

# A Home Built from Love & Loss

*Coming Together as a Blended Family*



**Sabrina McDonald**

This book offers the gift of empathy. A helpful resource for all blended families, *A Home Built from Love and Loss* pays special attention to how loss impacts blended-family bonding. I have been blessed to work with Sabrina McDonald through the years, and you will also be blessed by her candor, insights, and beautifully written testimony of what God can do for your family.

RON DEAL, director of FamilyLife Blended, president of Smart Stepfamilies, and bestselling author of *Building Love Together in Blended Families* (with Gary Chapman) and *The Smart Stepfamily*

Marriage and family are hard work. Period. But unavoidable layers of complexity are added when stepfamilies are formed. Sabrina and Robbie have put in the work to survive the trials after their losses, and today they are thriving and want to help you! Everyone needs a coach, a mentor, and a friend when traveling rough roads. Open these pages and let Sabrina be your companion on your family journey.

DENNIS AND BARBARA RAINEY, cofounders of FamilyLife and authors of thirty-five books, including *Moments Together for Couples* and *The Art of Parenting*

Filled with compassion and biblical wisdom, *A Home Built from Love and Loss* is for those who desire a deeper understanding of the grief associated with blended families. Sabrina McDonald's honest, vulnerable, and inspiring illustrations from her own journey help guide the reader through the complex layers of rebuilding. This resource provides practical steps toward healing and offers hope for today's Christian blended family.

LAURA PETHERBRIDGE, aka "The Smart Stepmom"; speaker, life coach, and coauthor (with Ron Deal) of *The Smart Stepmom*



A Home Built from Love and Loss



# A Home Built from Love & Loss

*Coming Together as a Blended Family*



**Sabrina Beasley McDonald**

**FOCUS**  
ON  
THE FAMILY®

*A Focus on the Family resource  
published by Tyndale House Publishers*

*A Home Built from Love and Loss: Coming Together as a Blended Family*

Copyright © 2024 by Sabrina Beasley McDonald. All rights reserved.

A Focus on the Family book published by Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

*Focus on the Family* and the accompanying logo and design are federally registered trademarks of Focus on the Family, 8605 Explorer Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

*Tyndale* and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Ministries.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of Focus on the Family.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version,® copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Cover design by Ron C. Kaufmann

Cover and interior illustrations are the property of their respective copyright holders from Depositphotos.com, and all rights are reserved. Home puzzle and clouds © Vadym Gannenko; people © Roman Yatsyna; woman's hair © Tawatdchai Muelae.

The use of material from or references to various websites does not imply endorsement of those sites in their entirety. Availability of websites and pages is subject to change without notice.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at [csresponse@tyndale.com](mailto:csresponse@tyndale.com), or call 1-855-277-9400.

ISBN 978-1-64607-102-9

Printed in the United States of America

30 29 28 27 26 25 24  
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To Robbie,  
my dear husband,  
who shares the loss and love with me.*

*To Benjamin and Katherine,  
who delight me continually with laughter.*

*To Seth,  
who endured the brunt  
of my learning curve and inspired this book.*





# Contents

Introduction 1

1 Two Funerals and a Wedding	7
2 Loss in Death, Loss in Remarriage	21
3 Remarriage and Wet Fish	47
4 Myths and Fears in Blended Families	75
5 The Invisible Family Member	97
6 A Different Kind of Parenting	127

7 Parenting and Guilt	151
8 Helping Kids Process Emotion	173
9 Home for the Holidays	201
10 Handling Rejection: When Kids Don't Want to Blend	221
11 A New Identity	239
12 Broken Can Be Beautiful	271
Notes	279





# Introduction

WITH EYES GLARING AND JAW CLENCHED, I stood furious and bewildered in front of my new husband, Robbie. Moments before, Robbie had scolded and humiliated my five-year-old son, Benjamin, with the ferocity of a drill sergeant in the first week of training. And it wasn't the first time.

I couldn't understand how Robbie, at the time an Army sergeant, could be so harsh to a child still in kindergarten. Ben's biological father had died three years prior—more than half Ben's life ago—and now Ben was sure his new “daddy” hated him.

Our blended family had only been together for a matter of weeks, maybe a few months, and I was already worried about our future as a family. Would my son and his stepdad ever be able to bond? This kind of turmoil wasn't what I signed up for.

