

Stepping With Purpose

Stories of Strength and
Faith for StepMothers

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PREFACE

Stepparenting is a hard role. We're given parental responsibilities but have no parental rights. We perform parental chores but get few parental rewards. We offer love and acceptance to our stepchildren but may receive pain and rejection in return.

That's why we've created this e-book. We believe stepmothers need the support of one another for strength and encouragement. We also believe stepmothers who rely on their faith for guidance and perseverance for their stepparenting journey will find greater peace, fulfillment and success.

So, we've compiled eight stories of strength and faith from seasoned stepmothers walking the trenches of stepparenting to help you. We don't pretend to have all the answers but hope to offer ideas and suggestions that have worked for us. Many of us have websites and blogs that offer additional support for stepparents.

We commend you for your stepparenting efforts and hope to encourage you on your journey as we strive to increase the odds of success for remarriage with children.

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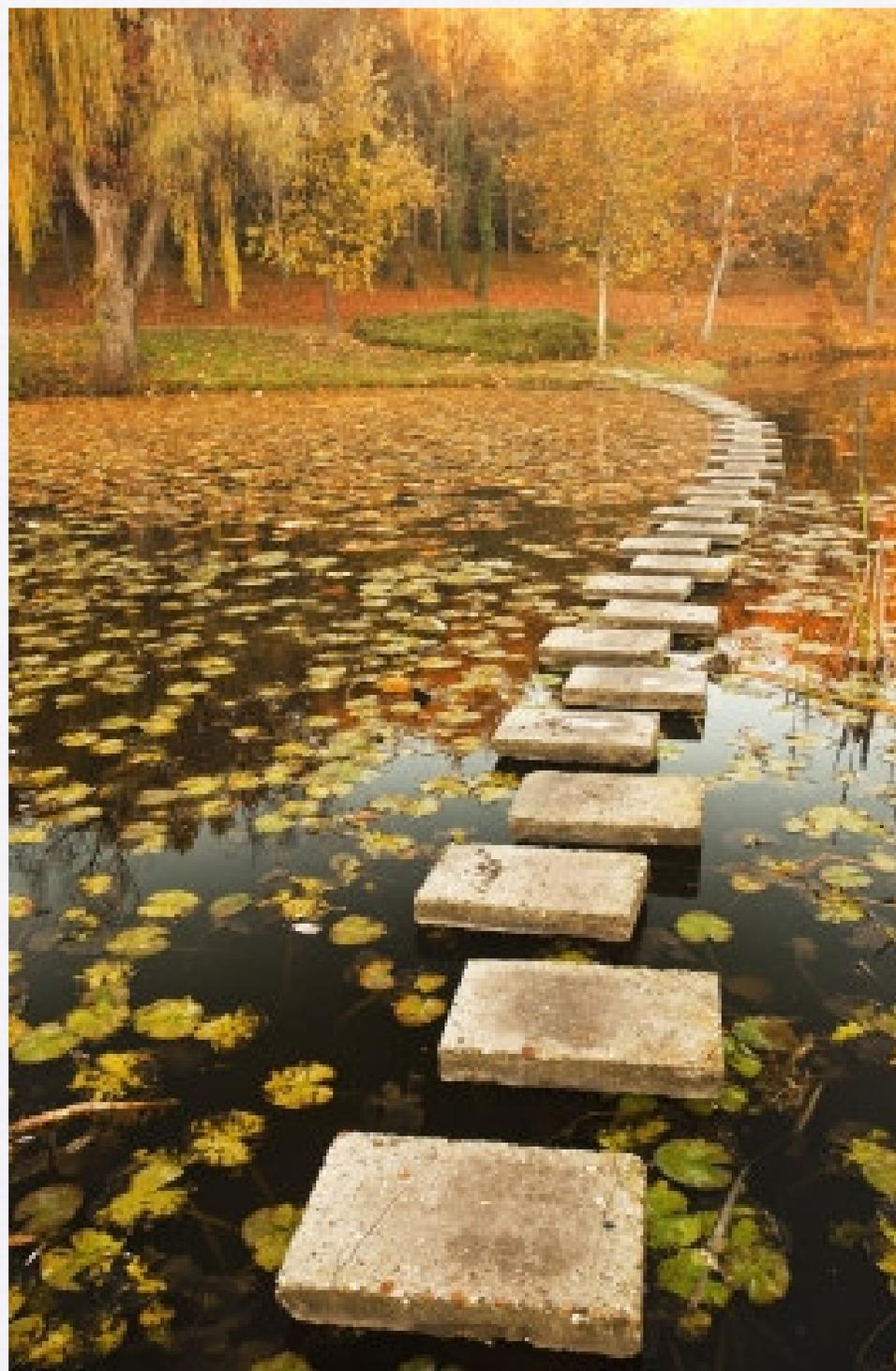


