

“THE PACKAGE”
By Carri & Gordon Taylor

The lament of many remarried couples is, “If only we didn’t have the kids..., when the kids are gone it’s so wonderful..., or if his/her ex-spouse would just leave us alone...” This is an illustration of what we call “the package.” Even in first marriages the package includes many people, mainly parents and extended family who have had an impact on our lives. “The package” for a remarried couple can be so big that it has the potential to destroy the marriage before the family even starts to form.

What’s in “the package?” His and her children, assets, debts, ex-spouses, in-laws and out-laws, different styles of living and parenting, to name a few. Even though the “Blended Family” is currently the most common model; it can be invisible, misunderstood, and quite a surprise. The Barna Research Institute has shown that divorce and remarriage is as prevalent in the Christian church as it is in secular society.

Carri: For me, the surprise began when my 13-year marriage was crashing and burning, never believing I would be divorced. After all, I signed up for life. After being a divorced single parent for 5 years, I wasn’t surprised that I was remarrying again; by then I had gotten used to the idea and was looking forward to it. I believed this time things would be different and my daughter would have a man to fill the “dad hole.”

Another surprise... two weeks after the wedding, my 14-year-old daughter decided we weren’t her family anymore, even though she was for our marriage before the wedding. She believed that everyone had deserted her. My ex-spouse had remarried shortly after our divorce and was absent from her life more than present. She assumed the same would happen with me. Now her friends were her family and in my mind she had sunk to the lowest common denominator and trouble was brewing big time. So much for the “dad hole” being filled, at least for now.

Gordon: It was in August 1977 that the inconceivable happened - my 18-year marriage and family broke up. I was divorced! It was shocking to the point that I asked myself if I could still be a Christian? After eight years of self-examination and personal growth, as well as raising three teenage boys as a divorced single parent, I thought I was ready to try marriage again.

Carri: Trouble seemed to break out every two years in a big way. In between there were some good times where shared experiences were building the memories on which our stepfamily would find its foundation. Holidays, anniversaries, birthdays and other special occasions seemed to get sabotaged. Time alone with my husband was spent strategizing how to handle our children, merge our finances and possessions, and engage our ex-spouses in interactions regarding the children. We were thrown into time alone violently when at 16, my daughter decided to “take off.” She did return after hitting bottom.

Working, as a co-parenting team with my ex and his wife seemed to bring up the issues that had led to our divorce, so how could we work together in our daughter's best interest? The patience it took on my new husband's part was unbelievable. Thank God I had picked a man that was up for the job of step-parenting.

Gordon: My commitment was not to let a teenager with an "attitude" get the best of me if that meant I had to learn new relational skills, communicate, understand step-parenting and change everything about me, including my career – which I did. I'm now a Marriage and Family Therapist.

Carri: Another surprise was the arrival of my unplanned granddaughter. Through a series of experiences, much guidance and prayer, we chose to take guardianship of her at age one. She'd been in our home since birth.

Gordon: Parenting as a stepgrandparent served to bring out every parenting flaw in me. This was something I certainly hadn't anticipated or signed up for! 17 years later she has become my greatest relational challenge and investment.

As difficult as single-parenting had been, "blending" a stepfamily was more so. For starters, after three brothers and three sons, it now became all females. I realized this relationship thing wasn't just going to happen; I had to implement everything I'd learned.

Carri: Gordon's three sons were fearful of getting close to me at first because there was no guarantee I'd stay around. Their Mom had gone through three failed marriages, and not until we hit the 12-year mark did they believe our marriage might last.

Gordon: Over the years I've been rebuilding relationships with my three sons (and I now have 3 grandchildren), because of the divorce and their belief that my new family got the "new improved version" of their Dad.

Are the struggles worth it? YES! We share five adult children, 10 grandchildren, holidays and special occasions with our ex-spouses and extended families (in-laws and out-laws). We've had four stepfamily weddings: including one where I walked Carri and my ex-wife down the aisle together and another where I gave my stepdaughter away.

God hates divorce but once in place, how do we stop the cycle? We believe education and awareness are the two dynamics needed to understand the stepfamily and place Christ in the center.

We thank God for a church and staff that teach the value of marriage, but values even more the people involved when they fail. Our prayer is that each of you in a stepfamily, touched by a stepfamily, or ministering to stepfamilies, will avail yourselves of the opportunities to learn more about stepfamilies presented by this church.