

FamilyLife Blended®

References to conferences, resources, or other special promotions may be obsolete.

Season 1, Episode 5: Daily Bread for the Starving Stepmom

Guest: Melanie Anthony

Air Date: April 22, 2019

Melanie: You know, my husband will say, “You know there are some good parts about being a stepmom.” I’m like, “I know, there *are*. It’s a blessing. I feel like God chose me, but it’s also very hard.” Sometimes he reminds me—he goes, “You talk about how hard it is too much—like you don’t talk about the blessing and the value that you add to them and that they add to you.”

Ron: From the FamilyLife® Podcast Network this is FamilyLife Blended. I’m Ron Deal. This podcast brings together timeless wisdom and practical help and hope to blended families and those who love them.

Have you ever skipped a meal? I did just the other day. I got to tell you, it was horrible—just one meal and my stomach started growling and I felt weak and a little pathetic to be honest. Well, if you’re a struggling stepparent, you long for something to fill the emptiness.

Recently, I had a conversation with stepmom and author Melanie Anthony about what she calls daily bread for starving stepparents. Like, what do you do when the stepmom scrutiny comes your way from the biological mother and how do you manage when the rose-colored glasses fall off?

Melanie Anthony is co-author with LauraBeth Hoisington of the devotional, *Daily Bread for the Starving Stepmom*. She and her husband Steve and their three blended-family daughters live in Austin, Texas.

In her book, Melanie shares one of the prayers that shaped her life. She says, “Lord, I would rather be single the rest of my life than to settle for someone that isn’t Your best for me.” So I asked her why in the world would she pray such a bold prayer?

Melanie: It was bold and I was at a point in time when I’d actually been divorced for quite some time. I was actually divorced in my thirties when most everybody else had families of their own, children. The struggle was I desperately wanted to be married. I fought that a long time through poor relationships, bad dating—some really bad dating.

I think it was during that time—you know they talk about the deserts—that was a desert because I was single. My dream of being married had been lost in a four-year bad marriage, and it was gone and I didn’t know how to get that back. I tried to do it on my

own which I failed miserably. I got to the point where I'm like, "I'm done." I said, "I only want what You have for me, God. I'll be single the rest of my life. I'm good with that."

I'm not kidding you—the minute I prayed that things just started falling into place. I surrendered everything. I stopped dating. The focus became it was just me and God. I said, "It's You and me, God, and I'm good."

Ron: That gave you some peace?

Melanie: Very much so. Very much so.

Ron: What was different? I mean, what did life look like day in and day out walking around with that sort of resolve that it's okay if it's just me and God—that's okay. How did that change the way your life flowed?

Melanie: I was more confident. I had more strength.

Ron: Interesting.

Melanie: I could hear from God. Although I believe God places desires in our hearts and my desire was to be married, I gave that desire to Him. Then at that point, He's like, "Now I can work through you."

Ron: That's really great. I'm keying in on the word you *desperately* wanted to get married. My experience is when people are desperate about anything—doesn't put us in a good place to made decisions.

Melanie: No.

Ron: You know we're leaning out over the edge, praying for somebody to catch us and we'll take whoever will come to the rescue at that point in time.

Melanie: Right.

Ron: That just leads to poor decision-making, the inability to really see through the quality of the relationship. You'll just take anything, anywhere. Was that the kind of the journey you were on?

Melanie: It was. I just—I was tired of making poor decisions because those poor decisions were leading me to a lot of pain—a lot of bad mistakes—and the consequences were hefty. I wasn't—I didn't want to do that. I wanted to do it God's way.

The minute I prayed that prayer—it was probably within six months—I took a job in real estate and I met my husband. I sold his house. He was my client, I don't date my

clients, but we'll go for coffee. He chased me hard and I was like, "No, no, no!" And he's like—because he was—

Ron: Okay, wait a minute, wait a minute. You went, in six months' time, you went from desperate, I'll take anything / anywhere / anybody / made some poor decisions, to I'm at peace with God, to now a guy is pursuing me and I'm saying no?

Melanie: Well, it was actually a seven-year journey.