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LEARNING HOW TO LOVE

If I'm being totally honest there were times in my early years as a stepmom that I didn't even like my stepsons, much less love them. To me they appeared spoiled and pampered, plus everyone in my husband's family seemed to tip-toe around their wants and whines. This was the total opposite of the extremely strict, "children are seen and not heard," single parent home in which I was raised.

But as a Christian I desired to learn how to love them. I knew Christ could teach me, if I was willing. My heart's cry was to be a loving stepmom who had a positive influence on my husband's sons. So I prayed, and sought God's wisdom.

The first thing God revealed to me was that I had a tainted view of the boys. They were hurting kids, not bratty villains. Their sharp, stinging comments were merely an angry response to their circumstances. They didn't view me as a wonderful new addition to their family; to them I was the new woman rocking their boat of security. In their eyes, I was taking away their Daddy.

Plus, I had to accept that just because I was raised in a stern home with firm rules didn't mean that was how my husband or his former wife wanted to raise their children. I was not the parent—they were. Therefore, unless the kids were being disrespectful or harmful to me, it was not my place to interfere. For a control freak like me it was extremely hard to do, but if my marriage was to survive I had to step back, and let go of the things I could not control.

The second discovery I made was that God would use the good and the bad in my life for His glory, if I let Him. He wanted to transform my painful childhood into a channel to love. My dad remarried twice after the divorce from my mom. Therefore, I knew what it felt like to be the child who moved from the front seat in my dad's car and life, to the back seat. This revelation stirred in me a tremendous compassion toward my stepsons. I understood it wasn't me they were rejecting, but the circumstances. And they were afraid of more change.

Thirdly, I encountered the "Daddy Wound" to my own soul. One of the things that used to infuriate me about my stepsons was the way they treated their dad. I felt they were neglectful, rude and unappreciative. My husband was diligent to visit his kids and to pay child support on time. He would get excited and make plans for visitation, but at the last minute the boys would cancel. I'd watch him break down and cry saying, "They don't believe that I love them, they don't want to spend time with me."

I was enraged and would think to myself, "I longed to have a dad who wanted to spend time with me, but he was always too busy. You have a loving father who is willing to give his time and resources and this is how you treat him. How dare you?" The toxic thoughts would brew inside of me, until one day God broke through my wall of pain. He revealed that my fury was a "knee jerk" reaction to my own deep seated feelings of abandonment.

LEARNING HOW TO LOVE

As my Heavenly Daddy revealed all of these things, I surrendered my anger, frustration, and the need to be in control. He began to heal the wounds in my little soul, and filled the hole of shame and loneliness that had resided there for so long with His unconditional love. The freedom and peace that followed flowed into a love for others, including my stepsons.

Each stepfamily has its own hurdles, ours is no different. Choosing and learning to love my stepsons didn't automatically fix every problem. But it did teach me how to see them through Christ's eyes, and not my own. And that transforms everything.

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Laura Petherbridge is an international author and speaker who serves couples and single adults with topics on relationships, stepfamilies, singles, divorce prevention, and divorce recovery. She is the author of *When "I Do" Becomes "I Don't"*—Practical Steps for Healing During Separation and Divorce, and a featured expert on the DivorceCare DVD series. Her book *The Smart Stepmom*, is co-authored with stepfamily expert Ron Deal. Her website is www.TheSmartStepmom.com



ACCEPTANCE

There are many events in our lives that are life changing; marriage, childbirth, divorce, death and remarriage. I remarried in October 2006 and I became an “instant full-time stepmom” in February 2008. My husband and I received a phone call on the way home from a beach trip in late February 2008 informing us that my stepdaughter’s mother was in the hospital with heart problems and may not live through the night. Hope’s mother passed away four months later.