My anger manifested in a whirlwind of emotions. I wasn't sure if I should cry, yell, or take my kids and leave. Nervous energy compelled me to start picking up toys and other

living-room debris, taking out my frustration on each stuffed animal and wooden block, snatching them up and flinging them into a laundry basket. I turned my back, refusing to make eye contact with Robbie.

My husband's furrowed brow softened when he saw tears welling in my eyes, blazing with fire as they were. He started with an excuse, "Well, he . . ."

"*He* is in kindergarten," I barked. "*You* are a grown-up."

"What do you want me to do?" Robbie scoffed.

I stopped my furious cleaning, faced him, and—with a look of exasperation—said, "I want you to love my son."

That was the moment I knew that blended-family life was hard, not just "I'll get used to it" hard, but blood, sweat, and tears hard.

The blending of families, it turns out, places parents in deeply emotional situations that sometimes require great sacrifice. Making a stepfamily work requires some of the most difficult decisions a parent can make, yet newly formed stepfamilies face those decisions on an almost daily basis. It's exhausting! So it's no wonder that such a high percentage of stepfamilies end in divorce.

Robbie and I were especially naïve about our coming together as a family. We were both widowed, and we thought our backgrounds would give us an easier and faster path to establishing a strong family connection. But we were wrong, like so many others before us.

When I tell the story of how Robbie and I met, most people respond with a sweet *awww*. Images of *The Sound of*

*Music* or *The Brady Bunch* come rushing to mind. It seemed so cut and dry: His kids needed a mom; my kids needed a dad. And voilà—everyone has what they need!

The truth is that most couples in a blended family—whether their path led through death or divorce—dream the same naïve dream. Yet the typical stepfamily story is less like *The Brady Bunch* and more like the Montagues and Capulets from *Romeo and Juliet*.

Almost all blended families follow the same basic journey. We start out brimming with hope, but then reality sets in. We realize that marriage didn't fix everything. In fact, some things got much worse. That leads to questions and doubts and, eventually, to the crossroads where all such couples must decide: hang on and keep going, or give up and quit. Those of us who keep going eventually reap the rewards, but not without our scars. And there are always nuances within this journey, of course, because no two families are the same.

There have been times when divorced friends have said to me, “I know I've never lost a spouse, but—” And that's where I stop them. Divorce isn't the same as being widowed, but it's a tremendous loss just the same. It's a loss for the spouse, and it's a loss for the kids. In some ways divorce *is* like death—the death of something (a marriage and family) that you hoped would last a lifetime.

No matter how each stepfamily comes to be, they all include a necessary journey through grief. Loss (and therefore grief) is a factor in every blended family. And even though this process is desperately needed in order to heal,

people often overlook the need for grieving when death isn't involved.

Thankfully, as time moved on, Robbie *did* form a bond with my kids. Nowadays it's as if they were always his. My daughter, who was three when we married, doesn't know a life without Robbie in it. I laugh when I see her do something the way Robbie does, or when she plays a trick on him that he taught her. I often say to him, "You know where she got that from, don't you? Her daddy"—meaning Robbie, of course.

It took a while, but I eventually realized that I had expected something in those early years that Robbie couldn't possibly give my children at that time—a bond. That kind of connection doesn't happen just by wishing for it. It takes time and sacrifice.

My family is long past our most vulnerable days, and we are looking forward to a happy future together. But there were many times in our past, like when Robbie scolded Ben, when the future didn't look so good. All stepfamilies go through these moments.

That's because the usual path to blended-family stability is baptism by fire. This wilderness adventure begins with walking across hot coals before moving on to consuming exotic foods like humble pie. Along the way, one can expect the ritual sacrifice of some stubborn habits.

The good news for you is that your family is not the first to travel this path. Other couples, like Robbie and I, have gone before you and can help light the way. That doesn't

mean you won't endure your share of scary encounters on this journey, but at least you can be prepared to face them.

This book attempts to explain the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of blending a family. Our story involves a new life that was formed after death, but this book is a resource for any blended family that formed after any number of circumstances. Death, divorce, abandonment, a single parent who was never married, foster care and adoption—these situations and others can be the basis for blending a family.

You might even be a grandparent in a blended family. This group is often overlooked, yet they aren't immune to the issues that affect stepfamilies. The grandparent/grandchild relationship can be a strong emotional bond, so grandparents are often confused and sometimes devastated as they try to determine just where they fit in this blended web of relationships.