Ron: Wow.

Melanie: So it was the seven-year journey. It started out and then toward the end of the journey when I said, "I can't do this anymore." Once I made that decision, it was within six months that I met my husband.

Ron: Okay, so let's back up just a little bit and kind of bring the listener in on the circumstances of your life. You had been married at one point for four years, then went through a divorce. Did you have children at that point?

Melanie: No.

Ron: Okay, no kids at that point. Then you pray this prayer, this bold, courageous—wow!—big prayer and then you meet Steve. You guys begin to date. Does Steve have kids?

Melanie: He did. He had two—twins.

Ron: How did that enter the picture in terms of your thought process when you start dating him?

Melanie: I sit here and I laugh because I had it all figured out. [Laughter] It's just like, "I got this." You know it was like, I talk about in some of the things that I write—I'm like those rose-colored glasses were big and rosy. I'm like, "Oh, he's got two little girls. They're so cute. They're twins." I literally went from being single for seven years or eight years to an instant mother—stepmother—stepmother of twins.

Ron: *Stepmother*—it has a *tone* to it.

Melanie: —*stepmother*. I was forty years old. It was fast and furious. Within seven months of the time we got married to the date, I became pregnant.

Ron: Wow! A lot was happening.

Melanie: A lot was—I didn't know what to do. It was overwhelming.

Ron: It was overwhelming. Yes. How were you coping with all of that?

Melanie: I wasn't—I wasn't. I was just flying by the seat of my pants. Really because I'm like, "I got this." But no, you don't.

Ron: You do write that you had rose-colored glasses on and they fell off.

Melanie: They fell off.

Ron: So reality hit fast.

Melanie: Yes.

Ron: Reality about Steve? About the girls?

Melanie: We married and the reality of the ex, the threat that I posed to her, the reality that, "Oh, I really am like a mom to these little girls" because my husband has primary custody. I was a full-time stepmom. They see their mom every other weekend.

So the reality of, "Oh, wow, this is really happening." I've prayed for this my whole life and it became instant. I mean I never thought I'd become a stepmom. That was like—I didn't know what a stepmom was. I didn't know *The Brady Bunch*—I had no idea *The Brady Bunch* was a blended family. [Laughter] I did not know that.

Ron: Had you seen *The Brady Bunch* show?

Melanie: I watched it all the time growing up, and I *never* knew they were a blended family.

Ron: Which is one of the things I've been preaching for a really long time and that is—they convinced people that blended families could be just like biological families because of how they did the show. There you have it. You did *not* know.

Melanie: Exactly, I had no idea.

Ron: That just goes to show you—you can romance anything into a notion that's not reality.

Melanie: Exactly.

Ron: Your reality was crashing in hard and fast.

Melanie: —hard and fast.

Ron: You were overwhelmed.

Melanie: Yes.

Ron: Were the relationships—I mean how were other people adjusting? How were the kids adjusting? How was Steve adjusting?

Melanie: Well, we didn't really know what we were adjusting to except—this is a new thing. We didn't really have any expectations. We didn't know what they were. We were just going with the flow but having to deal with the ex, legal issues, things of that nature put a little stress on the marriage, the relationships.

The girls were really young at the time though. They're pretty impressionable at that time—at that age, so things were—I use this word very loosely—easy back then raising them. It was an unknown. We were walking into the unknown.

Ron: You know you just said something that is a truism about blended families—about most, not all—but when there's stress, and the stress typically comes during those hard integration years, it always ripples into the marriage relationship. That's something I repeat over and over and over. If you listen to this podcast, you'll probably hear me say that.

The reason for that is I think people need to be forewarned. If they've already experienced that, understand that that's very normal. It could be that a phone call from a former spouse all of a sudden creates tension in your marriage. Like, "Wait a minute. How did it get here? It started over there and now it's between us."

Or maybe it's a kid issue or a parenting thing or maybe it has something to do with money. It can be a lot of external factors that then ultimately ripple into your marriage relationship.

Melanie: Right, right.

Ron: And you guys definitely experienced that.

