

# It Isn't Always Pretty

by Carol Duerksen

## MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- Bibles for every student
- Copies of the article at the end of the lesson for everyone
- Five large pieces of poster board of five different colors, markers
- Oreo cookies—enough for each student to have 1-2 plus enough to make small milk shakes for students. An alternative for anyone who can't eat them.
- Ice cream, milk, a blender, small cups, straws and/or spoons.
- Scissors

## SESSION OUTLINE

### FOCUS:

Welcome students, then invite them to take an Oreo cookie or two but not to eat it right away. Before students eat the cookies, ask: *How do you eat an Oreo? Just bite into it? Do you separate the cookie? Eat the insides first? Do you dip it in milk?*

After this short time of sharing how they eat their cookies, let them eat the cookies.

### CONNECT:

*Ask: How is being in a family like eating an Oreo cookie?*

*How is it NOT like an Oreo cookie?*

### EXPLORE THE BIBLE:

Divide into five groups and give each group Bibles, poster board, and markers.

Assign one group to each of the following chapters: I Samuel 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

Ask each group to read their chapter, then divide their poster into a puzzle and put the highlights of their chapter onto the puzzle pieces. This could take a fair amount of time—some of the chapters are a bit lengthy and have a lot going on.

When all of the groups have completed their poster puzzles, cut them up into puzzle pieces

and put them together in a pile. Then have students sort them by color, and each group takes a color that was NOT their poster. Each group then assembles the puzzle they have now. When each group has put together the puzzle that was created by a different group, share the stories from each chapter, beginning with chapter 16.

Discuss:

- What are the good things and bad things happening in this family?
- Did you know there was so much dysfunction in this Biblical family?

### **APPLY:**

Hand out the copies of the article at the end of this session and read it together as a class. Discuss:

- Does this sound like families you know?
- What are some of the things that cause families you know to be “broken”?
- What are signs that there is healing and hope for the brokenness?

### **RESPOND:**

Blend cookies, milk, and ice cream in blender to make milk shakes for students. While they enjoy their shakes, talk about the blending of the broken cookies with milk and ice cream to create the delicious treat. Make the analogy that God can create good things out of brokenness in families, and that there is hope even when “everything isn’t pretty and perfect.”

Invite students to share as much (or as little) as they want to during this time. Pray together for family situations that they are a part of or that they are aware of.

## Session Reproducibles

### BROKEN & BLENDED

**Note from the writer, Laurie Oswald Robinson:** *The following is a Question-Answer account containing responses from four young people whose families divorced. The father of Chad and Seth married the mother of Jenna and Joel, making these four young people stepsiblings. They share about their journeys, in hopes their stories will bring insight and comfort to people undergoing similar struggles.*

**Seth, 27**, is married to Sarah, and they have two children, Collin, 3, and Natalie, 8 months. He is an engineer for Cessna in Wichita, Kansas. They live in Newton, Kansas.

**Chad, 23**, of Hesston, Kansas, is a graduate assistant athletic trainer for Wichita State University studying "Exercise Science".

**Jenna, 21**, is a nanny and an English teacher in Phoenix, Arizona. She's married to David, a pre-med student.

**Joel, 17**, a senior at Hesston High School, is involved in many sports and music activities.

#### **Tell me the facts about your situation. What happened?**

**Seth:** My parents got a divorce when I was in eighth grade. Chad was three years younger and in fifth grade. They hid their struggles pretty well, so we had no idea this was coming. Dad remained unmarried for about a year and then remarried. This was very quick for me; I was not ready for him to get married again. But I realize now I can't control his life and that he had to determine if he was ready or not.

**Jenna:** My dad came out of the closet and announced that he was gay. He and mom divorced. We took turns living with my mom and stepdad and my dad. My mom and dad were friends at church with my stepdad and his former wife. Since we were born, Joel and I had known Chad and Seth.

