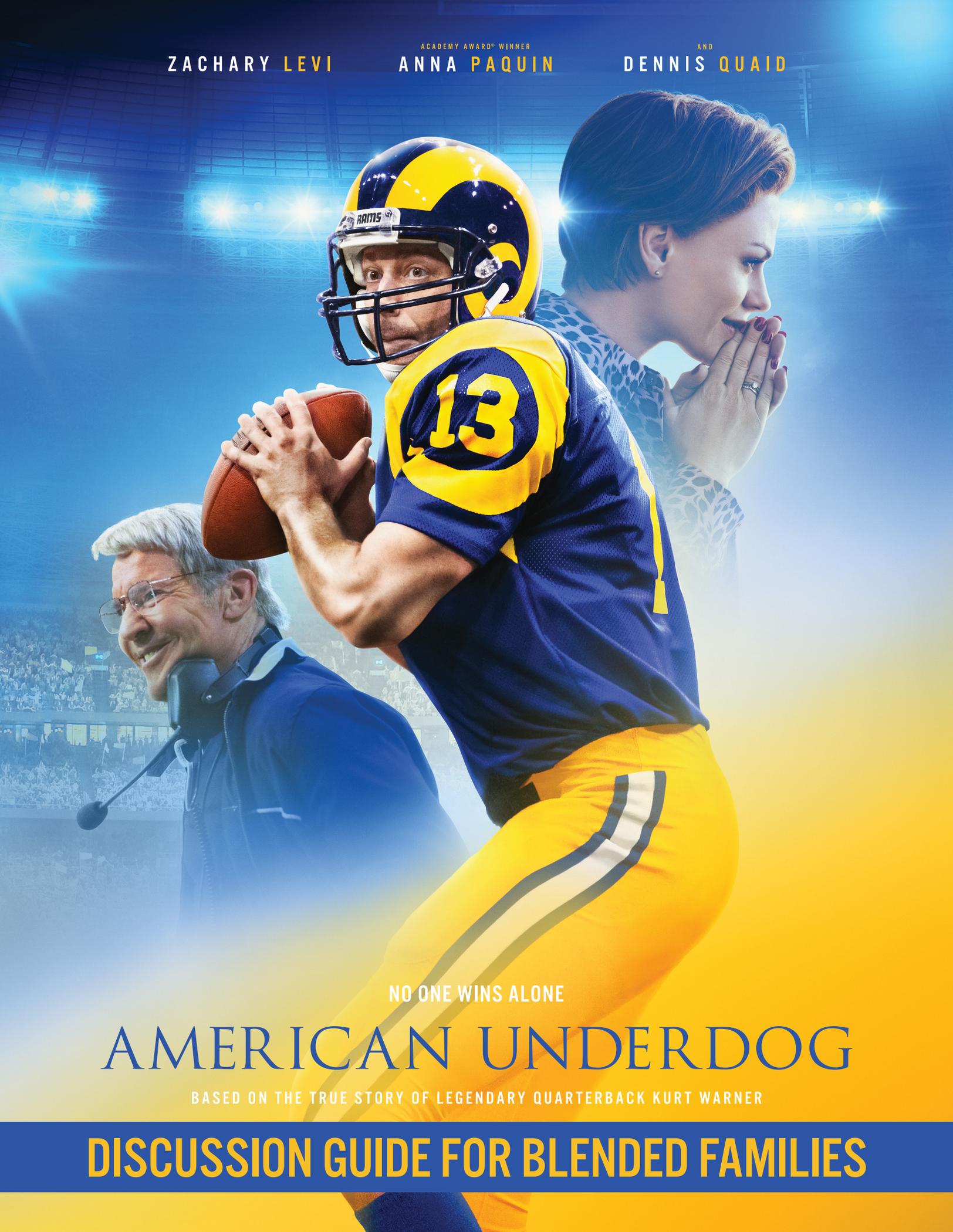


ZACHARY LEVI

ACADEMY AWARD® WINNER
ANNA PAQUIN

AND
DENNIS QUAID



NO ONE WINS ALONE

AMERICAN UNDERDOG

BASED ON THE TRUE STORY OF LEGENDARY QUARTERBACK KURT WARNER

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

AMERICAN UNDERDOG DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

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AMERICAN UNDERDOG

Viewing **AMERICAN UNDERDOG** through the lens of our own story as a blended family with seven kids was inspirational! With the myriad of challenges faced by stepfamilies (co-parenting, schedules, financial, emotional just to name a few) often stepparents and kids feel like underdogs.

