

# Raising Godly Children in an Ungodly World

Principles of Parenting from Proverbs

Dr. John D. Street

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## **Part 5: Navigating the Challenges of Blended Families**

### **God's Design For Blended Families**

#### **Spouse Struggles: "My children come first!"**

#### **Case Study Of A Step Family:**

#### **NOTES**

Larry and Judy, a couple who were previously married, found each other at church and immediately hit it off. Larry had been divorced for less than two years, but Judy had been widowed for almost eight years. Everyone at church believed they were the ideal couple. In fact, a couple of self-appointed match-makers at their church took credit for putting them together (It's amazing how these match-makers fade into the background when it becomes obvious the new family is having problems). Judy has two teenage daughters and a nine-year-old son from her first marriage living with her. Larry has a daughter of thirteen years and a son of ten that live with his ex-wife.

During their courtship everyone was excited except Judy's teenage daughters, who stood off from the whole thing and were polite but were confused and didn't know what to think. On the one hand, they were both happy that mom seemed so happy—happier than they could remember for years! On the other hand, they were not comfortable with the fact that Larry was taking so much of mom's time and was beginning to act a little like a father figure with them. He wasn't their father; their father was in heaven and he could never replace their father. Any suggestion of that was repulsive to them. Judy's son didn't seem to mind Larry's sudden introduction to their home because he was only one when his father died and he always wanted a dad.

Larry's ex-wife had left him for another man, who she was living with and refused to return even after going through church-discipline. The divorce was still fresh in the minds of Larry's two children when he introduced them to their future step-mother, Judy. They disliked her from the beginning. After all, they still hoped mom and dad would eventually get back together again and this new step-mother was a serious threat to that dream. At least their biological mom had not married her boyfriend. Both Larry and Judy noticed the awkwardness and tension when they first took a picnic with the two sets of children, both attributed it to "adjustment jitters" which would only be temporary thing. Once everyone got settled in everything would work out fine, they reasoned. Even Larry's ex-wife didn't like the idea of Judy, not because she wanted to come back to Larry, but if Larry married

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Judy the courts would view that as a more stable home and she could lose custody of her daughter and son.

In spite of the red-flags, in the excitement of their romance and believing it would eventually blow over, Larry and Judy decided to marry. With the exception of Judy's youngest son, both sets of children did not want to come to the wedding. In fact, one of Judy's daughters showed up in a black dress to protest the marriage. Judy was angry and hurt but withheld her comments to try and preserve the happiness of the occasion. She tried to smooth it over with Larry by saying, "You know teenagers, changes are always hard on them. She'll get over it soon." Regardless of Judy's efforts to smooth it over, Larry did worry.

After a dreamy honeymoon on the island of Maui the newlyweds returned to a tension-filled household. But, both Larry and Judy were determined to make it work. Larry found out that Judy's daughters greeted him with the silent treatment. He decided to make the best of it by treating them kindly until six weeks had passed and things were only worse. Every time they had a problem with homework they would always go to their mother, even when she was gone. When Larry was home alone with them they refused his help. Larry was reaching the boiling point. He found that he and Judy were arguing more and more about the children. To make matters worse when Larry's children visited they didn't like Judy's cooking and often would refuse to eat. On weekends when they were in the home a turf war between the two sets of children would break out and Judy's girls let Larry's daughter know she was not welcome into their home. Furthermore, even though Judy's ten-year-old son enjoyed having Larry as his new father he resented Larry's biological son coming on weekends. He felt Larry favored his son and would leave him out of their times together. He looked for times to secretly remind Larry's son that he had his father most of the time seeking to drive a wedge between Larry and his son.

It was beginning to work. Larry noticed that his biological son was speaking more and more favorably about his ex-wife's boyfriend and all the fun times they were having going to amusement parks and ball games. This left Larry with a sinking feeling inside, especially since this boyfriend was not a Christian and he refused to go to church. Then add to that the fact that Larry's church had disciplined his new girlfriend for leaving Larry, so he was sour on Christians and church. To make matters worse his influence on Larry's son was a bad one that resulted in a bad attitude and vocabulary. Every weekend it seemed Larry spent half of his time trying to correct bad attitudes and behavior in both his daughter and son. From Larry's perspective he thought he would see some improvement after six months of

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marriage, but the opposite seemed to be true. Instead of peace things in the family seemed to be unraveling.

Judy noticed the same thing. She was beginning to realize that she didn't like the way Larry ran the household. It was not the way she and her children were use to. They didn't like his rules, they were rigid and inflexible and she found herself siding with her daughters when they'd announce, "That's not the way Mom does it." Larry too, noted they had very different parenting styles and her daughters did not accept his new role as head of the household. Increasingly, he discovered that if he tried to exercise discipline or use any parental authority over them he was overruled when they appealed to their mother. All of their dreams of having a loving Christian home were quickly vanishing.

After a year so much resentment and bitterness had built up it was impossible to have any fun together as a family. The tension in the home was so thick you could cut it with a knife. Larry was spending more and more time at the office and Judy and the kids seem to be happy with that. Their dream had turned into a horrid nightmare. Even people at church knew something was wrong. Judy's daughters could say nothing good about their step-dad; they always referred to him with disgust as "that Larry" not "father," "dad," or even "step-dad." People could also see that Larry and Judy were not the happy Christians they use to be. It seemed they were dying inside. There was no joy in their lives, just mere existence. Their goal became a simple one, just make it through another day.

Eighteen months into their marriage Larry and a close Christian friend were playing golf when Larry dropped a bomb by announcing he was thinking of divorcing Judy. "She doesn't respect me. Her daughters despise me. My children hate her. The only person that seems to remotely like having me around is her son. Do you know what is ironic?" he said stoically to his golfing buddy. "After my first divorce I was determined never to allow that to happen again. I wanted to have the best Christian home possible. I really tried but I was overruled and frustrated at every turn. I almost can't believe I am saying this." "Don't you love Judy?" his friend probed. "I don't know. I don't feel anything anymore. All my emotions are gone. I am cold and empty inside, going about my responsibilities everyday like a robot. And I know this is not the way the Christian life is supposed to be. Frankly, I've given up hope for this marriage and if I read Judy right, she has too. I've tried everything, but I believe we'd both be happier living apart. At least I know her children would be!" "Everything' is a pretty big statement. Have you really tried everything?" his friend remarked. "Have you and Judy tried going to one of the pastors to get some biblical answers for these problems?" "No," he shot back. "I know what they will tell me to do. Pray about it and

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have devotions with the family. I did that and Judy's daughters fought me every step of the way. It was war every time I tried to be the spiritual leader." "Hey, give our pastors more credit than that. There are heart issues here that need to be addressed and I think you need to try to get some good biblical help. After what happened in your first marriage I'd hate to see you give up so easily." Larry's friend was right.

So Larry and Judy sit in front of you for their first counseling appointment. Tension is thick. What are you going to do?

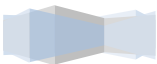
## A. Step-Families Need Hope!

1. Step-Families need broad-based hope

2. Step-Families need specific hope

## B. Step-parents Must Be Taught A High View Of Marriage

1. Marriage takes precedence over children



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## 2. Theological observations that should inform step-family counseling

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