father's lack of discipline (1 Kings 1:6), also attempted to overthrow David, and was killed by David's son Solomon. Solomon himself, in spite of his legendary wisdom, had his heart "turned away" from the Lord through the hundreds of concubines and wives he collected (1 Kings 11:1-8). The political liaisons caused by his many foreign wives undermined the stability of Israel as a nation (1 Kings 11:9-13).

The Early Church

Jewish and Gentile issues (Acts 10-11, 15; Gal. 2; Eph. 2).
Romans 1:16 tells us that the gospel was to be preached first to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. In God's master plan, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3) by having an opportunity to respond to the gospel (Rom. 11:11-25). But this paradigm shift was difficult for the early Christians, especially when it came to wanting to hang on to the Law and some of its ordinances. But through Paul and the early Church fathers, issues were resolved. So, even the family of God needed time to adjust to new brothers and sisters.

Biblical Encouragement

- God is the “Master Blender” (Acts 10-11, 15; Gal. 2; Eph. 2)
- Dysfunction is typical of every family
- Jesus can relate to our circumstances (Jn. 4, 7, 10; Mk. 6; Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4)
Part 1:
A Biblical Foundation
&
Personal Expectations

Personal Reflection
1. Are we blenders or crock pots?
   Blending is not the goal; more realistically, it is a process by which the various parts integrate or come into contact with one another, like a casserole of distinct parts. Our new “casserole family” takes TIME and HEAT (i.e., like a crock pot). Unrealistic expectations bring about an unhealthy attempt to blend quickly.

2. What were our initial expectations for our blended family? How or why did we formulate these initial expectations?
   Areas to address as a couple:
   - Stepfamily role expectations
   - Individual family histories (upbringing family and prior marriages)
   - Sexual histories
   - Individual financial situations (fully disclose individual financial histories)
   - Personality and communications styles

Defining a Family
We are, at the very least, a three-part family: our new primary family and the two secondary families (or more). We need to show dignity and respect to those families and their members.

- Various Portraits
  1. Husband with children marries never-married, no-kids wife
  2. Wife with children marries no-kids husband
  3. Divorced mom with kids marries divorced dad with kids
  4. Widow or widower with kids remarries
  5. Divorced or widowed parents of adult children marry

- The Goal
  The goal is to take “yours” and “mine” and turn them into “ours” and to make each family member feel “love-related” even if they are not “blood-related.” This can be done as we make a conscious and deliberate decision to love and to transfer that to our hearts and express it by our actions.
Revising Expectations

There is no way a second marriage is like a first so don’t expect it to be. Children generally do not ask for a parent’s remarriage, so expect some degree of anger and rebellion. “Second Chances” Dr. Jeff Parziale of InStep Ministries in Tucson notes that few kids are through the grieving process at the time of remarriage. In fact, most kids are just beginning to adjust to the new single parent household when the remarriage occurs. Also, the reality of Mom and Dad never getting back together becomes horribly clear to a child when remarriage occurs. This result in feeling of confusion anger and grief, and they are often unable to verbalize these feelings and may not even be aware of them, so they act out in tantrums, academic failure, anti-social or aggressive behavior. This is one of the top three reasons for stepfamilies to be in therapy: the child’s behavior (Lyn Rhoden, article “stepfamilies in therapy–www.saafamilies.org). Set realistic expectations (talk about finances, plans and dreams of the future, ex-spouses, family and roles, work and leisure time, roles and chores, sex and time alone, religion and spirituality).

Biological parents and children will always have a stronger bond than steps can have with those kids—even if all goes well. The same is true with blood relatives. This does not mean they cannot be close, but there will always be a qualitative difference. We must learn to accept the unique challenges and opportunities as a stepfamily. If we refuse to admit a difference, we shut off our ability to learn how to effectively relate.

Some potential baggage we bring into the marriage:

- Spiritual issues – how do you view God? Is He a loving father or angry and demanding? Do you pray?
- Skeletons in the family closet – were there abusive behaviors, mental illness or addiction in the home? Did your parents divorce or spend years in angry silence? What roles did you take on in your family of origin?
- Work and career – what did you want to be when you grew up? What are your career goals now?
- Emotional traumas – have you fully recovered from your divorce? Have you survived any abuse, addictions, disasters, or other traumas?
- Finances – what does money mean to you? Is it power, control, or security?
- Conflict and management skills – how do you handle conflict or stress? Do you ever numb intense emotions with food, alcohol, or drugs?
- Sexuality – have you ever looked for love in the wrong places? Any sexual trauma or abuse in your past? Any sexual intimacy issues?
**Biblical Encouragement**

- Discover a redemptive God Who loves, forgives, and provides strength and direction for journey.
- All families have problems, and imperfect families are all throughout the Bible.
- God loves and forgives the imperfect people in stepfamilies the same way He loves and forgives the imperfect people in biological families.
- People in stepfamilies are not second-rate Christians because there is no such thing as a first-rate Christian (Rom. 3:10-23).