As the movie shares, the odds of a high school football and college football player making it to the NFL, let alone winning the Super Bowl, are staggering! The odds of a stepfamily being able to thrive after the grief of a divorce or death can be similar. Yet success can be achieved by what and who you become through adversity. Kurt and Brenda Warner required the mindset to never quit and to stay in the “pocket.”

By experience, staying in the pocket is difficult and downright threatening in the stepfamily journey. Countless times, not only are outside opponents to the family bearing down on you like a linebacker, sometimes there are members of your family, who we like to call Those People, doing the same. Those People are your children! And of course, there are other extended family members, in-laws, ex-laws, and the other biological parents, who add color to your family. They all create challenges! This is

where you and your spouse must stay in the protective pocket of your marriage in unity and trust. The marriage is the core of the team in the adventures of the stepfamily. As we always say, “If you ain’t got the marriage, you ain’t got nothin’.” A strong marriage is the best gift you can give your children and your legacy!

In the game of marriage, we see the blended family as the “special teams” unit. Yes, there are some similarities but there are an estimated 72 differences between a first marriage and a remarriage! At times, different plays need to be called.

Being stepfamily counselors/coaches ourselves, with dirt under our fingernails and torn up sod on our faces, our study based on themes in **AMERICAN UNDERDOG**, offers perspective to your stepfamily and some helpful ideas for discussion. We invite you to suit up to take on the hard stuff that will sustain your special team (your family) to defy the odds and thrive. Themes for discussion are broken into four quarters. We’ll wrap up with the highlights of the movie in overtime, with questions for adults and kids.

REMEMBER:

- 1.** Gratitude is an attitude—it is in your gut. Skills and knowledge can be learned, then applied.
- 2.** When the adventure becomes intense, your will to love reinforces doing the right thing.
- 3.** Owning your influence permits you the strength to admit your weaknesses. This is humility!
- 4.** Show the world what God already knows He has prepared you for ... do you believe it yourself?
- 5.** What is your Special Team’s mission that will defy all odds?

**To view the trailer and find out how you can watch
AMERICAN UNDERDOG, visit AmericanUnderdog.movie/Inspires.**

THIS GUIDE CONTAINS SPOILERS, AND IS INTENDED TO USE AFTER A GROUP HAS SEEN THE FILM.



FIRST QUARTER: DON'T GIVE UP ON YOUR DREAM!

SCRIPTURE:

Romans 5:3 (AMP)

And not only this, but [with joy] let us exult in our sufferings and rejoice in our hardships, knowing that hardship (distress, pressure, trouble) produces patient endurance.

James 1:4 (AMP)

And let endurance have its perfect result and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfect and completely developed [in your faith], lacking in nothing.

Through the years, we have worked with hundreds of couples in stepfamilies. The consistent thread of the dream is to have a loving, honest, supportive spouse and a family where there is respect and care for each other ... as well as fun!

Sometimes reaching your dreams requires you to get out of your comfort zone to prove yourself. When you question yourself or think of your past, you may think you can't do it. As Brenda shared with Kurt when they first met, "Trust me, you don't want (my phone number). I'm divorced and I have two kids." She might as well have been saying, "I'm tainted and I'm not worth loving." Have you ever felt that way? Is that your truth? What is your attitude about yourself? This is what you are bringing to your "team."

