



## I Choose to Love You

One of the hidden gifts of stepfamily living is the opportunity to emulate God's marvelous choice to love.

**"If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."**  
—1 John 4:12 (NIV)

**I**'M CONVINCED THAT GOD uses the stepfamily experience to teach His children about choosing love.

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10, NIV).

God chose to love us even when we didn't love Him. Romans 5:8 encourages that even while we were sinners, God loved us. Despite our lack of love for Him and our sinful state, God sent Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. He loved us with everything He had.

Jesus didn't have to give up heaven's power or prominence to be born of a virgin, but choosing love required Him to do so. In so doing, Jesus, like all children, learned obedience at the hands of His parents. He also experienced something else: being born of a virgin afforded Him the opportunity to be chosen by His stepfather. Joseph made the choice to love Jesus. The One who chose to love us without reason was Himself chosen for love.

### Follow His Example

One of the hidden gifts of stepfamily living is the opportunity to emulate God's marvelous choice to love. Step-parents choose to love children not their own; stepsiblings grant one another the honor of being called family; stepgrandchildren are called heirs and granted inheritance; and stepchildren experience the adoption of stepparent love. Ultimately, these experiences reveal God the Father.

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Rom. 8:15-17, NIV).

1 John 4:12 tells us that "if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (NIV). Stepfamilies have an incredible opportunity to reflect God's model of "choosing love" and, in so doing, teach spiritual lessons that have eternal purpose, lessons that lead children and parents alike to a fuller understanding of God's love for each of us.

### The Gift of Chosen Love

This holiday season, be sure you are fully conscious of this opportunity in your home and give the gift of chosen love. Here are ways to demonstrate it:

- ▷ Marvel at the way your spouse loves, cares for, and offers blessing to your children. Show your appreciation for this choice.
- ▷ Even if you've said it before, be sure to tell your stepchildren how committed you are to them. Tell them what an honor it is to share in their lives.
- ▷ Encourage stepsiblings to show kindness to one another and to communicate appreciation for one another.

God didn't owe us a path to reconciliation, but He created one. Christ didn't have to be born, suffer, and die for our redemption, but He chose to anyway. And you are choosing to emulate God's marvelous choice to love. Now that's living Christmas out loud! □

Looking for more stepfamily wisdom? Visit this Web site: [successfulstepfamilies.com](http://successfulstepfamilies.com).

## Your Stepfamily Travelogue

**F**OR STEPFAMILIES, the holidays present an opportunity to reminisce about your growing family story. Doing so reinforces your developing family identity and helps to solidify relationships. Sharing your travelogue is one way to do this.

What's a travelogue? Well, if you traveled to a foreign country for a month, upon your return family members would probably ask for your travelogue — the story of your journey. *What did you eat? What famous sites did you see? What were the most exciting and disappointing moments?*

Similarly, a stepfamily travelogue asks each person to share what the new family's journey has been like for each person.

### DISCUSS TOPICS LIKE:

- What was your first impression of your future stepfamily members?
- How has life with your mom/dad/children changed since the wedding?
- What has been the most fun for you?
- What has been the most difficult transition for you?
- Share a favorite stepfamily memory.
- What painful emotions have you been feeling lately?
- What fears do you have about this stepfamily or yourself?
- Discuss the myth of instant love, and share how you envision love developing between stepfamily members over time.

Try not to be defensive or take comments personally. Listen openly and celebrate the evidences that love is growing in your home.



## STEPFAMILY MINISTRY 3 Tips for Church Leaders

**1** Affirm stepfamilies publicly. It's a great way to confront the fear that others view them as "second-class Christians," and it reminds the church that God redeems and restores.

**2** Incorporate the message of this article into a Christmas sermon or devotional.

**3** Find a stepfamily in your congregation who can serve as an illustration of the "choice to love."