

# **BLENDDED & REDEEMED**

**PASTOR'S GUIDE**

**THE GO-TO FIELD GUIDE FOR  
THE MODERN STEPFAMILY**

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Founders of Blended Kingdom Families



# GREETINGS

We (Scott and Vanessa) wrote this guide for one reason: **we love pastors.** We know pastors feel immense pressure. You are trying to keep dozens of ministerial plates spinning, while also balancing work and family and your own spiritual health. That's a LOT of spinning! We want to come alongside you and provide tools for ministering to your congregation. Since we believe blended families comprise the largest untapped ministry opportunity in the church, we want to help you reach them!

Blended Kingdom Families exists to break the generation cycle of divorce, equip marriages, and unite blended families with the truth of God's Word. We are a step-family ministry that seeks to spread the gospel to blended families all over the world and to help shine the light of Jesus Christ into every home and marriage. BKF has served over 150,000 blended families by providing biblical guidance and practical resources to help families find healing and hope while also building unity and peace that create thriving and healthy homes.

Our ministry provides up-to-date content such as blended family curriculum, teaching videos, blogs and video blogs, weekly podcasts, family and marriage conferences, events, and workshops to better equip marriages and blended families. We offer resources to help with all facets of the challenges blended families face. Our vision is to provide every blended family with a local church and group to receive equipping and support both spiritually and physically.

In this pastor's guide, we are providing a short summary of each chapter to give you the bigger picture of our book *Blended and Redeemed: The Go-To Field Guide for the Modern Stepfamily*. We have also written a study guide for individuals or small groups to accompany the book with a six-week and ten-week schedule. We highly recommend using both of these resources in your church's counseling, marriage, and family ministries so the members of your fellowship can dig deeper into each topic.

We believe the Lord will do a great work as you minister to those in your congregation who face the challenges and experience the joys of a blended family. However you decide to invest in blended families, we thank the Lord for everything He is doing and will do in your church. We would love to hear how you are reaching this segment of your congregation. We are humbled to come alongside you and your ministry!

# 5 WAYS YOU CAN USE *BLENDED AND REDEEMED* IN YOUR CHURCH

We designed and wrote *Blended & Redeemed* and its companion study guide for individuals, couples, and blended families in a variety of settings. Because of its versatility, you and your staff can decide the best ways to utilize these resources for maximum impact in your church and community. Suggested below are a few ways we think our resources could be used.

**1. Small group.** This could be a Sunday School class, care group, short-term study, or any similar gathering in your church. The study guide we created contains everything you need for a small group, including a six-week and ten-week schedule, although you are free to adapt it to your church's education calendar.

**2. Weekend retreat.** What couple doesn't need a time to get away to focus on their marriage? That's especially true of blended couples. You could use the study guide as a springboard for Bible study and discussion, and then encourage couples to read and talk about the book together at home, using the questions at the end of each chapter to continue to grow together. Another alternative is to offer a retreat as the kick-off to the study. This would provide more time to cover the material while also giving couples time to connect with each other and to meet others who are in the same blended boat.

**3. Blended family weekend.** This might take more time and volunteers, but it could prove to be a powerful experience for blended families. For this event, you would include the entire family in a weekend of education and enrichment. Provide childcare for the tiny ones, and for children and teenagers, adapt the lessons from the study guide for their age and development. You'd need to provide the *Blended and Redeemed* book and study guide well in advance so children and student ministers or volunteers can read and create a unique experience for them. You could spring for breakfast and lunch for the whole family—but each in their own separate spaces. That way, parents don't have to worry about meals and can enjoy conversation with couples over meals without the distraction of the kids.

**4. Book club.** If you want to reach an underserved group in your community, create a book club in your area. Hold it at a neutral site (library, coffee shop, condo clubhouse, etc.) to draw in those who are intimidated by or who have been wounded by the church in the past. You could cover one chapter a week and use the discussion questions provided after each chapter to spark interaction. By the end of the 10 weeks, that book club might just turn into an active small group in your church.