My dreams did not consist of being a full-time stepmom at this time of my life. My sons were grown and raising a child again was a very devastating thought to me. I am sure that stepchildren also don’t grow up wanting to be a stepchild. Stepchildren want things the way they used to be. I was still a newlywed at this time and had plans and dreams of traveling with my husband and spending time together. I was also used to going and coming as I wanted. My husband works in the evenings so I had “me” time while he was at work to do things that I wanted to do.

Having a stepchild come into your home to live is very challenging. There can be a war of wills since everyone is adjusting to different lifestyles. I realized my stepchild was entering a different environment in which she had to abide by different rules, habits and traditions. I learned to be patient.

Having my stepdaughter 24/7 was not what I had planned on. My life became a roller coaster of angry, sad, unhappy, and at times, depressed feelings. The reality is that “I” suffered a loss...a loss of the way things were and the way I wanted them to be.

I learned firsthand that there are many things you have to accept in the role of being a full-time stepmom:

Accept that your time, space and privacy are different from what they once were.

Accept that being a stepmom is unfair and lonely at times.

Accept that you may not see the fruits of your sacrifices until the stepchildren become adults.

Accept that there will be many sacrifices that often go unnoticed.

After some time and crying out to God, I realized that I had to **ACCEPT** these circumstances. In the dictionary, acceptance is the “willingness to receive or to welcome”. To accept, you have to believe. You have to come to terms with a reality and choose to live in spite of it. Acceptance has been (and still is at times) a huge battle for me. Here are some of the things that have helped me and continue to help me through this.

First and most importantly, I do firmly believe that this is God’s will for my life at this time. I know without a doubt that this is not an accident. I feel that I was put in Hope’s life and she was put in my life for a reason that only God knows. There have been times that I questioned the why’s, but am trying to live with acceptance and faith.

Accept this time in your life and take the steps needed to honor God in this. Trust God in ALL areas of your life.

ACCEPTANCE

Second, have a plan or a vision about your relationship with your stepchildren. Think about your impact and influence on the child today and how it will impact them later in life. What you put into this relationship is what you will get out of it. Spend time with them developing traditions just the two of you have together and traditions as a family. My stepdaughter and I do a bible study together at Starbucks. It gives us both a time of talking and getting to know each other.

Be yourself with your stepchild and realize that you and her are different. Develop a relationship of trust, love and guidance.

Give the relationship time to develop. It will not develop overnight. This may take years to develop. Have patience during this time.

Third, have a time by yourself to unwind, release and relax doing just what you enjoy doing - hobby, exercise, blogging, journaling. Do whatever releases stress for you. Don't keep stress bottled up. Also, it is very important to have time with just you and your spouse. *Have a regular date night without the children.*

Finally, have a sense of humor. Laugh at yourself! Don't expect things to be perfect. Enjoy this time in your life with all the ups and downs and struggles and rewards that come with being a stepmom.

In closing, understand that life is just hard at times. As women, we juggle the responsibilities of wife, mom, stepmom, daughter, sister, aunt, friend and employee. Yes, it is scary and unpredictable at times. Recently, my mom told me that I should be honored and humbled that God chose me to be Hope's stepmom.

Yes, I am honored and humbled that God chose me. In doing so, he is teaching me to be more like Him. How AWESOME is that!!!! And now, I continue on the Journey!



Jackie Brown said "I do" for the second time in 2006 to a wonderful man of God. My first marriage was for 20 years to an alcoholic. I have two sons, ages 25 and 28 and a step-daughter who is almost 16. My fulltime job outside the home for 33 years has been a registered nurse. My most important and all time favorite job is being a wife, mom, and stepmom for my family. I believe in putting God first in your life, next your spouse, then your children. This is straight from God's word. You can follow me on this journey at www.stepmomjourneys.blogspot.com.

TRUSTING GOD'S PLAN

During his sophomore year of high school, my stepson, Payton, suffered a back injury at an end of season football game that resulted in a trip to the hospital. Upon leaving the Emergency Room with my husband, Randy, he confided to his dad with tears in his eyes, "I'm thankful to be living here and be given the care I need." Unfortunately, that had not always been the case.