Melanie: We did. It was about—I became pregnant seven months to the day when we got married. I found out I was pregnant at forty, and I looked at my husband and I said, "I am so scared." He's like, "This is what you want, right?" Because I told him before we were married, "If you want to marry me, you've got to give me a baby."

Ron: He agreed.

Melanie: He agreed so I said, "Great!" That was something that I'd always desired to do is to have my own child. We had a child, an "ours" baby. Everything just kind of flowed but it was still another dynamic because now I was *Mom*, not *Stepmom*.

Ron: Right. Those are two very different roles.

Melanie: Very different roles.

Ron: How were they different for you?

Melanie: Wow, that's a loaded question because I feel like there are days when I put on many hats. The Mom role feels so much more unconditional than the Stepmom role, which feels so conditional. I think it's so much about our perception but it's harder.

It feels like this cloud of scrutiny, ongoing scrutiny—whether it's something that I make up in my own head or my perception. I'm sure it's my perception because others probably don't feel that at all—like my stepchildren they probably don't think twice about something I may have said. But I think about, "Well, this may get back to the other house. I'm not really your *mom* so when I say this it doesn't have as much authority or value to it." I tend to scrutinize myself because—

Ron: You run it through the filters.

Melanie: Oh, like all twenty-five of them. It's exhausting.

Ron: It is exhausting. I mean you're working harder. I think that's part of the experience of it is, "I'm working harder," because you're constantly justifying yourself—like, "Okay, if this goes through the ears of their biological mother, how will she hear that and perceive that, so what do I have to say? How do I say it?"

But then, it's got to go through the kids' ears. "But, by the way, my biological child is listening in to how I say it and I'm a little more direct when it comes to my kid than I am with my stepchildren. That may be affecting how they view me. 'Mom, why don't you ever say it that way to _____?'" Those are all those filters that you have to pass it through as you're saying it. That's a lot of work.

Melanie: It is.

Ron: You get starving is the way you guys put it in this book that you've written. In that situation, what are you starving for?

Melanie: I'm starving for somebody to tell me that I'm not crazy, that it's okay to feel this way—it's okay to feel like you can't figure all this out and that you are *not* alone, because—oh stepmom two over here, she feels the same way. I'm like, "You feel that way?" "Oh, I feel that way all the time." I'm like, "Oh, I feel so much better about myself."

Ron: Yes. There's two powerful messages in that. One—you're not crazy. This is not just all about you. Two—you're not alone. There's support. There's help. There's somebody who gets you. You can share this burden with somebody else.

Again, the book is *Daily Bread for the Starving Stepmom*. By the way, if you're a stepdad listening right now, there's stuff in here that applies to you as well. You say in the book, the day you became a blended family mom was the day you started fighting the evil stepmother stigma. Explain that.

Melanie: When you become a stepmom, nobody tells you about that. It's like before you have a child nobody really truly tells you what it feels like. Well, when you become a stepmom, nobody really tells you that there's a stigma that goes along with it, because the ex-wife or the biological mom of your stepchildren—you're a threat to her.

You have to somehow learn how to deal with that perception that she has. It comes out in really different ways sometimes. Because sometimes it'll go through the kids. The tone that is set with the children will come then back to you. But that stigma of—I mean just like Cinderella—the stigma is there of, “I'm not evil. I'm actually added here. I'm trying to add things to your children's lives not take away.”

But what I represent to the biological mom is a failed marriage / a failed relationship / something that she didn't have, because my husband and I have a great relationship. Although she's remarried—a lot of biological moms remarry—but I represent pain, so I'm the brunt of it. I always say to my husband, “She doesn't hate you. She hates me.”

Ron: Even in the best scenario, the best-working relationship, you're still a reminder of a painful time in her life—if not an ongoing pain now. That's hard to shake.

Melanie: It is.

Ron: Can you think of a time—is there a story you can share—that just kind of conveys how you—dealing with how the kids were viewing—that stigma from the kids or the stigma from her?

