

# BLENDED

*aligning* THE  
HIERARCHY OF  
*heart* + HOME

SUMMER BUTLER

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*To my husband Andy who quite literally none of this would be possible without. To Patriot and Creed who have loved me deeper than either of us expected and to Eli for your sweet, subtle ways of somehow bringing us all full circle. I love you all, with my life.*

# forward

## FROM THE AUTHOR

I never imagined my first broken heart was meant to help heal yours. At thirteen years old, my parents' divorce left me feeling lost and alone. Because of this, I never pictured myself as a second wife or a stepmom. But as life would have it, in 2011, I found myself in the middle of our blended family—literally. While I have no doubt that God brought our family together, for many years, I fought with insecurities, comparison, selfishness, and pride. Trust and control issues riddled my life.

Slowly, my issues found their way into our marriage, and Andy and I fought...a lot. Fighting kept us from the truth that our marriage was meant for more—that our marriage, with work, could break the generational curse of divorce in our home. Our “messy” blended family was meant to become God's message of redemption.

After seven years of marriage, a closed group through ReEngage marriage ministry, couples' counseling, and many, many prayers, our ministry took shape. Rooted in Christ, Blended Book Co. tackles the unique needs of blended families and exists to create space for difficult conversations. We are a relationship-driven ministry with a heart for groups—our mission: shaking up the failure rate for blended families one family at a time. Our workbook uses biblical truths to encourage you to look up to God for answers instead of out to the world for approval.

Through our battle, I learned the world was unhealthy and was keeping me sick. Why? Because another enemy existed. An enemy who makes brokenness the norm. Not only does he exist, but he knew our weaknesses and used them to break down Andy and me.

But thankfully, by the grace of Jesus Christ, today, we are victors. You can be too. We're here to warrior up with you so that, together, we can tackle topics that stir emotions but bury battles.

Whether you are doing this workbook on your own, with your spouse, in a small group, or as part of a weekend retreat, it was meant for you. It's been prayed over and edited by the most Loving One. God poured His truth into my life so I could deliver it to you here today. I can't wait for you to get started. Let's walk through *Blended*.

summer



# week one

## REFINED

The last thing I'm writing begins the first day of this book...and I've deleted it three times now. What is most important for you to see, before we embark on this super personal journey, is that I am practice—practice and progress. My ability to empathize reflects work I've personally done, and there isn't a street I'll ask you to cross without having done so myself. Today is the day we meet and, if I'm honest, I'm nervous. I've shared pieces of my life that can be read the wrong way. It's happened before, and it'll likely happen again. Today the rewards far outweigh the risk, so before I talk myself out of this, let's go.

Pretend we're meeting for a group. Maybe it's together with our spouses or split into groups according to gender. Either way, the air is thick with anticipation. Naturally, everyone shows up a little apprehensive, and maybe you start to question, "What am I getting myself into? Are these people going to be weird?"

Introductions begin, and your mind becomes anxious. You have to speak? Seriously? The person to your right shares and you relate to everything they've said. Next, the person to your left, and a piece of their story is yours as well. Pausing, you realize God has hand-plucked us all, and together, we are witnesses to the little bit of each of us that is collectively in us all. Finally, you can breathe.

Just breathe. Maybe we're meeting in person (and that would be awesome – I'm dying to meet each and every one of you), but chances are we're meeting on these pages, and so here I'll go first: I'm part of a blended family. We do life okayish, sometimes great, other times not so much. We're human, and we try, but I've had to

dig deep into my issues because of the position I've held within our family dynamics; I'm a full-time stepmom. (I don't even capitalize that title—it's never sat well with me).

We can dig into that more when we get to know each other, but I should first share that I have two teenage bonus boys from Andy's previous marriage, Patriot and Creed, and one from our own marriage, Eli. We live together in McKinney, TX, half a mile away from "the other home."

Some may hear that and cringe, but I can honestly say we're at a place where this is a blessing, and I'm thankful their mom and stepdad don't live far away. We've been a blended family for nine years now, and it's been a rollercoaster at times, to say the least. But today we have peace.