#### **Describe the hurts you experienced as a result.**

**Seth:** Being blindsided by the divorce. I still have a problem trusting my parents. To deal with this hurt, when I got to high school I separated myself from family. I hung out more with friends and started dating my future wife, Sarah. We got together most of the time at her house. I also was upset that my stepmom set the rules. My dad would enforce them, but they originated from her. Looking back, I respect those rules because they were the kind that should have been followed. But they were hard to swallow from a stepparent.

**Chad:** My parents still haven't told me what happened that ruined the marriage. They've never explained how it happened, and why it didn't work. Once my parents separated, I wanted to be alone all the time. My dad respected that wish. I was forced to teach myself a lot of things, and because of that, I felt left out during my junior high/high school years. I had no friends who knew what I went through, but now I feel this loneliness has led me to an understanding that I now experience.

**Jenna:** How the community handled the news that my father was gay. My parents weren't angry and bitter and handled everything as well as anyone could. But living in a small, conservative community was brutal. I knew my dad was a really great dad, but everyone was always telling me gays can't be good parents and they are bad people. This was really conflicting. More conservative sectors of the Christian church really judged my dad. I resent that a lot—the way people judge

## *Session Reproducibles*

others without walking in their shoes. I resent how people label other people as bad without knowing them.

### ***Name struggles you have in your blended family as a result of that past.***

**Seth:** The struggles I have now stem from when I avoided home in high school. I wasn't with Chad when we were younger—and that has more or less carried over until now. We have a better relationship than we did—but it's still not as good as it could be. We still don't talk very often, though when we are in contact, we sometimes talk about the divorce. That brings us closer.

**Chad:** Lack of communication was a real struggle. Growing up, all I wanted was to escape the reality of divorced/remarried parents. I spent a lot of time playing my drums or guitar and driving around so I wouldn't have to interact with my family. I still don't communicate well with others (just ask my ex-girlfriends!). I never had a relationship with my brother; he was always with his girlfriend or out with friends doing the same thing I was (avoiding home), and that has left us with a hole in our relationship for years. When I talked with my parents, emotions would always take over and the situation would never get resolved. Recently, new factors are beginning to outweigh previous barriers, so the cycle keeps going.

**Jenna:** I think my parents' divorce was a lot smoother than most. I knew Seth and Chad for so long, they weren't strangers to me. We actually have pictures of us playing together as babies. Who knew we would end up being stepsiblings? But it took a couple of years for things to smooth out. Later, I realized that though they weren't my family to begin with, they now are my family as much as anyone. For the longest time, I called my stepdad's parents by their first names, but now I call them Grandma and Grandpa.

**Joel:** It was really hard all of a sudden to be living with new people. For the first couple of years, it was the roughest. There was some anger and some sense of What are YOU doing here? It was pretty weird. The older people got, the more we came together on some things.

### ***Describe some of the good times and bad times you have in your blended family.***

**Seth:** The good times are when we go back and do family gatherings at Christmas and birthdays. I like big families, so it's fun to have everyone there.

**Chad:** Call me Scrooge, but the only good times I've had with my blended family are when they aren't around. I was in the time in my life when I was starting to make up my mind about what my life was, and I had a terrible outlook on the situation, and my mind was closed. I have been working at accepting the situation. But I haven't reached that point. I always have fun when I'm with the two heroes in my life, my dad and brother. Also, now that my stepbrother, Joel, is getting older, it's fun to talk with him about his high school experiences and what he's going through.

**Jenna:** I know it all got easier as time went on. What has helped me is that my "biological" family is also my adoptive family. My mother gave me up for adoption when I was a baby. My biological mother lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and we e-mail and talk on the phone regularly. I spent the last two Christmases with her.

**Joel:** The tension in the air made the atmosphere not so great sometimes. It takes a long time to live with people before you begin to understand some of the reasons they do what they do.