Adult children are another overlooked group in the blended-family equation. You might be a grown child who doesn't understand how you fit into your parent's new marriage. Maybe your heart is broken because the only family you've ever known and loved is lost, because a deceased parent seems forgotten, or because the grandparenting dream you had in relation to your kids feels gone forever.

Maybe you have friends or loved ones now struggling in a blended family, or perhaps you are a pastor or small group leader who needs to better understand the dynamics of stepfamilies in your church.

Whatever circumstances prompted you to pick up this book, what you will get is a bag full of tools to help you and



others in your circle address the challenges of blended-family life. I'll address topics such as the grief that impacts all blended families, the role of the ex-spouse (whether deceased or alive), changes in family identity for both children and adults, and the beauty that God can bring from the brokenness of life.

Most of all, this book offers the gift of empathy. Through our family's story, you get to take a walk in someone else's shoes. It's hard to gain a thorough perspective if you only see one side of a story, and it's even harder when you are the one who bears the pain, so I hope this book gives you a more complete view of a complex situation.

Suffice it to say that I can't cover every specific situation. Everyone in a stepfamily grieves not just the loss of a former way of life but also the loss of dreams. And they all deal with disappointment, guilt, and a host of frustrations and fears.

Blending a family can be complicated and often deeply emotional, but there is absolutely hope for a fulfilling life. It just takes courage, tenacity, tolerance, and grace, grace, grace.

With a focus on God's Word and a lot of patience for one another, any stepfamily can build a house with a firm foundation. In the next few chapters, I will discuss many distinct issues that stepfamilies face and how they can be dealt with, from both a practical and a biblical perspective.

The stories I'll share don't always represent our most flattering moments. Robbie and I messed up a lot. We hurt feelings a lot. We failed in many ways. But we also fought hard to honor God and maintain a loving home.

If we can do it, so can you.



## TWO FUNERALS AND A WEDDING

OUR WIDOWED DAYS WERE OVER, and Robbie and I couldn't wait to start our new life together.

It had been two years for him and three for me since our spouses died—years of crying, wondering, hoping, and worrying. Those were years of frustrated single parenting and lonely, dismal nights. Our wedding day marked the end of those burdens and an exciting new beginning.

My groom waited for me at the church altar, buttoned up in his military dress blues, and my heart burst like fireworks as I stood ready to walk the aisle. Red roses and navy ribbons adorned the pews along the way where my father would escort me to my new husband-to-be.

When I entered the church sanctuary, I expected bright, beaming faces, joining me in the joy that those lonely, struggling hours were now a distant memory. Instead, I was greeted with a host of red, puffy eyes. Tissues were everywhere as I passed each row. Sniffles echoed. It felt more like a wake than a wedding.

People were happy for us, of course, but they were also deeply saddened. Our wedding was another reminder that their loved ones—our loved ones—were gone.

My first husband, David, and Robbie's first wife, Kari, weren't coming back. It was hard enough for our friends and family to *know* it. It was even harder for them to *see* life changing and moving in a new direction without our beloved departed ones.

It didn't help that our wedding ceremony took place in the same church, in the same room, as Kari's funeral. Robbie's oldest son and daughter-in-law were visibly anxious. She wept throughout the ceremony, and it wasn't just an occasional tear down the cheek, but a shoulders-shaking, trying-to-catch-your-breath kind of cry.

Hers weren't the only tears shed that day. Women on both sides of the aisle couldn't keep their mascara from running.

It was also strange to see David's sister and his widowed mother sitting on the bride's side of the sanctuary. Just ten years earlier, they were on the groom's side.

Robbie's in-laws were on his side. I barely knew them and vice versa. I wondered how their hearts must be breaking. Robbie and Kari were married twenty-two years—high

school sweethearts. He was more like a son to them than a son-in-law.

The reception was also awkward. I asked my new teenage stepson to dance, but he didn't feel like it. I understood why. Still, it was hard for me not to feel rejected. I'm sure he didn't know what to feel, especially while so many family members seemed to be in a state of sorrow.

The whole event made me wish we had eloped to the Caribbean. I regretted the cost of this somber affair and longed for a refund on the live band and gourmet food.

When the "party" was over, Robbie and I realized something. This wasn't just a wedding. It was two funerals and a wedding.

We soon realized that each friend and family member was on his or her own grief journey. Our wedding ceremony was just one more step on that long road.