In a leadership position (like being a mom or dad), you must be ready. Taking the hits is part of the stepfamily journey. Comments like, “You’re not my dad,” “they are your kids,” “we have to pay your ex how much more money?” are like blitzes against the protective pocket of your marriage. Being able to stand together and keep your marriage the main priority will bring stability to the family. Remember, your spouse is not the opponent; you are on the same team!

Often a stepchild’s attempt for connection can be disguised as pain or innocence. Their intention may be good, but because they are still dealing with a major loss, it can be expressed as negative. When adults get remarried, they have found love and a new life again. What about the kids? Their dream of their parents being together is gone. Most of the time they had no say in the decision to move on. Their dream of their biological parents tucking them in at night, vacationing together, building family traditions are gone.

During all the challenges of learning how to communicate with each other, especially your step kids, look for “wins.” The time they introduce you to their friends (acknowledging your existence), a loving touch, a sincere thank you—while these are small wins, they are big in the long-haul thinking of the game. Do not overlook them—you are building connection!

PARENT QUESTIONS:

1. What is one way your kids/step kids might be reaching out to you that you’ve possibly missed?
2. Kurt was at ease and relaxed when he had a football in his hands—what makes you feel at ease and relaxed?

KID QUESTIONS:

1. In your stepfamily, when do you feel comfortable, encouraged, and you’re having fun?
2. In your stepfamily, when do you feel uncomfortable, sad, or misunderstood?



SECOND QUARTER: I PICK YOU—BUILDING TRUST

SCRIPTURE:

Deuteronomy 7:7 (AMP)

*The LORD did not love you and choose you because you were greater in number than any of the **other** peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.*

James 1:4 (AMP)

*Trust in **and** rely confidently on the LORD with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight or understanding. In all your ways know **and** acknowledge **and** recognize Him, And He will make your paths straight **and** smooth [removing obstacles that block your way].*

The boy needed a real man to bend down and meet a simple need—putting a battery in a radio. In *AMERICAN UNDERDOG*, Kurt chose to do what was uncomfortable—to stretch out on a bathroom floor and listen. Building trustworthiness by entering Zachary’s space, Kurt showed acceptance and validation.

Later, as they were sitting near the lake, Brenda shared her life story with Kurt. As she revealed the traumatic events of her previous marriage and how Zachary became blind, she was vulnerable not only with Kurt, but also with God. She shared with Kurt that she has a relationship with God. She trusted Kurt enough to say, “It defines me.” At that point, Kurt was defined by his athletic ability. What defines you?

When draft day came, being selected was a big deal for Kurt. The end of the draft was met with disappointment, yet he had a choice to make. He rallied and went to Zachary's birthday party, even though he didn't feel like it. He manned up. He did what was right.

When Kurt's opportunity came with the Green Bay Packers, he did not feel like he was ready. How often do we as stepparents feel that we aren't up for the task, so we disqualify ourselves? In reality, our step kids miss out on getting the love we both long for. Your step kid may not pick you right now, but that does not mean you stop doing the right thing. You take care of their heart, you encourage them, you continue to build trust, and you show love. Be relentlessly gentle.

Later, Zachary powerfully said "I pick you" to Kurt. Wow! Here is a man who was overlooked and not believed in. Then Zachary speaks truth softly and the weight of his words become a reality check for Kurt. In that moment, Kurt was not about to give up on Zachary or himself. Kurt's hope was reignited.

Zachary was on his own journey and Kurt willingly entered into it. As with all step kids, Zachary set the pace of the relationship. Kurt's presence set the pace of safety physically and emotionally—he could be trusted.