Life isn’t fair. Nor does it always make sense. It is not a neat little package with bow on top. But all of us have choices to make. We can choose to accept what God has allowed to develop in our lives. Those who know the Lord always have (or can have) victory over life’s circumstances.
Part 2:
The Marriage Relationship
“Marriage Priority vs Conflicting Loyalties”

Personal Reflection
1. What qualities first attracted you to your spouse?

2. What are two or three fun memories you have from your dating or engagement period?

Marriage Priority
Your marriage must be top priority.
- Be Christ-centered; a holy triangle; know your own identity is Christ.
- Do a couple retreat/conference every year.
- Make a commitment to go the distance – single-mindedness and dedication.
- Make regular deposits in the love bank, and don’t fall behind in your “payments.”

- We need to be a unified team
  A dance takes harmony and practice. A weak marital relationship can be eroded by pre-existing loyalties to kids, ghosts of previous relationships, and unpacked emotional baggage. Couples who don’t work as a team often have poor communication skills, don’t nurture their relationship as they should, or focus all their energies on the kids.

- We need to take the time to nurture our relationship
  Build a strong marriage – in order to be a healthy functioning family, each individual member must be a healthy functioning person. (Talk about spiritual issues, divorce or death matters, skeletons in the family closet, work and career, emotional traumas, finances, conflict in management skills, sexuality). In the marriage, talk about: spirituality, recreation and hobbies, time: me, us, family; intellectual pursuits, the arts, sports, parenting style, love languages, emotional closeness and communication, conflict management.

Conflicting Loyalties
Behaviors that protect the parent-child relationship to the detriment of the marriage are dangerous to the long-term viability of the family. Conflict over loyalty to children is not unique to modern day stepfamilies (see Gen 16 and 31 – Abraham dealt with jealousy over Hagar and Sarah--and Isaac and Ishmael). The real culprit driving the barrier of parent-child allegiance is when biological parents refuse to take whatever risks necessary to move their spouse into a place of priority. Also, stepparents can be very
pushy and pit themselves against the children for the place of prominence with the biological parent.

- Triangulation
  Research shows that the single most destructive thing a husband or wife can do in a blended family is to side with their biological child against their spouse (Jim Killam, “Dangerous Crossing” in *Marriage Partnership Magazine, Spring 2004, p. 48*).

**Biblical Encouragement**
Proverbs 4:23
Matthew 15:18
Part 2:  
The Marriage Relationship  
“Navigating Biological & Stepparent Roles”

Personal Reflection
1. How has our blended family impacted or altered our roles as husband and wife? As a dad or mom?

2. Do biblical roles apply to blended family relationships? 
   Scriptural principles apply to individuals in stepfamilies and relationships in stepfamily homes just as they do to people of every culture, race, and family structure.

Family Structure
How well step family members adjust to their new circumstance depends on how issues pertaining to the role of the stepparent are managed. Effectively integrating the stepparent into the family’s life structure is a must!

   A Message to Men
   Step dads need to understand that spiritual leadership is not a convenient volunteer endeavor—it is a calling from God (Eph. 6:4). When you give your life in marriage to another woman, you are also committing yourself to the care, discipline, and spiritual training of her children. We cannot pick our roles. Share your faith stories with kids, live your faith, and intentionally create a culture of faith and make it come alive in our homes.

   - Principles are universal
   - Leader vs Disciplinarian
   - Newness vs Passivity
   - Marriage Commitment = Family Commitment

Biblical Headship
All Scripture applies to the individuals in stepfamilies and the relationships in stepfamily homes just as it does to people of every culture, race and family structure. Relational Complexities
Research shows that kids in blended families potentially have much more exposure to conflict than kids in intact, two-parent families. Other issues include: perceived favoritism, privacy & intimacy issues, sibling jealousy, anger (unresolved or suppressed).
Steppoms
They are at a greater disadvantage than step dads b/c kids tend to maintain more frequent contact with the non-custodial moms, and kids attachment to their biological mother is usually stronger than to the biological father, and b/c society expects women to achieve a higher relational standard than men stepmoms feel greater pressure to build a strong attachment with step kids.

Stepdads and affection
Stepdads are often confused about their roles with their stepdaughters and physical contact (i.e., hugs, etc.); it is best to have a visible, healthy affectionate relationship with the spouse; the closer he is to the mother, the less likely will be his real or imagined advances toward her. The girl is more accepting and open. Stepfamilies need to set behavioral boundaries that discourage intentional and unconscious sexual attraction; have boundaries that honor privacy.

• Relational Pacing
  Don’t:
  • Try too hard to force the intimacy. As the stepparent, don’t insist on the children calling you Mom or Dad; calling you by your first name is fine (just do not use a rude name!).
  • Expect too much of themselves (kids expect a friend rather than a mother or father)
  • Rush into authoritative parenting
  • Punish before building relationships
  Do:
  • Have realistic expectations (kids see the stepparents as a coach or camp counselor, with limited authority, but they are not parents)
  • Grow into their roles of an authority, slowly move into disciplinary role:
    a. the happy baby sitter
    b. the uncle or aunt role
    c. the parent/stepparent role.