That peace, though, it comes from within— which is the number one message my heart hopes to convey. As we dive into the work to be done, understand that all of this takes time. For me, it took seven years of being blended, the help of a ministry called ReEngage, and then subsequent marriage counseling to start connecting the dots.

I needed God and needed Him to show up in more ways than one. He knew I couldn't do this on my own, and He'd been waiting for me at the end of my rope. God showed up as I drove down the Dallas North Tollway in October of 2017, and never again have I traveled the same street home. My life changed, our ministry was born, and this book became a living journal of everything in between. Refining my ways, God showed up for me just like He's ready to show up for you.

Let's move on. Day one.



"For you have tried  
us, O God; You  
have refined us as  
silver is refined."

**Psalm 10-12 [NIV]**

# day one

## THE REFINER'S FIRE

October 2017, I was driving down the tollway, mind chatter busy, and God spoke. Loudly. Here's why: Winter Formal was just around the corner, and for weeks I had been prepping our ninth-grader. Organization is my thing, and the details for the dance were in perfect order: tuxedo, flowers, rides, and party plans. If you know me, you know *THIS* is what my dreams are made of—and yet, somewhere along the way, I lost sight of that. I had veered off the path of pure intentions.

At some point down the tollway, I started to break down the plans for the weekend, and it hit me. We're a blended family, and the weekend of the dance would be spent at the other house. He would get dressed in his tux, take pictures, and share flowers at *somebody else's house*. "How many times would I work without reaping the reward?" I thought.

I was immediately triggered and found my way down a familiar mental spiral that consisted of hidden resentments. I felt bitter, and in that moment of anger, I picked up the phone to call Andy. I quickly explained just how unfair life was, and my exact words were, "It feels like working for weeks without getting a paycheck." It was, at that moment, all about *me*.

After hanging up the phone, God said, "Summer, pull over. Pull over and write this down." It was, without a doubt, a command. I've never heard God speak so clearly. It was physically impossible to ignore, so off the road I went.

"Write this down," He said. "You are not raising these children so that they grow up and call you their mother. You are raising these

children so they grow up and call Me their Father.” Mic drop, punch in the soul.

For weeks after pulling off the road, I tried to make sense of the matter. My human mind couldn't quite grasp all God was throwing at me, but I wanted to. I really, really wanted to, and the truth was, I was tired. Tired of being sucked down the same black hole of obsessive mind chatter and reactive behaviors. Tired of, well, myself. I craved control and would fixate on all the things I couldn't.

After sitting with God and this new proclamation, I started to feel shame. How did I get to this place of bitterness and resentment? What is within me that *needed* the recognition of others? Still convinced I was not totally wrong, I remember the day I showed up to bible study ready to confess. Our leader introduced the day with Malachi 3, then proceeded to share an anonymous story of *The Refiner's Fire*. And just like that, the punch in the gut that God delivered on the Dallas North Tollway was redelivered by every word pouring out of her mouth.

God was speaking again, and this time to tell me *He* was holding me in the fire. I had not been totally wrong—it was about me, but not in the ways I had created. Just as my Bible study leader did for me, let me introduce you to the story she shared. It is through this message that God clarified His purpose for my pain. I am praying it speaks to you as strongly as it did to me, not only now but for the remainder of our time together.

It was old that a group of women were studying Malachi and intrigued by the refining process. To better understand, one of the women contacted a silversmith. He invited the woman to his workshop and offered to demonstrate the refining process for her.

When she arrived, the silversmith explained that part of his job as the refiner was to remove impurities, sediment, or other unwanted matter from the metal. He began by lighting the furnace, selecting the silver, and placing it smack dab in the middle of the fire. First, he explained, the silver is held in the middle of the flames where the fire is proven the hottest.