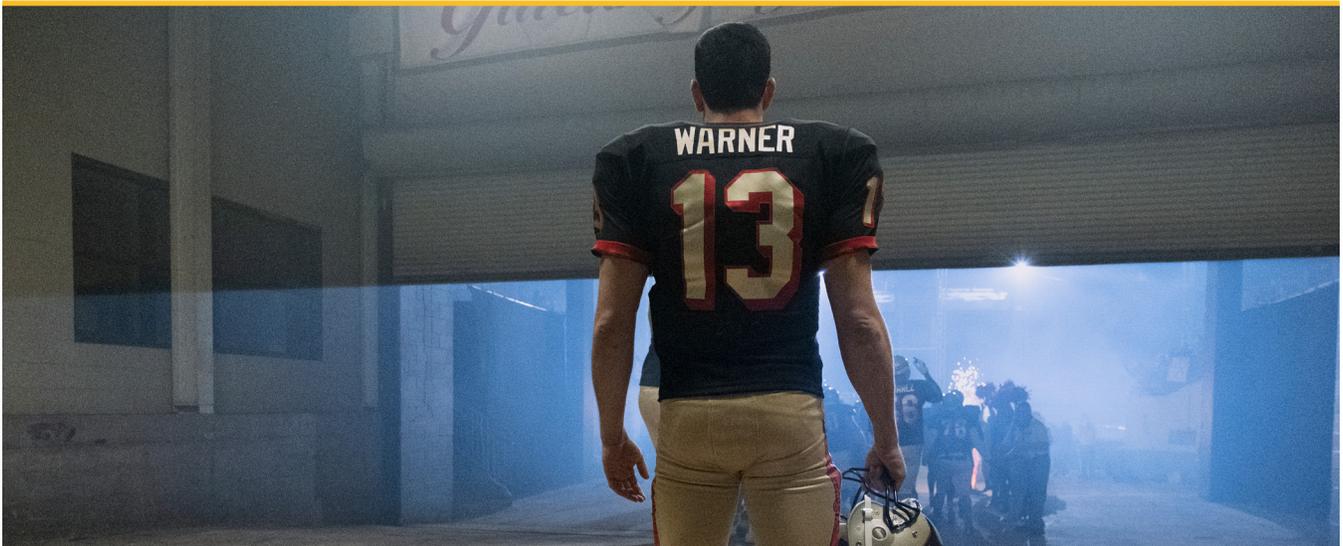
PARENT QUESTIONS:

1. If you had to define yourself to a stranger, what would you say?
2. How do you develop trust with adults/your spouse or with your children?

KID QUESTION:

1. If you could pick a superhero to help and protect you, who would it be and why?





THIRD QUARTER: LONG-HAUL THINKING AND OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

SCRIPTURE:

Jeremiah 1:17 (AMP)

But you [Jeremiah], gird up your loins [in preparation]! Get up and tell them all which I command you. Do not be distraught and break down at the sight of their [hostile] faces, or I will bewilder you before them and allow you to be overcome.

Revelation 21:7 (AMP)

He who overcomes [the world by adhering faithfully to Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior] will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

The first time Brenda met Kurt's mom, it didn't go well. Sue was concerned for her son's choice in dating a single mom. She had been one herself. "Is that really the life you want?" she asked. How many times have family members offered their advice to you? Is it through the eyes of their experience or is it in your best interest? You as a couple still have the final say.

People questioned us as we were looking at marriage and combining all of our kids. When we first got married, would we have preferred buying a new, bigger house? Sure! Could we? No. It would have impacted us financially and caused us to move the kids to different schools. We made a pinky swear that when the last kid moved out, we would get our own home together. We had a plan. We honored each other enough to

stick to it, even when it was not convenient. We had our end in mind. We now live on Glory Road in the middle of a forest and love it. It was worth the wait.

Grit is needed to form a stepfamily. You may have thought your previous marriage was good. Now it's time to make this marriage great. If you're just starting out, look for ways to invest in your relationship. The first two years are usually the toughest. If you've been remarried for a while and it's not great, it's never too late to learn new skills that make your marriage vibrant again. Gratitude is an attitude that sets you up to be great. When you remarry and kids are involved, it's not just about the couple.

Here's a reflective question: Do you want your kids to have the marriage you have today? If not, there are many resources to help you learn new skills. Another question is, "How teachable are you?" We're talking about legacy here! What are you passing on to Those People? What areas do you need to grow?