Two years prior, Payton stood by his stepfather in a custody hearing against his dad and adamantly stated his desire to continue living with his stepfather and older sister. His mother had passed away after a devastating battle with cancer, and his stepfather sought legal custody. We lived more than 300 miles away, but believed Payton needed the stability and support we could provide. Randy wanted to finish rearing his son, but wasn't sure he would be given the chance.

Following the death of Payton's mom, Randy and I were summoned to court to begin a custody hearing for Payton. As the biological parent, Randy felt certain he would gain custody of his son. However, we were unprepared for the accusations and false representation of our family. After hours of testimony at the pre-trial hearing, the judge ruled in favor of Payton residing with his stepfather until a complete custody trial could be scheduled.

We were completely baffled. We didn't understand the judge's decision. But we knew God was in control and sought His divine plan for Payton.

I trusted in the words of **Isaiah 55:8-9**: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." We didn't understand what was happening, but we knew God had a plan.

In the upcoming weeks Randy and I decided we would not fight the judge's decision. We gave up our right to a custody trial, focusing on our long-term relationship with Payton rather than a short-term fix. We sensed God's hand at work and wanted to surrender to His plan.

The following year proved increasingly challenging as we strove to support Payton through his grief while living hundreds of miles away. Our emotions vacillated between confusion, anxiety and discouragement. We watched Payton live in a neglectful environment that resulted in unhealthy choices. But although the journey was hard, we remained steadfast in our efforts to draw closer to Payton and support him through the healing process.

It was slow and painful at times, but as the months marched on, we noticed subtle changes. Payton wanted to spend more time with us and asked that his visits be extended whenever possible. He seemed to enjoy the time he spent with his siblings in our home and we noticed signs that healing and growth were taking place.

TRUSTING GOD'S PLAN

And then one day, a turn of events led to an unexpected call from Payton. He confided in his dad about some details surrounding his step-dad that were concerning to him. He had temporarily retreated to his aunt's house and didn't know what to do. In the urgency of the moment, Randy sensed a strong need to remove him from his present residence immediately. Miraculously, without opposition or legal proceedings, Payton came to live with us the next week. It was truly a miracle that only God could orchestrate.

It had been 18 months since his mother died, and Payton seemed relieved to come into our home. It was a smooth transition because Payton had been given the time he needed to grieve the loss of his mother with his sister and half-brother. He had worked through much of his anger and bitterness with a hospice counselor and could now allow others to reach out to him to further the healing process. He settled in easily, making new friends and comfortably starting a new school.

Surrendering to God's plan for Payton was humbling and discouraging at times. I wanted to offer my support as his stepmom through the early stages of his grieving process, but wasn't given the opportunity. However, I came to realize that he couldn't have accepted my help in the beginning. God had a better plan that allowed Payton to grieve and heal with his stepfather and biological siblings who had suffered the same loss.

By trusting God's sovereignty, our family gained renewed relationships with one another. I learned to seek God's guidance for my stepparenting journey and cling to His Word for direction. And although I may not always understand God's plan, I know I can trust it and commit to follow it without hesitation.



Gayla Grace is a wife and mother to five children in her blended family. She is passionate about helping other stepfamilies due to the struggles she has walked through on her stepparenting journey of more than 15 years. She holds a Master's degree in Psychology/Counseling and ministers to stepfamilies through her blog and website at www.stepparentingwithgrace.com.

EXPECTATIONS

My husband and I began dating shortly before his birthday. When the big day rolled around, his three teenage children graciously invited me to birthday dinner at a local restaurant. His younger daughter had recently broken her right wrist and was having trouble cutting her steak. I pondered the idea of cutting the steak for her, but thought it would be best if I remained in the background. After several attempts at cutting with her left hand, the right-handed kid turned to me and asked if I would help her. Of course! I had been watching her struggle with her dinner for the past five minutes! It would be a relief to cut that steak finally.

That first dinner six years ago set a precedent for me. I felt a genuine need from these children to participate in their lives. I wanted to be the mother they didn't have. However, having no children of my own, I wasn't certain how that scenario looked. It's no secret that as women we experience pressure regarding preconceived gender roles. It is presumed that women will naturally exhibit mothering skills no matter the fact that they have no children. Thus began my full-blown attempt at mothering perfection. Betty Crocker, watch out!