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*The story goes that the woman thought about God holding us in personal trials (the fire) and again about the verse that says: 'He will sit as a Refiner and purifier of silver.' (Malachi 3:3 [NIV])*

*The correlation of God as the Refiner, whose goal it is to remove impurities, began to sink in—yet one question remained: How does the refiner know when the process is complete and the metal is considered pure?*

*The process is delicate, the silversmith explained. A refiner's eye cannot leave the metal during the refining process. If the silver is left a moment too long in the fire, it is destroyed. A refiner's timing is of the essence, and at just the right minute, a purification occurs. The refiner knows that the substance is refined when he can see his reflection in it. The refiner's reflection is the indicator that removal from the flames is necessary and that purification has occurred.*

I had to sit with this story for a minute. God the Refiner, as described in Malachi 3, was holding me in a fire. This was it. This, right here, is what God was showing me—I was the silver needing to be refined. He, the Refiner, and the personal trials in our blended family were the flames.

In my role as a full-time stepparent, I often did a lot of the grunt work, which is fine, except I expected to receive all the rewards. Unfortunately, as a blended family, rewards don't just come every other weekend; dances fall on weekends that aren't ours, and friends' parties don't follow the custodial arrangements solidified in court.

Rude.

The cold hard truth is that some days, being a stepparent is hard. Hell, being a parent is hard. Adding the word 'step' tends to attach connotations I spent all my days trying to disprove. My mission was to prove to others—my husband, his ex, my bonus boys, and anyone else watching—that being a "step" meant nothing less and so much more. My thinking was, if I worked harder, I could prove I'm

## Day One: The Refiner's Fire

worth a place in this family. But what happened along the way, as God would so graciously teach me, is that my acts were self-serving, and when He stepped in, I stepped down. The platform built for me by me no longer needed to exist.

What God pulled me over to say was this: "Sweet daughter, you're working so hard for approval you'll never find. You have absolutely nothing to prove. Your title doesn't matter; it is *My* purpose for you that does. The worth you're seeking can't be found in the accolades of others. I have a calling for your life, and it is time to get down off the pedestal you've built and follow Me. Let *Me* show you your role and define your job—come to Me, and let's get to the Kingdom work."

*"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are **willing**, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but **eager** to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being **examples to the flock**. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." 1 Peter 5:2-4 [NIV, emphasis mine]*

I had it all wrong. I am a shepherd, and this flock under my care was placed there by Him. I hadn't been working to better His position; however, I was working to better mine. There's a difference between the two, and the difference is in the gain. I'd been dishonest in my intent, lording over the flock by trying to control it. The example I was setting was self-serving and had nothing to do with God. And there it was, God couldn't fill me when I was full of myself. My heart needed refining, and chances are yours does too.

If I'm honest, it took me months to fully process God's words that day, three years' worth to be exact. Still, they continue to refine me. At the time, I was so wrapped up in serving the kids, I had lost sight of serving God. My role, the one He gave me, far outweighed the worldly title I wanted to place on it. I was so consumed with placing myself on a pedestal built by my acts of service, that I needed to be

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pulled off the road. But He didn't just pull me off the tollway that day; He pulled me off the road to self-destruction. And just like He did for me, God is inviting you to pull over, press pause, and determine *WHO* you are working for.

His desire is to refine us all, and this is how: He will continue to allow our personal trials to heat up so that we melt down and allow Him in. Our Refiner's Fire is an opportunity for growth, and it requires a decision. Our decision can be: 1) to stay stuck in the flames and let our challenges define us or 2) to pull over and let God drive.

He is waiting in your hardest situations (or relationships) for your full surrender. Maybe your surrender looks like mine, stepping down from the pedestal you've built, or maybe it's something totally different. Either way, it's time to let Him take the stage.

## Day One: The Refiner's Fire

# Reflect + Respond

Shift your thinking. Your hardest situation or relationship (also known as the fire) is the greatest opportunity for refinement. It's God's invitation for personal spiritual growth. Look inward. In what ways or with whom do you struggle, and how can you start to invite God in?

What message does the Refiner's Fire speak to you?

Through your challenges, what could God be bringing to the surface that needs refining? This may take some time to consider. I fought the cold hard truth for years, but you don't have to. The only way out of the fire is to work right through it. Use the space below to reflect and respond to what God is bringing to light.