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How to Prepare for Marriage in a Blended Family

I have decided to develop a three-hour marriage enrichment seminar entitled *How to Prepare for Marriage in a Blended Family*. The goal of this seminar will be to prepare engaged couples for married life in their blended family.

The seminar will last for three hours and will consist of two main sections with breaks in between. The sections are called 1.) “Preparing to Blend” and 2.) “Barriers You Will Face.” In the first 75 minute section “Preparing to Blend,” we’ll discuss how to have realistic expectations of both marriage and of blending families. This topic feels like a good launching point as it will ground people in realistic thinking. It seems that many couples don’t take the time to voice their expectations to one another, so I think this time will offer good self-awareness and self-reflection. Before I start my lecture, I will have everyone journal for ten minutes answering these prompts: What do you think marriage in a blended family will be like? What do you foresee as being difficult about it? Easy? After they have journaled, I will show them this video:

<https://www.familylife.com/familylifeblended/videos/>. The video basically outlines how blending a family is anything but easy. The purpose of having them journal and showing the video is to offer a gentle reality check in case some people are completely in denial about the hardship of marriage and blending families. I will then start my 30 minute lecture entitled, “Having Realistic Expectations.” The two sections of this lecture will be 1.) having realistic expectations of marriage and 2.) having realistic expectations of blending step-families. In

addressing realistic expectations of marriage, my first point will be that infatuation dies quickly. I'll use content from *Sacred Marriage* quoting, "Romantic love has no elasticity to it. It can never be stretched; it simply shatters." I'll explain that the purpose of marriage is holiness and not happiness, and that use the quote from *Sacred Marriage* that "if the purpose of marriage was simply to enjoy an infatuation and make me happy, then I'd have to get a new marriage every two or three years." I'd then continue to argue marriage-for-happiness-sake by explaining that marriage actually requires a dying of oneself and a submission to the other. I'd quote Ephesians 5 and explain that mutual submission is key—God calls both the man and woman to equally submit to each other and literally die unto themselves. This means that marriage will not always be easy and enjoyable.

Next, I'd make the point that in order to have realistic expectations of blending family, one must understand the typical time-line of blending families. As found in *The Smart Stepfamily*, I'd state that it can take two to three years for stepfamilies to assimilate and five to seven years for stepfamilies to experience intimacy. I would briefly introduce the "crock pot method" and explain that blending families requires patience and perseverance. I think it's crucial people hear this information in the very beginning of the seminar so they can hear the rest of the seminar without rose-colored glasses.

After my lecture, I'd have two couples join up for a 30-minute discussion time. I'd have the them discuss the expectations they originally wrote down and give them the following questions: Do your expectations match up with your partner? How are they different? Are your expectations realistic after learning what you've just learned? After discussing, everyone would be dismissed for a 15 minute break where coffee and snacks would be offered.

The second portion of my seminar would be called, “Barriers You Will Face.” I think it’s crucial that a couple is prepared for the hardships ahead of them to best protect their families and marriage. I will start this section off with a 15 minute lecture discussing what *The Smart Stepfamily* says about barriers faced in marriages of blended families. First, both biological and step-parents can contribute to child-parent allegiances. I will teach that these alliances can form either when the biological parent allows guilt to inform the way they try to protect their child or when the step-parent guilt-trips the biological parent for wanting to spend time alone with their child. Per *The Smart Stepfamily*, I will reinforce that couples must not “compare loves.” I will list the tips that *The Smart Stepfamily* lists to combat these allegiances, such as “including the step-parent in parenting decisions, setting up date nights and keeping them,” and “taking a few minutes each day to connect as a couple without interruption.” Then, everyone would break off with their partner and discuss the following question for 15 minutes: What fears do you have for your children and how do you try to protect them?

I’d then continue the second half of the lecture with what *The Smart Stepfamily* outlines as “Ghosts of Marriage Past.” For about 15 minutes, I’d list the ghosts couples can face in their relationship, and then I’d have individual couples pair up. For the next 30 minutes, the couples would discuss questions that I took directly from *The Smart Stepfamily*: “How many years has it been since your last serious relationship? What could be the benefits of slowing down your dating? What scares you about committing again? How would you act differently if you had never been hurt before, if you could love like you have nothing to lose?” I’d have them identify their ghosts and lastly create contracts stating that they’d help each other defeat their ghosts. Signing these contracts would add in a level of accountability for the couple and be a reminder for them in the future. Lastly, everyone would journal and reflect on what they learned in the

last fifteen minutes. After the seminar, I think it would be nice to host a dinner where couples could talk more about what they've learned and get to know each other better.

As I was putting this seminar together, it all came relatively quickly to me. I also had conflicting thoughts. At first, I thought, *Why would anyone listen to me? There's people that have dedicated their whole lives to teaching about what I'm teaching.* But then after developing the entire seminar, I thought to myself, *Dang! This looks pretty good!* It was also difficult to choose what to include in the curriculum. We've gone through so much valuable content in ca, and I may or may not have tried to squeeze too much into one seminar. I think I'd have to refrain from expounding in depth on each point and just explain the main ideas succinctly. While I know this seminar is directed towards a niche audience of engaged couples, I'd open it up to married couples with blended families as well. Ideally, I could condense this seminar into an hour long lecture that I could take with me to marriage seminars. I hope to teach at some point in the future and can use this template at least as a starting point!