Long before our wedding, I became Super Stepmom. I did kids' laundry. I made kids' beds. I ate hot dogs as I sat on bleachers in countless gyms cheering at volleyball and basketball games. I studied recipes and made four-course meals. I played bingo on family vacations. I did homework until midnight. I bought Easter dresses, prom dresses, knock-around shoes and underwear.

But I also went to the gym less. I read fewer books. (Only stepmom guides made the bedside table.) I made little time for friends. I worked fewer hours. I became less me. My husband started to take notice. It was unsettling to him that in my efforts to fulfill a preconceived notion of motherhood I was losing myself. I wasn't enjoying my family because I was busy attempting to make certain all of their needs were met. My concern for my stepchildren's well-being was detracting from their actual well-being. I was a nervous "mother" making everyone else nervous too.

In the midst of my exhaustion, God began speaking to my heart. I was reminded that I am made in God's image. I am possessed of inherent worth and dignity simply because I am a child of God. He led me to this family and I knew I was meant to be a part of it. But I needed to be me. God's will for me was that of a real life role model for my stepchildren, not that of the "milk and cookies" mom I was striving, with great difficulty, to be. My own expectations were getting in the way of the life I was meant to live.

My, how things have changed! On a recent family vacation, my stepson failed to pack pants. (Yes, really.) A few years ago, this would have set me into a tizzy. What would I do? Where would I find pants? What would people think of a woman who allowed her children to exit the house without first checking their suitcases?

First and foremost, I have learned that I will not live my life attempting to live up to society's expectations of mothering. Secondly, I have learned that my stepson, a college freshman, should be able to pack his own pants.

EXPECTATIONS

God is still working with my unfinished soul. Today, I am happy to report that my parenting and life choices reflect my values more than the Susie Homemaker image to which I once aspired. I choose to continue to pursue my career wholeheartedly. We frequent the local Cracker Barrel for dinner. A lot. And I now refuse to do the laundry of anyone to whom I am not legally betrothed! Still, despite my attempts at a blissful familial setting, all does not go as planned. However, God's will for me as a stepmother is written on my heart and my stepchildren know it.

Oh, and about those pants...thank goodness my husband and stepson are about the same size!



Gara Hoke Lacy is a thirty-something attorney and writer. In the midst of climbing the corporate ladder, she discovered herself madly in love with a single father - who just happened to have full custody of his three teenagers. After surviving the teenage years, she and her husband are finally looking forward to their honeymoon!

For more information visit her on the web at www.garahokelacy.com, or on FACEBOOK and TWITTER, keyword "Suddenly Stepmom."

PLEASING GOD

It was Friday morning, typical as most. Hubby and my 12 year old stepson were up first and out the door. It was my day off, so there was no need for me to jump out of bed and start getting ready for work. I casually got out of bed and tiptoed into the girls' room. "It's time to get up," I whispered.

My seven year old stepdaughter mentioned that she needed to find something to do with music, so that she could get a piece of candy at "Round Up," the big Friday morning assembly at school. She began to draw a music note on her hand. I quickly remembered that I had a whole bag of scrapbook stickers and paper in the closet.

As I dug through the hundreds of stickers, I managed to find some music notes. I was apprehensive about presenting them to her, thinking she would reject the idea. To my pleasant surprise, she loved them and wanted to put them on her face. My nine year old stepdaughter wasn't so sure about the stickers and said that she had something in her desk she would use. As I placed the stickers on my youngest stepdaughter's cheek, my older stepdaughter began arranging some on her hand. They were excited about their display and out the door they went, skipping and saying "goodbye," as I wished them a great day and weekend.

This story may seem ordinary and you may be thinking, "So what?" Well, not so long ago, something as simple as offering music stickers to my stepdaughters wouldn't have been possible. I would ask myself questions like, "Would the stickers make their mom upset? Would they feel like they were not showing loyalty to their mother by showing pleasure in wearing the stickers to school from my house?"