Melanie: I tread very lightly in that area because they're very—they come to her defense all the time. What I say is—I guess *scrutinize* is the word—again, it just doesn't hold as much water, as much value, so it's tough to say that I—do I have a great relationship with my stepkids? No. Do I have a relationship? We have somewhat a relationship, but that intimacy—being able to talk to them about things like that, it's not there.

Ron: How old are they at this point?

Melanie: They're 15.

Ron: Okay, and you have a biological child who is how old?

Melanie: She's ten.

Ron: Okay. So three girls, altogether.

Melanie: Right.

Ron: In particular, when there's a difference between your biological daughter and your stepdaughter, do you find yourself drifting towards what's easy—that is, the relationship with your biological daughter? It's more clearly defined. You don't have to go through all the filters of what I say. Is that a natural drift, do you think?

Melanie: It is a natural drift, and the way my stepdaughters look at it as they look at it as unfair treatment. I think that is such a good point there Ron—is that you know, my husband is not a stepparent. He's just a bio dad. He's the father to all of our children. But when push comes to shove, he's on the couch with his twin daughters and I'm in the other room with our bio daughter.

So that division—and I think we have to be really careful about the division in the home—it's a natural thing. Because Momma Bear comes in, and I'm like, "Come on let's go." He just wants peace.

Ron: Right.

Melanie: Then that separation begins and then what is affected? Our marriage, because we can't agree.

Ron: Sure, let's unpack that for a minute. Now, I appreciate you sharing that with just such honesty and candor because I think that's something a lot of people can really relate to.

We don't have to go into all the details of how you get there, but I'm wondering if the process is something a little bit like, when there is a stress or a strain that takes place within the home that your husband who's, "Hey, why can't all you get along?" It's easy for biological parents, by the way to go, "I love you and I love you. Why can't you guys love one another?"

They get into that caught place, that stuck place. But at the end of the day, if he feels like his girls are off by themselves, he may just drift that direction to comfort them—not necessarily to oppose you or to make a statement to the biological daughter you guys share—but just to offer some comfort that they're not all alone in this.

Your natural drift is back toward your biological daughter. So there you have it. You're with one, and he's with the other two. Does it almost feel in that moment to you like he's with them—more loyal to them?

Melanie: I don't think it's a loyalty. I think it's—I was just talking to somebody this morning about this—that I think there is whether you want to call it guilt or shame associated with the divorce, so you want to make sure whatever you do over the top,

whether you buy them more things—which is not us—or you coddle them more or you bring them in more, whatever it is to reaffirm to them that they're loved. I mean, I know I've heard of stories where the weekend parent, whether it's the mom or the dad, they just— they shower their kids with gifts.

Ron: Yes, they want it to be a fantastic two and a half days then—no conflict, no real life, so they give them everything that they ask for. But unfortunately what you end up doing is you kind of stop being a parent in that situation.

Melanie: Right.

Ron: But again, what you're describing I think is very real. It's not that anybody's necessarily choosing, "I choose my kids over my wife." I think sometimes it's just that, "I don't know what else to do. It just feels like somehow the girls are all alone, so I'm just kind of hanging with them to let them know, we still love them—they're still cared for. I want my girls to still feel like they're around and they want to be a part of our home."

Yet that adds some stress to your marriage. It adds a little stress to your relationship to your stepdaughters, "Dad's on our side but you're kind of on the other side." I even wonder about the stepsibling relationship, like your stepdaughters and your biological daughter. Does that end up affecting them?

Melanie: Oh, I'm so glad you mentioned that. That is our number one struggle is—it's sad when a child is involved in a divorce because it's a loss—it's heartbreaking. People focus on the children of divorce, as they should, but what I think gets neglected are the children that are brought into the marriage naturally.

Ron: The "ours" baby.

Melanie: The "ours" baby, they just think that they just go into the fold and they don't. We struggle greatly with that. The relationship with the steps and the bio and it is the *number one* issue that we have in our marriage. Whether one's parenting the other too soft or too hard or whether, "You don't understand that you need to discipline this one." "No, I don't."

It just—"What is fair? What isn't fair?" The "ours" child—all she says to me is, "I just want to feel a part." Because, it's not very often you have twins but because my stepdaughters are twins—*they're twins*—they're close.