It certainly makes sense to hear the words *grief journey* in the context of death and remarriage, but these same conflicting emotions are also natural when someone who has been divorced gets remarried. That's because this seemingly joyous union signifies the death of the former relationship. In such a case, there are likely those in the family still hoping for the exes to reunite. That's especially true for kids.

No matter how terrible a parent's past behavior—drugs, abuse, infidelity—it's rarely bad enough to dampen the hopes that children have for Mom and Dad to reconcile. Children always—*always*—hope that the "bad" parent will

one day be a better person and finally become the hero they always dreamed of.

The grief that occurs when a marriage ends doesn't just hit the children. If you were a part of the marriage, then it also hits you. Yes, I understand that you have probably accepted the end of your marriage—maybe you desperately wanted it to end—but your loss involves more than a *person*. The breakup of a marriage is like the loss of a *dream*—the “happily ever after” dream.

### A Match Made Online

I met Robbie on an internet dating site. (How else is a single mother with two preschoolers supposed to meet single men?) I admit that when Robbie first approached me, I wasn't a fan. He was attractive enough, nice enough, and a Christ follower, but our circumstances were completely out of sync. He was ten years older than me, and his kids were much older than mine, with a twenty-year difference between his oldest and my youngest.

Yet the fact that he was widowed gave Robbie and me a sort of camaraderie, like two soldiers who had lived through the same war. For some reason I couldn't stop saying yes to dates with him. He understood a part of me that few others could appreciate.

Something happened one night that helped me realize it was time to stop resisting and give Robbie a chance. I was at a Super Bowl party with a bunch of young singles. I was

around thirty-six at the time, and a young man in his early twenties approached me.

As this guy swaggered and chatted with me, it struck me how young he seemed, as if I were talking to a child. Yes, he was only about ten years younger, but it felt like more than that.

Our differences were about more than just age. I had two kids (a maturing process of its own) and had gone through the trauma of losing a spouse. This guy couldn't possibly comprehend any of these experiences, and I didn't expect him to.

That's when I called Robbie and told him to meet me at a restaurant. We sat side by side in a quiet booth and watched the football game together. Nothing much was said, aside from occasionally commenting on a particular play or a funny commercial. It wasn't dramatic or even romantic, but it was comfortable—the way time spent together as a married couple so often is.

The next day I was still pondering. For one thing, I knew that our circumstances weren't ideal. From the outside, our combined family might look crazy. For example, I wasn't old enough to be the mother of the oldest, and Robbie looked more like my kids' grandfather than their father.

Then I looked up on my bathroom wall, and there was the answer. Framed in beautiful calligraphy was 1 Samuel 16:7: "The LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (NKJV).

Robbie's heart was good. He knew God. He studied the Bible. Why would the outward appearance of our family matter if both our hearts were following God?

It reminded me of what my first husband, David, used to say: “A soulmate isn’t someone you *find*. It’s someone you intentionally and prayerfully *become*.” He truly believed (as do I) that any two Christians can marry and have a good marriage as long as they are both following God’s Word. When that’s the goal of both spouses, virtually any marriage can make it.

If your first marriage ended in divorce, you might be thinking, *I was married to a Christian and we still didn’t make it*. Being married to a Christian isn’t the magic formula for a good marriage. Christian people still choose to sin and live according to the flesh. A *flourishing* marriage, however, involves both spouses desiring God’s will and doing their best to follow His guidance and wisdom. When a marriage between two Christians fails, it could be because at least one partner wasn’t living a life that was pleasing to God.

If you’ve now started over—or are about to start over—then your new marriage certainly has the potential to flourish. But it doesn’t happen without work. A healthy Christian marriage requires that you both seek and follow God’s principles. That’s no guarantee that you’ll never disagree, but it is a recipe for inner peace and joy.

I Was Ruth. She Was Naomi.

I reached the point where I had just about decided that Robbie was the man God provided for me and my children. (Robbie had actually made up his mind long before.) But there was one person whose opinion mattered to me most—a person

whose approval I wanted before I could proceed any further. That person was David's mother, Joy.

If you're in a blended family, you know that your previous spouse's parents don't simply go away. They are still the grandparents of your children, and they still want to spend time with them. Their child is no longer alive to look out for their interests, so it's up to the surviving spouse to include the in-laws in the children's lives.

Oddly enough, David's mother had walked the same path of widowhood as I did. The similarities are almost eerie. Joy's husband, like mine, was killed in a car accident when her children were young. David was two years old at the time and her daughter was only a baby, just like my daughter.