Going into my role as a stepmom, I really thought it was going to just be an extension of my role as a mom. After all, I've been a mom for a long time and fairly successful at it, in my opinion. When I became a stepmom, it seemed I suddenly became completely incapable of doing anything right. I couldn't fix hair, I couldn't cook, I couldn't buy the right size clothes and shoes. To some degree, it turned my world upside down. I was angry, hurt, frustrated and just about every other negative emotion you could think of.

All along, without even realizing it, God had a plan and had things under control (as He always does). I began to realize that I wasn't alone and there were many other stepmoms dealing with some very similar things. While my circumstances were a little different, the underlying theme was the same.

Shortly after I married, God placed a sweet dear friend in my life to support me in my stepparenting role. She has been my rock. She too is a stepmom and is on the other side of the difficult times of raising her three stepdaughters. I didn't ask for her. God was gracious enough to send her to me. If you ask, He will provide someone for you.

You see, I can't please everyone, but I can please GOD. Pleasing GOD should be and is my purpose. As my pastor recently said, "Being worried about what others think about you is the quickest way to forget what God thinks about you." (Craig Groeschel)

PLEASING GOD

When I'm angry, I remind myself that troubles happen to the best of us. I forgive myself and forgive those who have angered me. I trust that God has it all under control. I ask God for strength, peace and wisdom daily.

I study Scripture and allow it to speak to me: **Proverbs 17:14**: "Starting a quarrel is like a leak in a dam, so stop it before it bursts." **Proverbs 14:30**: "A sound mind makes for a robust body, but runaway emotions corrode the bones." **Proverbs 20:3**: "Good character averts quarrels, but fools love to pick fights." Don't get me wrong, this is easy to put down on paper, but much harder to put into practice.

When I'm lost and don't know what to pray for, He does: **Romans 8:26**: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know how or what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us."

The most reassuring verse I can rest in as a stepmom and life in general is **Romans 8:28**: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose."

I am called by Him to be the best wife, mom, stepmom and much more that I can be.



Amy Urbach and her husband, Eric, live in Edmond, Oklahoma. They have been married for 5 years. They have 5 kids between them. Amy has a daughter who is a sophomore in college, majoring in Marriage and Family Counseling. Amy also has a son who is a sophomore in high school. Eric has a 12 year old son that is very active in sports, a 9 year old daughter and a 7 year old daughter. Eric is a practicing attorney and Amy works at www.LifeChurch.tv. You can connect with Amy on Twitter: www.twitter.com/amyurbach and Facebook: www.facebook.com/amyurbach. You can also find Amy at www.facebook.com/blendednbonded as she is busy working on forming a non-profit organization that will help connect blended families with resources to become a bonded, successful, blended family.

GOD'S COSMIC JOKE

In 1987 I was pregnant with my youngest daughter. From the time the test showed a pink plus sign until her delivery, I referred to her by the boy's name I picked out - Christopher. In the middle of delivering my baby, the doctor asked me if I had another name. Clearly the boy I convinced myself I was having turned out to be a girl and I named her Christina Marie.

Fast forward 18 years. My first marriage ended in 2003 and three years later, my first boyfriend from high school found me on classmates.com. It was love at first sight all over again. Three weeks into dating, he invited me to his home for dinner.

I pulled into Richard's driveway and noticed a little boy hanging from a tree. I parked my car and stared out the window. I knew it was Richard's youngest son. Richard came out to greet me and hollered, "Christopher! Get out of the tree!"

Christopher unhooked his legs from the branch, dangled for a moment, and then dropped to the ground. Richard ordered him into the house to clean up.

"Well, that's Christopher," he whispered as he hugged me hello.

"How old is he?" I asked. I remember Richard telling me his youngest was fourteen, but Christopher looked like he was ten.

"He just turned fourteen last week," Richard looked down at the dirt driveway and kicked a few stones. "I know...he looks and acts a LOT younger than he is."

Just as Christina was graduating from high school and I was welcoming the empty nest, Richard and I got married. His three older kids as well as Christina and my oldest daughter, Jessica, were out on their own but Christopher was about to enter high school. We put the empty nest on hold.

My husband had full custody of Christopher and he gifted me with a passive-aggressive, angry, lying, ADHD, learning disabled, and socially delayed teenager. Christopher also had a daring, fearless streak in him.