As Brenda's father told Kurt in the garage, "It's not what you achieve but what you can become. ... Promise me you won't take off when things get hard, because they will get hard." This would be what we call long-haul thinking. Don't get so caught up in the here and now details, obstacles, and detours. Look at 5, 10, 25 years from now. Where do you want your marriage to be? The thoughts and decisions you make today will impact your legacy. What do we want to become?

How many times have you wanted to quit? The stepfamily journey is not for cowards! It is made for those who are willing to stay in the pocket. And that is exactly where the "great" is found. It's all about doing what's best for us. Yes, there will be times one of you sacrifices for the other, but that's what teamwork is all about. When we are defensive and don't understand each other's history, empathy is out the window and confiding disappears. Trust and honesty decrease and grace is not extended.

So, when loss comes, the vow is "I'll be here." We like to say, "I'm not going anywhere," which to us is as strong as saying I love you.

PARENT QUESTIONS:

1. How do you feel about the obstacles in your life right now?
2. With long-haul legacy thinking, how can we encourage one another?

KID QUESTION:

1. If someone gets in your way of doing what you want, what's the best way to get along?



FOURTH QUARTER: IT'S LIKE A CIRCUS! IT'S GOING TO BE FUN!

SCRIPTURE:

1 Peter 4:12-13 (AMP)

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which is taking place to test you [that is, to test the quality of your faith], as though something strange or unusual were happening to you. 13 But insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, keep on rejoicing, so that when His glory [filled with His radiance and splendor] is revealed, you may rejoice with great joy.

1 Peter 5:9-10 (AMP)

But resist him, be firm in your faith [against his attack—rooted, established, immovable], knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being experienced by your brothers and sisters throughout the world. [You do not suffer alone.] After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace [who imparts His blessing and favor], who called you to His own eternal glory in Christ, will Himself complete, confirm, strengthen, and establish you [making you what you ought to be].

Kurt did not believe his path to the NFL was through the circus—Arena Football. The owner/coach of the Iowa Barnstormers, Jim Foster, tells his players “Arena Football moves as fast as NASCAR; it’s like a 50-yard indoor war.”

Combining two families together resembles this description! First-time marriages experience many firsts together. Your first apartment, first pet, first dog, first house, first kid. Creating a stepfamily is like jumping onto a moving train. Everything is moving

at full speed. Schedules, food choices, holiday traditions, relationships with the other biological parent, and money matters to name a few. So, as you are adjusting to being married to a new person, you contend with all that life already has going on. Hang on!

In the movie, Coach Foster had Kurt working on a new quarterbacking strategy: “1-2-3 throw.” Is it time for you to learn some new moves, some new ways to approach the stepchild you can’t find the on-ramp into his or her heart? Is it time to show your spouse how important they are in the way they need to hear it? When trying new skills, you may stumble and experience some pain. Humbly accept your weaknesses. Mistakes will be made, but these mistakes will hone your skills as you find your rhythm. That is when the fun begins. You are a hidden gem and a gift to your family.

In the movie, Brenda tries to end the relationship because her pain reminded her of her previous marriage. Her wound of having been betrayed slid into their present. Do not let the past hinder your present. This is a common issue for remarried couples. We have defined and labeled some of these emotional reactions as Bare Wires, Sneaker Waves, and Old Tapes. You can find out more in our book *Restored and Remarried* and on our podcasts.

While sitting on the end of Zachary’s bed, in a moment of loss, Kurt reached out to God. Often through pain and loss, we look for God to be present. We just never realize that He has been there all along. He is just waiting for us to turn to Him.

Later on, as Zachary sings at the wedding and Jessie invites her “daddy” to dance, we realize Kurt becoming an instant dad is not by accident. After 20 years, we are renewing our vows and all of our kids are attending. It’s never too late to extend invitations for bonding and relationship, remembering that the kids set the pace. Kids need the stability of knowing they are safe, protected, and that they belong. This is our job as the parents, whether stepparents or biological parents.