## *Session Reproducibles*

### ***Where do you find a sense of hope? How has your faith been helpful?***

**Seth:** Talking with my wife has helped me come to terms with what happened. She's taught me not to clam up but to get my feelings out in the open. She's helped me realize that my parents' marriage relationship is not in my control. I stopped saying what I think can and cannot happen for them. I am too busy working to build my own marriage. I believe that Dad and Beth have a good marriage and good communication, and that is something I really value. Sarah and I talk a lot and don't have very big fights. And when we do fight, we work it out. I remember how when I was little, my biological mother emphasized the importance of communication. I realize a lack of this was what went wrong with my parents' marriage.

**Chad:** I find my hope in Jesus Christ. I had little faith until I went to college. I met a college buddy, Levi Lear, and he is the strongest Christian I've ever met. He comes from a solid Christian home, and he was my "angel." It was through knowing him that I discovered what Jesus my Savior can do for me. Now that my faith is growing, I hope someday I will put these experiences behind me. Perhaps I will one day truly feel that in the big picture of God, none of these struggles really matters.

Growing more in my faith in the last six months also has helped. I realize that God is not part of my plan; I'm part of God's plan. Life is not about me but about God. Since I've figured that out, I don't worry as much, and things are easier to understand. I once thought a lot about how things could have been different. I felt if I had done things differently, my parents would have made different choices. Today, I see the divorce in a different light. Everything used to revolve around it. Now it takes more of a backseat. God's got a different plan than what I had in mind, and I'm going with that.

**Jenna:** I've never had trouble trusting that God had a plan. I don't know much theology. But I do know this: God exists, and God is love. For some reason, I've just always known that in my heart. What's happened has given me a better understanding and acceptance of people who also are going through hard times.

**Joel:** My faith and my church have helped me look at life from a glass half-full perspective and to look at things in a positive light.

### ***What would you say to young people who are struggling with similar issues?***

**Seth:** You won't understand a lot of things told to you until you're older. You can only control your own actions—you can't control what your parents do, what they like, who they marry. You can only control how you respond to it and how you grow from it.

**Chad:** I believe the best way to help others is to lead by my actions and morals. I choose to follow Jesus Christ and the Lord our God. I thought one day, If I could have one thing in life, what would that be? It came to me—to go to heaven. I do want to achieve some things—completing education, beginning a family, and having a job I enjoy. But those goals come and go. Heaven is forever. However, some words can help. My college football coach told me to "surround myself with good people." His modeling in building a team and fostering good relationships taught me to surround myself with people who make me a better person.

**Jenna:** Your family is who loves you—and it doesn't matter who that is. It doesn't matter if they are actually your biological family. Family is a wonderful thing.

**Joel:** Don't stay quiet about what you're thinking and feeling, and talk it out with someone you trust. Kids from divorced families are told that all the time, but it's true. It's important to have another person to be there who knows you and your experience.

## *Session Reproducibles*

### ***What's the most important thing you learned as a result of your experiences?***

**Seth:** The way we handle experiences—especially the bad ones—shows our character.

**Chad:** Nothing is more important than living for Jesus.

**Jenna:** I must appreciate the things I have and trust that God knows what God is doing, even if I don't understand it. God gets it, and that's all that matters.

**Joel:** Life goes on. It will keep going on, for the rest of your life. Divorce is not the end of the world. There is a future, and there is hope in many things. Remembering this, and being involved in positive things in school, really keeps me moving forward. This year, I'm playing tennis and singing in a select music group, and I'm a second-chair tenor saxophonist in state jazz band. Keeping busy keeps me focused.

### ***What last things would you like to say to those who are reading this story?***

**Seth:** It's important to make the most of the present because life is not a destination; it's about what happens along the way and what you've learned. I used to plan for the future so much that I bypassed a lot of good things. In high school, I wish I had been there more and gotten more involved with my family. In not being there because I wanted to miss the bad things, I also missed out on the good things.