After the honeymoon phase of our new Step Life, Christopher began acting out. He destroyed property, he was failing school, and he lied about nearly everything. I was new to the brand of chaos Christopher played but not new to the game. He seemed to thrive on conflict and I seemed to be the only one to see it. After a number of alarming incidents, Richard and his ex-wife realized their son needed help. For the next two years, Richard and I spent our Wednesday afternoons in family counseling with Christopher.

At one of our counseling sessions, Richard and I compared notes on our two youngest children and during the conversation I started laughing - and I was quite certain God was laughing, too.

GOD'S COSMIC JOKE

God didn't give me Christopher in 1987 because I needed to learn on the "Christopher-lite" model...and that would be my Christina. As a child, she gave me a run for my money. Mysteriously high fevers, weird infections, and a dare devil, fearless approach to life that landed us in the ER more times than I'd like to admit. A run in with a full bottle of Flintstones vitamins with iron at three, an out of control bike at seven, I have long since forgotten her total stitch count. And let's not forget her teenage years...or should I say her "mean-ager" years! Defiant, disobedient, and mouthy...not to mention she operated in her own time zone.

I realized that I had finally gotten my wish. With Christina, God made sure I could deal with a challenging, obstinate, willful child. After eighteen years with her, He decided I was ready and he gave me "my" Christopher. I'm convinced His purpose was multi-faceted. He gave Richard and I the gift of each other and in doing so, He gave our adult children the gift of seeing their parents in a happy, healthy marriage. He gave Christopher the gift of another adult whose perception was not clouded by past experiences. I became Christopher's advocate and I helped get him the emotional and medical support he needed.

Today, as I write this, it's Christopher's nineteenth birthday and he's about to join the Marine Corps. His father and his mother are thrilled and as his stepmom and number one fan, I couldn't be prouder.



Peggy Nolan teaches stepmoms how to stand in their power and expand their wholeness of mind, body, and spirit. Peggy is a Self-Care coach and certified yoga teacher. She is the mother of two and the bonus mother of four. Peggy hosts the wildly popular "The Stepmom's Toolbox Radio Show" on www.blogtalkradio.com. Connect with Peggy at www.thestepmomstoolbox.com

WHERE SHALL I CAST MY CARES?

I'm married to a man who has always had custody of his children. Their mother struggles with an insecurity regarding my stepparenting role, resulting in a tenuous relationship between the two of us. To cope with the difficult situation, I spend a lot of time revisiting two chapters of the Bible I find most helpful: Psalms and Proverbs.

There are times I cry out to God for solace.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." **Psalms 46:1**

Many times I need sound advice.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." **Proverbs 15:1**

I can handle children not liking me some of the time. I understand kids. I have three of my own who are all older than my step-children. Choosing not to be my children's best friend, I'm used to it.

However, I was not prepared for my stepchildren's mother not liking or accepting me, and lashing out at me. I don't believe I'm unlikable or unacceptable. I'm always doing my best to put myself in other's shoes. It's always worked for me in every other area of my life. I've never felt I had an enemy, until now.

I had always questioned whether I was doing something wrong and kept trying different approaches that were all met with disapproval or mocking from my step-children's mother. I lived in fear of whether or not threats would come to fruition, trying to prove myself worthy or defending myself from untruths she had told about me. I thought there was a slight chance that she actually believed what she was voicing to me and about me. I thought perhaps if she just "knew" me, she wouldn't feel the way she did. So, I kept engaging trying to prove her wrong. But it only made things worse.

I believe as women, it bothers us more when everyone is not getting along. At times I still wonder if I could do something differently and remedy her ill feelings toward me but I believe God is telling me to let Him handle it because it's not about me. I know that in and of myself I am not capable of handling such issues. I cannot force another person to accept me or like me.

I've struggled with worry and anger in my step-mother role. However, I know that God does not want me to worry or let my anger turn into bitterness. I don't "have" to worry about being attacked or threatened.

In my step-family situation, I've been taken back to some childhood memories from when I was afraid to leave my home every day. I grew up in a bad neighborhood, and had to put on a tough front so I wouldn't be a victim. I don't "have" to do that anymore. I'm strong but I'm not "that" kind of strong. I can take precautions, but I don't have to worry about it. God's going to take care of people who harm me.

WHERE SHALL I CAST MY CARES?