PARENT QUESTIONS:

1. What if a tragedy struck you and rattled your faith? How would you want to be comforted?
2. How can you lead your family when things are tight with an “I’m not quitting attitude?”

KID QUESTION:

1. When getting along with others is hard, what helps you know they love and care for one another.



OVERTIME: YOU WERE BORN FOR THIS! CAPTURE THE MOMENT!

SCRIPTURE:

Jeremiah 1:5 (AMP)

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you [and approved of you as My chosen instrument], And before you were born, I consecrated you [to Myself as My own]; I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations.

We are born for life's moments. Wilderness experiences define us because those moments can be disguised as disasters. The wilderness represents failure, burnout, disappointments, unfulfilled longings, and considering yourself a has-been. That's where nay-sayers criticize your character and your ability.

As we see in **AMERICAN UNDERDOG**, those experiences make you who you are. The wilderness gives you something others don't have, a sense of destiny. Destiny belongs to the underdogs. You've earned it, you've prepared, it's your time, you know who you are. If others have said you are wrong, you remain humble

All of the 67 types of stepfamilies come with their own personal wilderness of pain. No one planned for death or divorce. How they come through that wilderness is what makes the difference. Good character translates anywhere.

As Kurt was getting ready to go out on the field for his first start in the NFL, Brenda came to the locker room and shared a letter “our” son wrote—this is a HUGE statement in that she didn’t say “my” son. Despite his nervousness, Kurt was inspired by Zachary’s letter that reminded him of who he was.

After Kurt’s less-than-stellar start, Coach Martz shared words of affirmation and confidence. The coach instilled hope. How many times do we miss the opportunity to instill hope in our spouse or family? It is easier to point out the missed plays and the fumbles. Change the lens you look through: look for the positive; this is a game changer in any relationship.

It was still intimidating for Kurt to face off against the strong defense of the Baltimore Ravens. It can be the same feeling when facing an ex-spouse. They know you, and can expose your weak spots. But with support from your spouse (and family), you can defy the odds and have a vibrant stepfamily.

After his first win, Kurt made his way to find Brenda in the stands and told her, “We did this.” In their relationship, they had each other’s back. They sacrificed for their dreams. When obstacles came, they weathered them together. They had long-haul thinking. They kept their composure under pressure.

What is *your* this?

Our *this* looks like a vibrant, healthy marriage. What did it take to get here? Being involved with short-term missions’ trips, creating a stepfamily ministry, not being offended when step kids hurt us without even realizing it, supporting each other, being supportive of all our kids through their difficulties, going through grad school later in life, career changes, and death of parents. Beneath all of that, there is trust, honesty, vulnerability, openness, forgiveness, laughter, fun, and adventure. Has it been easy? No. Do we have it all together? No.

Is it worth it? Yes! Because “if you ain’t got the marriage...you ain’t got nothin’.”

PARENT QUESTIONS:

1. How do you take ownership when you fumble (make a wrong decision, bad tone, jumped to conclusions/assumptions)?
2. Kurt and Brenda acknowledged that they did this together. As a couple and as a family, what is your “together mission”?

KID QUESTIONS:

1. How would you encourage your parent/stepparent if you knew they were nervous or scared?
 2. How would you like to be encouraged or comforted when scared or nervous?
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ABOUT GIL AND BRENDA

Gil and Brenda Stuart live in Brush Prairie, Washington and have 7 adult children and 9 grandchildren. Gil has his Master's in Counseling and Brenda has her Life Coaching Certification. They have been working with couples (both married and remarried) for more than 18 years. Although they work with couples in every season of their marriage, their specialty is the blended family. They deliver a fresh style of encouragement to this ever-growing population in society: the blended family. Willing to speak the obvious from their own stepfamily adventure, the Stuarts share heart to heart as they walk the walk.



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