Ron: They have a close bond.

Melanie: They have a close bond and that's great. But that close bond alienates my daughter and it causes a lot of friction and a lot of rebellion on my bio daughter's part.

Ron: Wow! Yes, I can see what a struggle that would be because your biological daughter is not guilty of making any of this happen. Yet she feels isolated and alone in some ways. Which just tugs on your heart, I would think.

Melanie: That's when Momma Bear comes out.

Ron: And you get protective.

Melanie: Very protective.

Ron: Which means you might have to be more critical of the other side, if you will, your stepdaughters and then maybe your husband indirectly because he's kind of over there with them.

Melanie: I mean it's exhausting.

Ron: It is.

Melanie: You know, my husband will say, "You know there are some good parts about being a stepmom." I'm like, "I know, there *are*. It's a blessing. I feel like God chose me, but it's also very hard." Sometimes he reminds me—he goes, "You talk about how hard it is too much—like you don't talk about the blessing and the value that you add to them and that they add to you, because sometimes you just get so caught up in all of the emotion of it all," because it is a lot of emotion.

Ron: In what's not going right.

Melanie: In what's not going right.

Ron: Because that's always where your focus is, your attention is, because you want those things to improve. Yes, we naturally give a lot of time and energy to what's not going well rather than recognizing what *is* okay. I think that's a good word. Yet the everyday experience is we're hurting about this. Here's some pain over here.

That constantly draws our attention. I mean, think about our physical bodies for a minute. If there's one little spot, you know, in your back that hurts or you've got a bruise on your elbow, boy, that's the thing you notice. Everything else is working just fine but you still don't feel like you're doing all right. That can be challenging.

Where's the hope? Where's the encouragement? Like what are the things you would encourage somebody who's listening? Maybe it's not the exactly same circumstances as you but there's a pain somewhere in the emotional body of their family and it's drawing all their attention. What would you say to them?

Melanie: I would say that without God you cannot do any of this. You cannot. I think blended families are God's pride and joy, meaning, here's My restoration—here's My redemption. I mean Jesus was in a blended—I mean—Joseph—you know, Mary and Joseph—Joseph wasn't the biological father to Jesus.

The redemption truly comes from God only. He's the only One that can make anything beautiful, so get connected to a church. Get connected to a tribe or community of like-minded people that can walk you through the good and the bad and the ugly and that have your back. That's really important.

Ron: That's really important. I would just add to that—tell me what you think about this—remaining persistent in the midst of the hard, I think is really important. In your situation for example, if somebody were to just say, "I give up" and they go into defeat, and "I'm just going to live on this side of the house because that's where it's safe—I'm not even going to mess with trying to figure out the hard on that side of the house."

That just means you get more entrenched. My experience is then the other people get more entrenched as well. That just makes the gap even bigger. The hard part is, "Alright, how do I lean into one little part of this and to see what we can do to make things a little bit better."

Now the caveat is—for example, if you said, "You know what, I'm going to make things better with my twin stepdaughters." You can take some steps in that direction. Maybe talk with your husband to figure out what you're going to do. That's one piece of the puzzle that you're going to work on. You can make progress but it does depend a lot on whether the twins are even open to you making some changes.

If they, too, meet you in the middle, then things move faster in a better way. But if they don't—if it's a brick-wall response, well, then that's just really difficult. I guess what I would say to somebody in that situation is you've got to pick another piece of the puzzle to work on. Just find another place where you do have a little more influence or power to make some change.

Melanie: I think that's a good point. But I think expectations—I mean, especially if you can catch them before they get married, remarried, and sit down with them and say, "Okay, Tom, what are your expectations of Judy? Okay, Judy, what is your role going to be like? What's it going to look like?" Because those unmet expectations are what cause so much hardship.

Ron: I think you're right.

Melanie: That's really critical. Even in the midst of a marriage you can do that—set those expectations.

Ron: Yes, if you can make those adjustments long before you ever get there it helps.