Through my stepparenting struggles, I've realized that I need to wait on God, spend less time trying to make someone like me, and focus on giving my heartache to God daily; sometimes hourly!

I've also learned that when the past stirs up ill feelings, I benefit from pulling this verse from memory: "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." **Philippians 3:13-14**



Deb Wilson is a 44 year old custodial mother and stepmother to five children combined. Deb was married in October 2005. Her husband Dwayne is a custodial father who has two children, ages 15 and 12. Deb's children are 23, 19 and 16. Deb is a full time mother and part time office manager. You can connect with Deb on Twitter www.twitter.com/steps4life and visit her blog at <http://hodge-podgeness.blogspot.com/>.

CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

Conversing with God is something that I do every day. Sometimes, I thank Him for the blessings in my life and other times I cry out for strength and wisdom. But I have come to know that each day I need to be in conversation with Him.

In the dating phase and early months of stepfamily life, my conversation with God went something like this “thank you for bringing this wonderful man into my life. Thanks for our family. Thanks for blessing me God.” I would have this conversation while gazing at my handsome husband at the dinner table and/or during night-time tuck ins with the kids.

Then about six months down the road my conversation with God went something like this “God give me strength to get through today. Help me to love my stepchildren the way you love them. Help me to look at my family through your eyes.” This conversation, in contrast to the one above, took place all alone in my bedroom.

Honestly, in the early years of my remarriage it was so easy to see my stepdaughters in a negative light. They didn't respect me, my possessions, my kids, my ways of doing things and that really hurt me because I knew in my heart I was doing all I could for them. I cried out to God to help me love them the way He loves them. To see them the way He sees them and that has made a world of difference.

While my two stepdaughters and I bonded easily when I first started dating their father, the dynamics of our relationship changed slightly once I said “I do.” The girls were still grieving the fact that their mother had left them (before I even met their father) and they began taking their pain out on me.

My oldest stepdaughter watched every step I made, questioning me at every turn. I wasn't used to this. I am a very responsible and compassionate person and I couldn't understand why she didn't seem to trust me. Many times I cried out “God, why does she question me so? Please help me not to get frustrated with her second guessing.” When I really prayed about it, I realized that her abandonment had made her insecure. She needed to learn to trust again. God spoke to my heart and taught me that it truly wasn't about me.

My youngest stepdaughter transferred all her anger that she felt towards her mother onto me...the mom in the house. What did I do to deserve this? I thought. I am kind and loving towards her. I will have to admit that after months of being yelled at, lied to and even spit on, I found it hard to “love” my youngest stepdaughter. Once again, I asked God “why is this so hard? Why isn't my love enough to help her feel loved.” During these difficult conversations, God kept telling me that I love you unconditionally and you have to love your stepchildren without condition.

I give you a new commandment: that you should love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you too should love one another. **John 13: 34**

CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

Being a stepmother challenges me everyday to live a life of faith and to love unconditionally. As a mother, I love my children based on my heart and not on their deeds but as a stepmother my feelings towards my stepdaughters are often based on how they act and treat me. I know that isn't Godly and therefore, I know I need His strength to love them the way He commands me to love them - without condition.

Today, four years down the stepfamily road my conversations with God are still daily. Some days I am praising Him for what I have and other days I am crying out for what I need. I have come to realize that I cannot do the job of stepmom or any job for that matter without His strength. I know He listens. I know He cares. It is my conversations with Him that give me the strength and wisdom I need to pass the unconditional love He gives to me to those in my family.

I can do everything through Him who gives me strength. **Philippians 4:13 NIV**



Heather Hetchler is the mom of four and custodial stepmom of two whose passion is to help stepmoms thrive in their role as the heart of their blended family. She is the Founder of www.CafeSmom.com where she brings positive resources, inspiration, and support to stepmothers. As a part of CafeSmom, Heather has an Eshop where she offers products made exclusively for stepmoms. As a StepMom Encourager and Coach, she uses her education, professional experience and life lessons on her mission to help stepmothers define their own positive path and to connect stepmoms, helping them feel empowered and remove feelings of isolation. Heather is the host of the StepMom Connection on www.momtv.com/stepmom-connection. She resides in Cleveland with her husband and family.