**5. Series of sermons.** We think the material in this book could easily be adapted as a series of sermons. You could preach on the biblical principles that would apply to couples and families of every kind, but also give application for both traditional and blended families. Not every chapter would necessarily be covered (such as Chapter 10), but the book and study guide contain ample material for a sermon series.

# REFINED IN FIRE

***“Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we were sitting among the flames, but God was with us in the furnace.”***

—BLENDED & REDEEMED, PG. 9

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Our family, the Martindale family, is a blended Kingdom family, and we both come from blended families. We have experienced the challenge of bringing together different people, different backgrounds, and different personalities to form one family.

The heart of our family and the Blended Kingdom Families ministry we've built over the past few years is reflected in Isaiah 61:1-3:

*He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners...  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion*

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*to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair (NIV, emphasis added).*

The year 2017 was supposed to be a year we could catch our breath, but it became 12 long months of all-out spiritual warfare and attacks from the enemy. As we knelt before the Lord, the refining process began. Like He did for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, God walked us through fire, and we emerged from the flames completely changed, refined, and victorious. Through our own experience, we testify to the way God took what was broken and shattered and brought us into a new, beautiful work of art.

Also like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, God never promised to keep us out of the fire. He only promised to walk through it with us. His plans are to prosper us and to use every agonizing situation for our good and His glory. Out of our experience, we knew God wanted to use our family to strengthen, equip, and encourage other families who were facing the same kinds of struggles and obstacles.

# THE CHURCH AND BLENDED FAMILIES

*“By providing resources and simple acknowledgment, churches can help normalize the existence of blended families.”*

—BLENDED & REDEEMED, PG. 44

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God asked us (Scott and Vanessa) to build Blended Kingdom Families (BKF) to strengthen, encourage, and equip other families who are facing the same difficulties we've experienced. Satan wants to destroy families, but we can fight back through the power of prayer and the truth of God's Word.

Most churches have full schedules. It's rare to find something specifically designed for blended families. However, blended families have unique needs and struggles. Most blended families sitting in church on Sunday morning feel like they are alone. Based on our experience in working with blended families and conducting the Blended Kingdom Project, there are two main reasons for this:

1. Blended families have difficulty finding people who can relate to their situation, and they wish the church had more resources and opportunities to help them.
2. Blended families feel ambiguous about their place in the church, and the majority carry the weight of shame because of their situation. Many will walk into church on Sunday morning, force a smile as they engage with others, and bury their hurt until they get back home. What's missing for the entire congregation is a biblical understanding of divorce and the implications it has on remarriage, stepfamilies, and the church's role in these families' lives. We believe there is biblical support for a handful of situations in which the victim of the divorce is 100 percent free of the marriage:
  1. Adultery (Matthew 19:9)
  2. Abuse (1 Corinthians 7:15–16)
  3. Abandonment (Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Corinthians 7:15–16)
  4. Addiction (1 Corinthians 7:15–16)

The church can tap into this enormous need and bring immediate hope to blended marriages. Children in blended families also need help sorting out their unique experiences. As God-honoring churches, He wants us to acknowledge as many as half the families in our communities. We've never had *fewer* people in church and *more* people in blended families than we do right now. This could be the single greatest opportunity for discipleship and growth in our lifetime!

# THREE PRIORITIES FOR A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

*“Strong marriages make strong children, and godly marriages make Kingdom families.”*

—BLENDED & REDEEMED, PG. 78

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Divorce is not “the unforgiveable sin.” Whether someone is a perpetrator or victim of divorce, God offers forgiveness and grace. He even wants to bless new marriages! Churches can preach both truth and grace and provide a safe, shame-free environment for blended families to receive the love of God.

One of the biggest problems in a remarriage is unclear or misaligned priorities, and the biggest offender is prioritizing children above the marriage, which is an especially big problem for children in long-term single-parent homes. Doing marriage God’s way means setting priorities early and defending them often. The top three priorities are:

**1. Your relationship with Christ.** The number-one priority for an active, healthy, vibrant marriage might surprise you. It isn’t about making your spouse your top priority; it’s learning how to make your spouse second. So who should be our number-one priority? Jesus—over everything.