But for whatever reason, Joy never remarried. That was the biggest regret of her life, but not because she regretted her lack of companionship. She was perfectly content living without a husband, but she regretted it for the sake of her children.

Both David and his sister, Jerra, became well-adjusted adults, but David never got over growing up without a father. He often told me, "If anything ever happens to me, promise me you will get married again." To which I would say, "Yeah, yeah, whatever you want. What are the odds?"

When David died, Joy had a similar request of me. She said, "Don't do what I did. Get married again."

In my mind, Joy and I were like Ruth and Naomi: both widowed, both lost, and both in search of a Boaz—a "kinsman redeemer" (in our case, a brother in Christ) who would



serve as the man in our lives. (You can read their story in the book of Ruth.) Of course God doesn't promise every single parent a new spouse, much less one of Boaz's reputation and stature. Simply dating as a single parent is already tough enough without the pressure to find that ideal person. And that's before the work of *blending* has even begun!

Joy and Jerra felt responsible to help fulfill David's wishes, to help me find a new spouse. During my three years of widowhood, those two set me up with four different men.

One was a young man who rescued Joy when her car broke down on the highway. She was smitten! Joy made me go with her to visit his church the next Sunday. Unfortunately, his fiancée was a little perturbed to see us show up in person to thank him for being a knight in shining armor!

When it came time to introduce Robbie to Joy, I was nervous. In a way, I felt like she was a stand-in for David—the one destined to give me the “family blessing” so to speak. I knew her opinion would help seal the deal for me, one way or the other. Joy had high standards for just about everything, and my relationship with Robbie had some, shall we say, structural concerns.

I previously mentioned our children's ages. But then there were *our* ages. As I said, I'm ten years younger than Robbie. I'm also only twelve years older than his oldest son, who happens to be about the same age as my youngest brother. Robbie was the youngest of three children, so his sisters and their husbands are closer in age to my parents than to me.

I had already struggled through many of these issues, but what would Joy think?

Joy and Robbie met at my house, and the two of them sat on the back patio to talk. I played inside with the kids, glancing out the window from time to time, trying to judge their expressions. To this day I still don't know all that was said.

Robbie went home and I sat at the kitchen table, waiting to hear Joy's verdict. In my heart, she would render the final ruling. She was the one who would reveal whether Robbie was the man we were waiting for. Was he our Boaz, our provision, from God?

What she said in that moment amazed me. Not only was Joy known for her high standards, she was also known to be somewhat reserved in sharing her opinions. But not that day. It almost felt like a word from the Lord because she spoke with such strength and authority.

"Sabrina, I am so impressed," she said. "I was afraid you would fall in love with a man who wasn't right for you, but I want to tell you something: *You* did not find Robbie; *God* brought you together. He is kind and respectful and mature. He is a blessing from God, and it's no accident that you met. He is perfect for the family, and I feel that I can love him like I loved my own son."

That's when I knew Robbie was the one.

### A Grief Journey for the Whole Family

Robbie and I initially bonded over our shared experience with sudden loss. His wife, Kari, died at forty-two of an

aggressive form of cancer. The disease was discovered in her spine in May, and by July she entered the gates of heaven. Even though the family could see it coming, it still happened too quickly to absorb.

Surviving family members of cancer victims can sometimes work through much of their grief before the person dies. But Kari's decline was so rapid, there was little time to consider a future without her. Robbie was left being a single father of twelve- and twenty-two-year-old sons, both of whom were experiencing important stages of transition in life.

My husband, David, died instantly in a car accident at the age of thirty-seven. He left for work one morning and never came home. An eighteen-wheeler was making an illegal pass across a double yellow line and struck my husband's car head-on. His car spun around and hit another vehicle. Traffic was backed up for miles and blocked the highway for hours.

Our son was only two and our daughter was three months old when their father drew his last breath.

As devastating as those losses were for Robbie and me, we weren't the only ones who suffered. Our children, parents, in-laws, brothers and sisters, friends, and even distant family members all shared in our pain.

I think we instinctively knew that others were hurting, but we didn't recognize how deep that sorrow ran until we got engaged. It's hard to pay attention to someone else's agony when the biggest yearning in your life is to put an end to your own.

In hindsight, we gave our friends and family little time to

adjust to the idea of a remarriage. I was shocked and somewhat hurt when my family and friends urged that we “slow down” and “get to know each other better.”