Biblical Encouragement
Deuteronomy 6
Ephesians 5-6
Philippians 2:1-4
Part 3:  
Home Life  
“Perspective & Pitfalls”

Personal Reflection
1. What is perhaps the single most important lesson you have learned so far about either being a stepparent or being in a blended family?

2. Do you believe that biblical roles for fathers and mothers apply to blended families?

The Book of Proverbs  
An Introduction
The book of Proverbs is God’s Manual for Parenting. Nearly all of the Proverbs are written from a father to his son and express the heart of parents for the spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing for their child.

- The Heart of a Child
  - Kids likely have unrecognized loss and unexpressed grief. Kids lose contact with parents & grandparents, lose control of their lives, and lose the continuity of living arrangements and routines. They are being driven by menacing emotions and need to be able to talk it out. As parents, we cannot fix the grief, but we can keep the “touch points” alive with our kids (fun rituals, winks, handholding, bedtime stories, etc.).
  - Kids may be forced to deal with birth order changes, and this can be rather problematic. For example, in his former home a child may have been the baby but in his new home he is now the middle child or an older child. Parents need to sit down and talk with kids about how their roles have changed and the responsibilities they may have lost or have now gained. Allow them to be angry, empathize and feel sorry for their loss, but support them and communicate confidence that they will respond well. Make sure also to spend alone time with each child to affirm his or her uniqueness.

In general, the younger the children are, the easier a remarriage will be on them. Children are NOT ready if they exhibit these behaviors:
- acting out at school or at home
- new behaviors have emerged: bedwetting, hoarding food, immaturity
- eating or sleeping patterns have changed
- emotional swing, shyness, withdrawal
- child feels responsible for the divorce
- child vocally opposes the new marriage
• Pitfalls
Stepparents try too hard to force intimacy, expect too much of themselves (kids expect a friend rather than a mother or father), and/or rush into authoritative parenting (i.e., punish before building relationships). As the newcomer in the family, your job is to love your spouse, love the kids, and support them all the best you can. You must let your spouse and the ex-spouse handle situations that affect their children together. Do not interfere with their job as parents, even when they have a difficult or contentious relationship. It is not your place to run interference.

**Biblical Encouragement**
Selected Proverbs
**Part 3:**

**Home Life**

“Laying a Foundation for Order and Cooperation”

**Personal Reflection**

1. What is perhaps the single most important lesson you have learned so far about either being a stepparent or being in a blended family?

2. Do you believe that biblical roles for fathers and mothers apply to blended families?

**Discipline**

Research shows that kids in blended families potentially have much more exposure to conflict than kids in intact, two-parent families. How well stepfamily members adjust to their new circumstance depends on how issues pertaining to the role of the stepparent are managed. Effectively integrating the stepparent into the family’s life structure is a must:

- Plan for discipline….talk it through before things happen.
- The plan should subject all children to the same standard.
- Don’t make too many new demands with the new family structure…don’t allow the stepparent to take the authority role in the discipline of the kids too soon after the marriage. There needs to be an adjustment period.
- Let kids look to the biological parent for discipline during the first few months. Then little by little the step can come alongside the biological parent, in a slower manner, demonstrating warmth, discussion, interaction and even prayer with the kids.

Discipline is a major source of conflict with stepfamilies. Often both parents have opposing disciplinary styles, and maybe even an unconscious fear of letting the stepparent discipline one’s own children. A key for success is to anticipate potential differences and issues that will likely arise; then, discuss them ahead of time. Practically speaking, consider making up some house rules together. Here is a sample list:

- Treat everyone with respond, kindness, and love
- Use manners all the time
- No name-calling, no saying “SHUT UP!”
- Do not hit
- Ask to use others stuff
- Obey a parent
- “No” means “No”
- Let others know when you leave the house
No throwing things in the house
Only eat and drink in the kitchen

Routine
When kids don’t cooperate or want our food or call us names or ignore us, it is NOT about you! They are hurting inside; kids like routine and predictability; there is security in that. When parents divorced and remarried, children’s routines were disrupted, and they may even be physically displaced. Allowing kids to complain about small things gives them a sense or control….allowing them to control some aspects of their own lives can be positive. Let them make some of the decisions, with proper guidance, that affects them (paint a room, posters on wall, etc.).

Family Bonding
Family Meetings
• Make them a priority and regular
• Begin with compliments and appreciation
• Post an agenda board and let kids and all have a role on what gets discussed
• Rotate leaders to lead the meeting
• Be open to all feelings and use listening skills
• Pray together

Privacy
• Institute a “quiet time” for everyone in the house.
• Take the “high road” and focus on what is best for the kids (be respectful of your children’s families/parents).
• Emphasize respect; commit to learn conflict resolution skills; share and ask permission and forgiveness.

Quality Time
• Begin to color-code a calendar to track all the children’s events, supporting each child’s individual activities.
• Take yearly family vacations.
• Begin and keep a Friday night tradition of pizza and movies.
• Get to know your stepchildren, spend time with the kids one-on-one.

Biblical Encouragement
Selected Proverbs
Part 4:
Hope & Encouragement

**Personal Reflection**
1. Type a question here

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**Biblical Encouragement**