**2. Your marriage.** Love without priority will not be sustainable. If you love something, you will inherently prioritize it above other things. The more you love something, the higher its priority. According to Scripture, the thing you should love most in the world—a close second to your love for Christ—is your spouse.

**3. Your children.** Most blended-family couples struggle with making the marriage a higher priority than the children. These parents get so worried about the children and allow their time to be so monopolized by the children’s needs and schedules that they neglect or flat-out refuse to make their marriage a priority. They simply don’t want to disappoint their children or make them feel threatened by the “new” stepparent.

Sure, it seems simple, but it is so easy for these three things to get out of alignment, especially in a blended family. When that happens, you’ll see more conflicts between spouses, less intimacy, more frustration and resentment, higher levels of conflict with your children, and a general dissatisfaction with your marriage. By aligning your marriage God’s way, you’ll empower yourself to deal with past pain, lay a strong foundation for your relationship, and prepare yourself for the challenges of blended family life.

# A MARRIAGE REFLECTING GOD

*“A marriage that reflects God is a marriage that reflects God’s grace.”*

—BLENDED & REDEEMED, PG. 102

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Matthew’s Gospel exhorts us to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33, emphasis added). The following are ways you can seek God first together as a couple:

**1. Prayer together every day.**

Couples who pray together regularly have a low divorce rate of *less than 1 percent!*<sup>1</sup> The most effective way to divorce-proof your marriage is to pray with your spouse. In addition to praying *with* your spouse, pray *for* your spouse every day. Prayer is the most powerful weapon we have to combat the enemy.

**2. Be intentional in your communication.**

Communication is a *life-or-death issue* for marriages. The way in which we speak to our spouse has the power to build them up or tear them down.

**3. Recognize marriage as a faithful commitment to your spouse and to God.**

Marriage is not just a contract between two people; it is an agreement, a *covenant* between God and His children. Your family can do things for the Kingdom *together* that none of you could do alone.

**4. Forgive freely.**

How do you stop the enemy from destroying your marriage? You *forgive*. Forgiveness breaks the deadly separation the enemy uses to isolate a husband and wife from each other.

**5. Show your spouse the same grace Christ has shown you.**

Regardless of how severe our circumstances may be, the power of God can be made perfect in our weaknesses. The biggest and smallest mistakes are all opportunities for God to extend His limitless grace to you and your spouse and for the two of you to extend grace to each other.

**6. Love with humility.**

The antidote to pride is humility. Mistakes don’t have to ruin a marriage. Humility, backed up by grace and forgiveness, does the impossible: it turns one step backward into two steps forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Lavern Nissley, “An Amazing Secret to Marriage Success,” Encompass Connection Center, March 26, 2019, <https://www.encompasscc.org/blog/an-amazing-secret-to-marriage-success>.

# THE FALSE PROMISE OF INNER VOWS

*“When we make an inner vow, we aren’t making a promise to ourselves at all. We’re making a promise to the enemy.”*

—BLENDED & REDEEMED, PG. 122

After we get hurt, especially going through something as painful as a divorce, we tend to not only bury our pain deep down, but we also make ourselves promises about what we will and/or won’t do to prevent experiencing that kind of pain again.

Early in your marriage—usually within the first year—you will start to recognize things about your spouse you didn’t know about. One of these discoveries can be self-made promises (inner vows) your spouse has made at some point in their life. By *inner vow*, we mean a promise forged in the heat of pain and loss. It’s a declaration about what we will or won’t do to protect ourselves from experiencing that kind of pain again.

- I will never allow that to happen to me again.
- I will never date someone like that again.
- I will never allow that to happen to my children.
- I’ll never get married again.
- I’ll never let anyone else get that close to me.
- I’ll never let anyone control me.
- I’ll never allow myself to be taken advantage of.