Melanie: That's true. That's true. I think one thing, too, is acceptance. You made a good point. The children are the ones—the stepchildren are the ones that navigate the relationship and the tone of the relationship with the stepparent. I also believe that the biological mother navigates that through her children, as well, as to what type of relationship *her* children are going to have with their stepmom.

Ron: Which is a message to anybody who is a biological parent listening right now. No matter what your situation is, if your children have a stepparent in the other home, please, please, please give them the gift of your permission for them to get along with—to build their own relationship on their own terms, whatever that looks like, with their stepparent and step siblings in the other household.

You have a strong influence in their life. They will remain deeply loyal to you even to the point of being problematic to everybody else in their world at their own peril, by the way. But if you release them from that loyalty, then they'll still love you and be loyal, but they will also have the freedom to get along with other people.

Let's turn a corner for a second. You—I guess you at one point in time played competitive tennis.

Melanie: I still do.

Ron: Oh really? That's great!

Melanie: I played competitive golf in college, and then I actually had a hole in one last week.

Ron: Are you kidding me?!

Melanie: I'm serious.

Ron: Man!

Melanie: I am not kidding you.

Ron: Have you ever had one before in your life?

Melanie: I have. I was thirteen and I had my next one now. It's crazy. I play golf once a year.

Ron: Good for you.

Melanie: It's pretty crazy.

Ron: I guess everybody can have a good day every now and then.

Melanie: I do like to play tennis too.

Ron: Well, where I was going with the tennis question—I mean, golf’s a whole other conversation.

Melanie: I had to brag a little bit there, my hole in one.

Ron: No, that’s really good. I was just thinking a little bit about being a stepmom. Do you ever find yourself hitting that ball back and forth with a stepchild? You just feel like, “This is a rally, I’m caught in this thing, we are just going at it, and they want to win as much as I want to win” You ever been there?

Melanie: Oh been there. Always there. Always there, and especially teenagers—they want to be right all the time, right?

Ron: Yes, amen to that.

Melanie: You know that right. Yes, so being a teenager plus the fact that they’re doing this with you is—yes—

Ron: —infuriating.

Melanie: It’s infuriating.

Ron: By the way, have you noticed—because I’ve noticed this in myself—when your child takes on that strategy of “I’m right and I’m going to prove to you I’m right,” that I dig in my heels a little bit deeper too. Now we’re both trying to prove the other’s—and guess what that does by the way—the listener needs to really get this—that creates a dynamic where you end up inadvertently helping them do more of what you want them to do less of.

We shoot ourselves in the foot. Because when I dig in my heels, then they dig in their heels, and then I dig in a little deeper, and they dig in a little. Now we’re both pushing the other to a place of competitive tennis. [Laughter]

Melanie: Right. Right.

Ron: You know, part of the trick is noticing that “Oh, I dug in my heels. I volleyed what they tossed. I’m—yep, yep—I’m part of the problem at this point. How do I drop the racket? How do I step aside and go, ‘You know what, I need to change my strategy rather than arguing to prove that I’m right. How do I stop that and do something a little bit different?’” It doesn’t always become clear what the other thing is but if I just continue to play tennis so will they.

Melanie: Humility is a really—in fact I’ll tell you a story. The other morning I lost it—like *lost it*. They all three walked out the door crying. I’m like, “This is horrible.” For various reasons, there’s a lot going on. It’s about the second time I’ve done that.

Ron: Is that all? That’s not bad. [Laughter]

Melanie: Yes, right. Well, I’m not really being completely honest here. [Laughter]

Ron: Okay, maybe two and a half.

Melanie: Maybe two and a half. But I knew I knew I had to humble myself and I knew I had to apologize. I knew I did because that’s what God would want me to do. It wasn’t—nobody deserves to be yelled at.

I took each other them alone and I apologized. My husband was in the restroom brushing his teeth listening to all of it. He walked back out and he goes, “You know, that was probably the most mature thing I’ve ever—no, no, no—that was the most mature thing I’ve ever heard *anybody* do.”

Ron: Wow!

Melanie: I was like—and to me it just felt painful. It was just like, “Oh!” But I was very sincere when I did it. But I was like, “Wow! Okay, maybe I am making progress even though it doesn’t feel like it.”