They didn’t say those things back when David and I got engaged. I didn’t realize at the time that their desire for Robbie and me to slow down wasn’t simply out of concern for our relationship. It also had to do with *everyone else’s* need to process what was happening.

Robbie and I married only six months after we met—a mistake we regret to this day. Our rushed relationship wasn’t bad for us, per se, but it seemed to make things harder for both our families.

In the minds of our loved ones, Robbie and I were total strangers, and in some ways we were. I had met Robbie’s two sons, Will and Seth, only a couple of times before our wedding day. And Robbie had just a few opportunities to interact with my two small children, Benjamin and Katherine.

We thought getting married as soon as possible would be best for the kids. I don’t know why we thought that. Wishful thinking, maybe? I had read all the books by blended-family expert Ron Deal, including *Dating and the Single Parent*, that explain why it’s best to date at least two years before a second marriage.<sup>1</sup> I should have known better.

But Deal did offer a caveat that “maybe” marriage could come sooner for couples with younger kids, if only because they tended to bond faster. That was all the permission we needed. We heard what we wanted to hear. Benjamin was five and Katherine was three when we made the decision.

Clearly we would be candidates for fast bonding . . . or so we thought.

Robbie and I started dating in January. By spring we were engaged. We really wanted to wait a little longer, but Robbie's son Seth was entering ninth grade—high school. And my son, Ben, would be starting kindergarten.

Since marriage would involve at least one of us moving to a new city, we decided to get married in the summer so the kids wouldn't have to change schools mid-year. So that's what we did.

Looking back, I realize that we somehow expected our new marriage to fix our friends' and families' pain and sorrow. Perhaps the same way I hoped it would fix mine. After all, each person I talked to was eager for me to remarry, and they all approved of Robbie, even if the pace of our relationship was too fast for most. I thought my friends and family members would be relieved for my sake, knowing I had a good man to help provide for my safety, my kids, and my happiness. And in many ways, they were.

But what I didn't realize, and they probably didn't either, was that the lingering sadness of David's loss would not be assuaged by another marriage.

Not only that, but another marriage created a host of new concerns for everyone involved. The grandparents wondered if the children would be properly loved. Friends and family members wondered if the deceased would be forgotten. Robbie and I wondered all those things and more.

Blending our families didn't mean our grief was ending.

It simply meant that our grief was entering a new phase. And that's true for all blended families, no matter how they came to be.

### We're Here to Stay

If I had it to do over again, I'd do several things differently. I've already said that I would wait longer before marrying, and there are other issues I would have worked through during that time.

I would have made sure that Robbie's sons, Seth and Will, were more included in his plans. I would have looked for ways to bond with Robbie other than over the loss of our spouses. I would have had all our kids spend more time together.

It's impossible to know how things might be different had we taken these steps, but I do think it would have sent a message to our children and our loved ones: We care about your feelings on the matter, not just our own.

Second thoughts, however, don't change circumstances. We are where we are, and we're here to stay.

And so are you.

Blended families come to be in countless different ways. Maybe you lost a spouse after an affair, or even multiple affairs. Maybe you were the one who was unfaithful. Maybe your spouse was depressed and just left.

Maybe you're worried that getting remarried was the biggest mistake of your life, and now you're questioning whether it can be undone. But whatever the difficulties you experienced, or even created, they are all *redeemable* in the hands of God.

One of my hobbies is upcycling. (Unlike typical recycling, upcycling involves giving new life to items you might otherwise throw away.) I love to take old stuff and make something new out of it. With a little glue, paint, and imagination, I try to create beauty out of items that have been cast away and forgotten.

That's also one of God's specialties. How do I know? Look at Moses—a tongue-tied killer whom God trusted with His Law. Look at Gideon's army—a cast of 300 men who took on the entire Midianite army. Look at the ragtag group of twelve disciples whom the Lord used to help bring His gospel to the whole world!

I often say that God likes to use people and situations that look hopeless because no one else can take credit when He makes something amazing out of almost nothing. When people hear stories like that, they have to say, "Only God could have done this!"

In the same way, when you trust God with your stepfamily, He can bring about something beautiful—even when others might have given up. As Philippians 1:6 says, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." As tempting as it might be at times, don't give up on your new family. Allow God to finish His work. It might look like your blended family is a mishmash of discarded items. But when God gets done with it, you'll stand back in awe and say, "Only God could have done this."