

*pended on several to help with daily child care. At each of these homes, Lisa kept a toothbrush.*

*Does it surprise you that for my birthday one month before our marriage, Mark and Lisa presented me with a toothbrush, decoratively framed in a shadow box?*

*I was beginning to blend in.*

Mothers that are grafted into an existing family relationship are called stepmothers by our society. The resulting union is a blended family. Whether it happens because of death or divorce, it always comes into a life marked by loss. How each person to be blended deals with the loss influences what kind of relationship develops.

While you won't find stepparent as a family role in the Bible, you will find evidence of blended families. In the Old Testament Eastern culture, people often lived in extended family communities. Especially with the practice of multiple wives, there were often several mothers raising children who had the same father.

### **A Love Story at First**

The story of Rachel and Leah is certainly a story of a blended family. It starts out as one of the most romantic stories in the Bible. Jacob finds Rachel tending her father's sheep. His interest at first sight grew into love and prompted him to ask for the

hand of Rachel in marriage. Laban, Rachel's father, is willing to give his daughter's hand in exchange for seven years of work from Jacob. For Jacob, seven years was a small price to pay for a lifetime of love. However, Laban tricked Jacob on his wedding night. He sent his firstborn daughter, Leah, into Jacob's darkened tent. When Jacob realized he had been tricked, it was too late. He was still one bride-price away from his beloved Rachel. He quickly agreed to another seven years. Again, no price was too great to pay for love. After his marriage week with Leah, he married Rachel and began his seven years of voluntary indenture. His marriage to Rachel was also the beginning of a blended family.

Rachel moved in to enjoy her role as the loved wife. Leah took her place as well. She was the mistake, unwanted and, therefore, the unloved wife. She had the part of ex-wife while still holding a marriage certificate. There wasn't much blending going on.

### **Keeping Score**

One of the quickest ways to prevent the blending of any family is to keep a scorecard in the heart. In time, the two wives drew their lines for competition. Rachel had Jacob's love, but Leah was his first wife. Rachel had Jacob's attention, but Leah began to have his children. The two sisters reduced family into a contest in which the one with the most of something

wins. However, they learned the truth about score-keeping. Keeping score weakens relationships and makes any attempt at blending difficult to futile. Scorekeeping means everybody loses.

To make matters worse, Rachel started blaming Jacob for her childlessness. Blaming is another sure way to destroy a blending process. Blame marks an easy target. A bulls-eye is easy in a game of blame. The only problem is that the target is usually wrong. The more energy Rachel gave to blaming, the less she had to give to her relationship with her husband.

During this time, Leah did not understand the dangers of scorekeeping. She thought children could add points to her scorecard with Jacob. She believed they would create a bond that would mean the same as love. However, four sons later, she does not have the loving connection she thought children might provide. Attachment is duty, not love. Again, Leah loses.

### **The Glue That Doesn't Stick**

More than blended families need to realize that children do not glue a relationship together. They do not replace a love that was not there. They do not strengthen a weak love. Children's need for love and acceptance only uncovers where love does not exist. Furthermore, when either parent feels unloved, there is less love to give away, never more. Only a loving

relationship replenishes the love and keeps the circle going.

### **No Contest**

When Leah couldn't use her natural-born children as a love connection to Jacob, she retreated to a childbearing contest with her sister. Rachel pushed the boundaries and gave her servant to Jacob to father a child. Leah did the same. They had more babies, but it did not produce more love. Whether or not Leah's relationship with her sister had ever been positive, it certainly wasn't now. They traded Jacob in the same way their fathers traded them. Unfortunately, wounded people tend to repeat the same patterns of woundedness. Healthy blending requires breaking the negative cycles of wounding.

### **God Sees the Unloved**

It is also important for any mother in a blended family to allow God to make up for shortages. Everything Rachel and Leah tried to do to even the score between them was artificial and did not win for them the love they so desperately craved. It is clear from scripture that God saw the unloved plight of Leah (Gen. 29:31). Her children were not to be a mark on a scorecard, but a gift to demonstrate God's love to her. When she used the children to get her husband's attention, she misused the gift.