

Mother's Day and Father's Day in a Stepfamily

by Kathy Coryell

With Mother's Day and Father's Day approaching, it can be an awkward, if not difficult time for those in a stepfamily. As a parent, you may feel ambivalent about taking your child shopping for a card or gift for your ex-spouse. You may have trouble encouraging them to enjoy the day with their "other" parent and stepparent. Yet, those are the very steps necessary, to nurture your children's emotional health. How do you do that? You must separate your emotional feelings from your duty as a parent, which is to ensure that your children and stepchildren grow up to be emotionally healthy adults. One of the best gifts you can give to your children is to encourage a healthy relationship between your children and *all* of their parents. This includes their stepparents. Learn to separate your emotions from your parenting and focus on the desire to grow healthy children. Let that be the priority. It will make it easier for you to do the right thing for their emotional health and well-being. You will feel better as a result of knowing that you are a better parent. This is God's will for your stepfamily.

Take your children to the card shop and encourage them to pick out cards for their stepparent(s) and for their other biological parent. If you cannot afford to buy them, sit down with the children and help them make some cards. It is important that they learn to honor their parents. This includes their stepparents. Notice the Bible does not say to *love*, but to *honor*. Do not try to force them to love their stepparent. Only teach them what the Word says, to honor. In time, the love may come.

"Honor your [step] father and your [step] mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12 NIV, emphasis mine).

They also need to know that it is okay to love *all* of their parents, without fear. The parents need to be the adults and reassure the children that loyalty to one parent is not disloyalty to another. This is one of the healthiest truths you can teach your children. It will greatly increase their emotional stability and security and give them permission to be a child. They will grow up knowing that they are loved by all of their parents, which in turn, frees them to love themselves and others. To do otherwise, places an undue burden on the children to "protect" the other parent. It creates an internal conflict which eventually will result in self-hatred and hatred toward others, especially those in authority. This will usually manifest itself in the preadolescent/adolescent years and carry on into adulthood.

You, as the parent or stepparent, have the power to form and shape your children or stepchildren's future, by what you do today. When times are difficult, persevere, press on and pray on. When you don't want to do it, do it anyway. When you don't feel like it, love them anyway. The rewards will come. You will reap the harvest, but it takes time. Take your stepchildren to their ball games, encourage your child to call his father, help your stepdaughter make a gift for her mother. Do not say things that will cause your children to feel guilty about spending Mother's Day or Father's Day with their "other" family. You can celebrate together when they return. Create your special memories with them on

another day. It is not the day that matters; it is the quality time and the experiences that you are instilling in their lives. Are you fostering peace and security in their lives? Or chaos and conflict?

After you have invested time, patience, understanding, love, and yes, money too, you will begin to see the fruits of your labor. You will see the little blessings begin to blossom. We want to encourage you to save those mementos, Mother's Day and Father's Day cards, gifts and letters from your stepchildren. They are what we call *stepfamily treasures*. We store them in a special keepsake box, our *Stepfamily Treasure Box*. Here are excerpts from one of our stepfamily treasures. It is a letter from Kathy's son to Don (his stepfather):

*"Dad,
It's weird because most of the people I talk to don't get along with their stepparent(s), but you have made it easy and I know that I haven't. I am sorry for the times...you have had a tremendous impact on my life...your character, wisdom and (sometimes tough) love, have brought out the best in me. Thank you for getting up in the middle of the night and going with me...you were right there to see that I got help. Thanx for the rides to work and to school and anywhere and everywhere else you have taken me. I enjoy our sometimes sick humor and the time we get to sing in the truck (aaawww yeah yeah yeah). But what meant the most was when I had just graduated and my dad wasn't in sight. You were...I am grown up and ready to go out in that big world and try and make a difference just like you have with me. You are a very Godly man and I am glad God brought you and my Mom together. One day I will have kids, and I know that I will have marriage problems, everyone does. But the only difference is that I can come to you and Mom and get help...Whatever the outcome, I know that you have always been there and are a man of your word. I only hope I can one day be as responsible as you are...you have directed me in the right path...thanx once again..."*

We share this with you as an encouragement to invest the time with your stepchildren. Get to know them and ask the Lord to help you learn to love them as He would have you do. You may not even like them, but God calls you to love them. He has made you a steward of your stepchildren. You are accountable to Him for how you manage them. Study what it means to love. Read and study 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NIV):

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

Do you need God's help to love your stepchildren? God's grace is sufficient. His power and strength may be manifested through you. You need only ask, trust and obey.

"Don't be misled. Remember that you can't ignore God and get away with it. You will always reap what you sow! Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful desires will harvest the consequences of decay and death. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time. Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters" (Galatians 6:7-10 NLT).

Remember that with love, comes forgiveness. The "F" in forgiveness stands for freedom. When you forgive, it gives *you* freedom, not the offender. It releases you from the bondage of an unforgiving spirit, which is sin, separation from God. In order to be holy, we must be pure and blameless before God. We must be clean. The only way is with forgiveness. It started on the cross. It ends with you accepting that gift, and giving it freely to others, as it was given to you. Do you need to forgive someone this Mother's Day or Father's Day? Your ex-spouse? Your stepson or stepdaughter? Yourself? All you need to do is ask. 1 John 1:9 (NIV) says,

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

We hope and pray that you and your stepfamily have a blessed Mother's Day and Father's Day, sprinkled with love, forgiveness, peace and honor.

Copyright © 2008 Kathy Coryell. All rights reserved.

Kathy Coryell
Creative Connections Ministry
www.creativeconnectionsministry.com
connectionsmin@aol.com