

# Voices: Thank you, step, foster and adoptive parents

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Talking to friends about the topic of stepfamilies and having stepparents, I quickly realized this can be a highly sensitive topic.

When I began to praise my stepdad of 25 years and speak of my gratitude for him, friends often jumped in to tell me how sad they were about their broken families and told of their painful histories.

I learned not to try to speak for everyone about stepfamilies and to respect various experiences.

## Backstories

Stepfamilies always have a back story. A parent died or divorce happened. Both are hard on children, whatever their age, with all the emotions prior to, during and following the event. Fighting in the home, long-term illness and sudden tragedies are traumatic. The first two can go on a long time.

Divorce is a difficult topic for many of us. Even so, about half of marriages end in divorce. Despite the difficulty of the topic, many of us conclude God offers forgiveness, healing and a second chance, especially if we have repented and tried to make right any harm done to another in relation to the divorce.

If there are children in a marriage, we particularly want a happy, godly home for them so they can move forward with their lives with as much innocence and peace as possible. God can make a way. He mitigates the damage if we give all the pieces of our failures to him.

During my childhood, my parents tried hard to avoid divorce, but divorce finally happened when I was in college. This was in the early 1970s. Most church people were kind, though some did not approve of my parents' divorce.

I knew the situation was not fixable. There were personality and medical problems involved. I realized everyone in the family would have to rebuild their lives. Some of the rebuilding was smooth for some of us, but most of it was not smooth at all. In fact, I was seeing doctors as a result.

## **My stepdad**

A couple of years after the divorce, my stepdad entered the picture. He was well-educated, a respected man in the community and a deacon in our church. He had a rather boisterous personality, and I wanted to hide from him at first. I did not want him to notice me at all.

Yet—and this is the important thing—*I really needed him.*

He had the qualities I needed to feel secure and to learn how to grow up, work, be an adult, and to know how to form a family of my own. My family of origin had not been solid, and I needed his strength and example. He was a leader to me, and I felt safe with him. I knew he would take care of all of us.

How amazing, that this man was willing to give the remaining years of his life to smooth the waters of my troubled young life! Obviously, he loved my mother very much, and he was willing to take me in the bargain.

During his final years, I appreciated being at his side in the hospital, and his biological children allowed me to stay close and always tell him how much I loved him.

“You were the best stepdad in the world” were my last words to him.

# The gift of a bridge

We were recently at the funeral of an especially beloved friend who died after a short and tragic illness. At the graveside, his two stepsons played the guitar and sang the Simon and Garfunkel song "[Bridge Over Troubled Water](#)."

That's a nice song for a funeral, I thought. Then it hit me.

My friend, their stepdad, had been that bridge over troubled water to them in their young lives like my stepfather was to me.

People don't want to say, "I need a parent." We want to appear cool, like we have it all together. But this world is full of children and young adults who need to be loved, cherished, provided for and parented. We have gaps in our parenting and growth that trauma took away.

Stepparents, foster parents, adoptive parents—you are beautiful and irreplaceable. When you were needed, you laid down your lives as bridges over children's troubled water.

When a child needs a parent—even if that child is "grown up"—the parent does not have to be perfect. Your child may have to mature before he or she can see your value and contribution. You may feel walked on, scarred up and worn out before then.

Still, you are like Jesus, who bridges the wide gulf of our deep need. Thank you.

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