These vows are meant to protect us. But they are false promises. We don’t have the power to control the universe—that’s God’s job—and the only way to take that control for ourselves is to wrestle it out of God’s hands. When we make inner vows, we make ourselves the protector and defender of our lives, thereby making ourselves the God over those areas.

Nothing incites a slew of new inner vows like the trauma of divorce. That, of course, makes inner vows especially dangerous—and plentiful—in blended families. People who’ve been through a divorce might be shocked to discover how much damage they’re still carrying.

How do you clear out a lifetime’s worth of inner vows?

- 1. Ask God to reveal your inner vows.**
- 2. Repent of trying to take control away from God.**
- 3. Renounce your inner vows.**
- 4. Forgive the person who hurt you.**

There is freedom from inner vows. It may take a lot of reliance on the Lord, but He is bigger than your pain, and He has more power than your inner vow.

## BLENDING YOUR BUNCH

***“You may not love your biological children and stepchildren exactly the same way, but you can love them with same intensity and intentionality.”***

—BLENDED & REDEEMED, PG. 145

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Love comes in many forms and types. You may not feel the same type of love for your stepchildren as you do for your biological children, and that's okay! Love is a gift from God.

It is okay that the love you feel for your stepchild is different than the love you feel for your biological child. It doesn't make you a bad stepparent, a bad spouse, or a bad human being. You can love them *differently* and still love them *equally*.

If the child is young, one of the best places to start is with fun activities. Engage in the activities your stepchild loves, even if they aren't your favorite things to do. If the child likes video games, pick up a game controller and play games with him. If she likes tea parties, dress in your finest clothing and have a tea party. If she likes to read pop-up books, grab three of them and let her pick one to read together.

If the child is older, the activities will obviously be different. You may trade tea parties for weekly trips to Starbucks, or you might play fewer video games and instead go to professional sporting events together. Situations like this become Holy Spirit moments that produce conversations that can bring forth unity, peace, and trust along with lasting, beautiful memories!

Building relationships takes time under the best of circumstances, and throwing kids in the mix—especially kids who don't really know each other yet—doesn't exactly make things easier! Here are a few suggestions for activities that will create closer bonds:

- Do fun activities together (hiking, biking, events, picnics, etc.)
- Schedule regular touchpoints times to check in with each other.
- Pray together daily as a family.
- Schedule family game nights.
- Review each person's “happies and crappies” over dinner.
- Take regular vacations.
- Establish holiday routines and traditions.
- Schedule movie nights.

Blending a family is a lot like mixing a cake. You have all these different ingredients coming from different places. Individually, they may not look the same. They're probably very, very different. And yet, somehow, they all mix together to create something wonderful.

# PARENTING AND CO-PARENTING

***“No matter how different your two families are, you will always have one thing in common: your child.”***

—BLENDED & REDEEMED, PG. 197

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Co-parenting is a team sport, but sometimes it feels as if our teammates are more like the opponents playing against us. The blessing is that there should already be a partnering plan in place, which both parties have either agreed to or a judge has filed within the legal system. This is a great place to start building the trust in your co-parenting relationship and possibly navigating toward a better situation for both parents and the child(ren).

There are three key areas to develop for a healthy co-parenting situation:

### **1. Communication.**

- b. Parents should never communicate through the child.
- c. You should stay in regular, direct communication with your child's other parent.
- d. Communicate information even if the ex-spouse won't respond.

### **2. Discipline.**

- a. Biological parent takes the lead.
- b. Parents present a united front.
- c. Both biological parents get on the same page (if possible).
- d. Serious discipline issues are communicated to the other parent.
- e. Drop-off day discipline issues are not “free passes” for bad behavior.

### **3. Finances.**

- a. Make child support payments a priority in your budget.
- b. See child support as giving your child money to live and thrive.
- c. If you receive child support, talk with the ex-spouse about child expenses.
- d. Communicate your child's financial needs to the other parent.

Parenting is a team sport. The biblical ideal points to both the mother's and father's roles in raising a child. God designed families to have a mom and a dad working together in raising the child. Our goal should always be to live up to and honor that standard—even when it's hard.

# FACING NEW FAMILY CHALLENGES TOGETHER

*“Don’t let fear drive your thoughts and actions; let your faith drive them.”*

—BLENDED & REDEEMED, PG. 213

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Divorce is never easy. *How* you interact with your ex is up to you, but your attitude *about* them and *around* them will have long-lasting implications for everyone involved. Who is going to pay the biggest price if you have a terrible attitude about your ex? Your child. You can model the character of Christ by having an attitude of kindness toward your ex, even if it is not reciprocated. By doing this, you can save yourself and your kids even more pain than you’ve already experienced.

Most parents are so focused on their own household and the urgent needs in front of them that they can miss one important detail: **you are a part of one blended family, but your child is a part of two**. Helping them truly feel “at home” at both places and always connected to their other parent is a serious challenge that requires some coordination between households. The good news is that making your child more comfortable in their back-and-forth way of life is something that’s easily fixed with just a little attention to two things: **accommodations and communication**.

As parents wanting the very best for our kids, we’ve got to be mindful of how we’re using our influence in an honoring, Kingdom-minded way. When we’re constantly belittling the other parent in front of the child, we’re using our parental influence in a negative way, hoping to bring disruption and disunity into the child’s relationship with the other parent. God is a God of peace and unity, not resentment and division. Scripture calls all children to *honor* their mother and father. To have a connection with other people—especially people we don’t particularly like—we must learn to love them in Christ and see them through His eyes. The best weapon we have to fight back against the enemy’s schemes is a loving, grace-filled attitude toward the person with whom we’re raising a child. The enemy has already broken up one home; don’t let him break up any more.

# LITIGATION: YOUR NEW, LEAST-FAVORITE HOBBY

*“The best goal for litigation is a resolution you can live with and that is good for the child.”*

—BLENDED & REDEEMED, PG. 233

The litigation journey can have several different entry points, much like a highway has several different onramps. There are different processes for litigation as well, meaning different ways to get to a resolution, but there are primarily two reasons why one or both parents may begin a formal litigation process to revise the custody arrangement outlined in their initial divorce/custody papers:

- 1. If something has changed.**
- 2. If the child’s safety is at risk.**

The goal—the best outcome—of litigation, whether through mediation or a full-blown court case, is a resolution you can live with and that is good for the child. Almost no one walks out of family court or mediation feeling like they got everything they wanted, but it’s not about getting everything you want—it’s about getting something you can live with. This usually requires the grownups to choke down their pride and frustration and make a sacrifice in the best interests of the child, whether that’s a sacrifice of time, money, convenience, or opportunity.

We should do our best to stay out of court because that’s what God has called us to do (see Matthew 18:15–20). We want the legal system to be our very last option. However, if litigation is the last resort, then keep these facts in mind:

- 1. Litigation is spiritual warfare.** The real enemy in our custody conflicts isn’t our ex—it’s the devil. He hates our families, and he will do anything he can to tear them apart and destroy our children’s futures.
- 2. Litigation is really expensive.** If you’re going to make it through your litigation process, you’ve got to have a realistic understanding of your budget from the outset.
- 3. Guard your expectations.** There are no real “winners” in any litigation, regardless of what the judge decides.

Whether you’re the one serving the papers or the one receiving the papers, we recommend keeping these five warnings in mind throughout the process:

- 1. Don’t jump right into action.**
- 2. Don’t engage in social media.**
- 3. Don’t try to go it alone.**
- 4. Don’t unburden yourself to your child.**
- 5. Don’t let fear steal your parental authority.**

Be bold. Be brave. Take care of all the legal things that demand your attention, but never stop parenting your child. After all, that is what you’re fighting this whole battle for!

# BLENDED FAMILIES, GOD'S REDEMPTION

*"Our families are a collection—a reflection—of our broken pieces, masterfully rearranged by God into a beautiful mosaic."*

—BLENDED & REDEEMED, PG. 264

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Our God is a redeeming God, and He loves to redeem our lives from the mess and madness we often find ourselves stuck in. Nowhere is that more evident than in the life of a blended family. We are not lost and alone. We have a Redeemer working *with* us and fighting *for* us. We are building our new families on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ.

The mission verse for our Blended Kingdom Families ministry is Luke 1:37: “For nothing will be impossible with God.” He knew this blended family life would often *seem* impossible. God will walk with you through the most intense heat and deliver you safely out the other side.

When we’re making Kingdom-based decisions, we’re looking for every opportunity to draw closer to God, especially when we’re in the fire. Whatever your relationship is with Him now and whatever your experience has been with Him in past, we want to encourage you to run to God in the fire. He is there, and He is waiting for you.

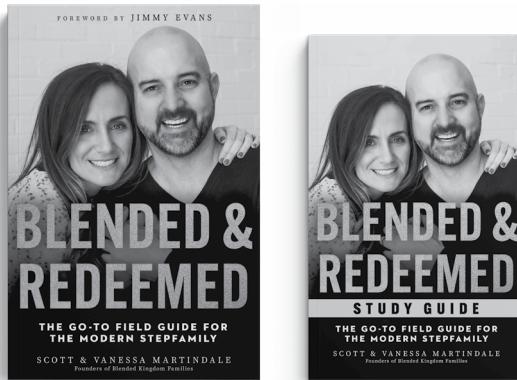
What we love about our blended family is that God took what the enemy meant for evil and turned it into good. He took the ashes and turned them into a crown. And through that process, we became grounded and firm in our foundation with Christ.

The breakdown of society begins with the breakdown of the family unit. If the enemy can get to our children, he can destroy our legacies. If he destroys our legacies, then he controls the world. Kingdom legacy is all about breaking generational curses. It’s about teaching and training our children in the Word. It’s about showing our children what godly, healthy marriages look like. It’s loving others as Christ loves us. It’s living a life of forgiveness. It’s embracing restoration. It’s accepting our position as a new creation in Christ.

# BLENDED & REDEEMED

THE GO-TO FIELD GUIDE FOR THE  
MODERN STEPFAMILY

Designed for Pastors, Church Leaders, individuals, or Small Groups



Blended families are increasingly common, but they can also be complex and challenging. Blended and Redeemed was created by Scott and Vanessa Martindale to help these families see through God's eyes and find hope, healing, and redemption in the midst of their challenges. With the companion study guide, pastors and leaders will be able to lead families into deeper discussions and reflection questions, as well as encouraging prayers. Blended and Redeemed is a much-needed resource for churches and communities who want to support blended families. Help these families see that they are not alone and that God has a plan for them.

**[BLENDEDANDREDEEMED.COM](http://BLENDEDANDREDEEMED.COM)**

Discounted pricing available for churches and organizations looking to purchase in bulk.

Please contact: Carter Berry, Ministry Representative  
[carter@xomarriage.com](mailto:carter@xomarriage.com) | (817) 305-0107



# Marriage Help

We understand that when your marriage is struggling, you need help in a timely manner. XO Marriage is here to support you and stand alongside you in the fight for your marriage. We offer two distinct services:

## **Coaching on Call**

Offered at multiple lengths, these sessions are designed for couples or individuals who are in crisis and need immediate help. Specializing in marital crisis intervention, our team is available to meet you in your time of need to listen with compassion and understanding, provide wise objective counsel, and help you navigate the best plan of action to start the healing process.

## **Marriage Mediation**

Our full day private one-on-one marriage mediation is designed for couples who are struggling with multiple issues and/or feeling hopeless about the future of their marriage. This intensive approach allows couples the extended time needed to fully process their primary issues without the interruption of time or hassle of scheduling multiple weekly sessions.

To learn more, visit [xomarriage.com/help](http://xomarriage.com/help).