That’s that I like to encourage stepmom is even though you feel like you take one step forward and six back and then a half step forward and then twelve back, you are making progress. It’s baby steps, but humility is—and I’m not always good at it, but there are times. I have my moments.

Ron: I don’t know anybody who’s good at humility. But I’m 100% in agreement with you that that was the right move. As hard as it was, it showed a lot of courage on your part, but my guess is it helped repair. It may not have been instant—probably wasn’t an instant repair with the girls but it at least gave you an opportunity to do that. By the way, I want to commend your husband for staying out.

Melanie: He’s—he’s—yes.

Ron: You know, and here’s what I mean—I think sometimes bio parents rush to fix and jump in there, “Whoa, there’s conflict between my spouse and my kids and I’m going to jump into the middle of that. I’m going to coach everybody on how to make this right,” and there’s no way to win that scenario. He kept brushing his teeth apparently and let you do your thing. That had to be a one-to-one.

It would have muddied the water if he would have gotten involved with it. He may not even realize how important that was in that moment but he stayed out of it, which left for you and them to figure out.

Melanie: He's my number one cheerleader. He's reading a book on stepmoms right now.

Ron: Cool!

Melanie: I know. It's like, "I'm going to read this one now." I'm like, "Okay, go for it." He is my number one. That's another comment is that the thing that I'd like to impress is, if your husband's not on board, like putting you first and putting your kids second then it's going to be tough.

Ron: Unpack that. Say a little more.

Melanie: Well, there's a priority of you need to put God first, your marriage is second, and your kids are third. The hierarchy of priority is it's Scriptural and God knows what He's talking about.

When a man puts his wife above his children—it's not to spite them or anything—that's just the way spiritually he's supposed to do. He's supposed to be the leader of the house. When that falls into place appropriately, then there's a lot more peace and a lot more harmony.

Ron: Good, so give me an example. What does that look like for him to do that for you?

Melanie: He will make sure that my voice is heard through him. We always make sure they know we're united. We're very affectionate with each other, hugging and kissing in front of them. We go on date nights. We're grounded in our church. We pray. He's the leader. I mean, I have heard too many stories, Ron, where the man's not the leader because he doesn't know how to be a leader and the wife's over here just hiding in a corner.

Ron: I think what you're saying is—I would say that's important for all marriages and his leadership of course needs to be one of mutual respect and admiration for his wife, building her up. I'm a firm believer that because of a husband's leadership, servant leadership, his wife should be *more*, never *less*.

Okay, so we're not talking about that here. That's true in all marriages. I think I hear you saying that's particularly important in a blended family situation with a stepmom, because she's not going to have any credibility with her stepchildren if he doesn't help her get there. He's the one who positions her. Is that what you're saying?

Melanie: Right. Correct. Correct.

Ron: Those external things, like just showing affection for one another in front of the kids / spending time / carving out time for one another—that’s a way he prioritizes you. It sends the message that, “Look, Melanie really matters. She’s important to me.”

Melanie: Correct.

Ron: “This relationship’s important to me.” Finding unity in trying to deal with parenting situations. We talked earlier that sometimes you don’t end up exactly in the same room, and so it’s not easy finding unity. Sometimes that is really challenging.

You’ve been listening to my conversation with Melanie Anthony. I’m Ron Deal and this is FamilyLife Blended.

We’ll hear one last thought from Melanie in just a minute. Do you remember the portion of our conversation when we were talking about multiple filters that stepparents have to put their words through? How all the people in their life are going to experience those words and the expectations that are put on stepparents? It’s really hard to find your identity in the midst of all of those opinions. It raises the question, “What is your identity? How do you know who you’re supposed to be in your home?”

Well, I can hear someone saying, “Well, your identity is in Christ.” Yes, that’s absolutely true. Ultimately, your identity is found in your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. You still have to work out your role in your home. There’s many opinions about what that should be—your husband’s opinion / your opinion / the biological mother’s opinion / the children’s opinion / your biological children’s opinion—there are many. You still have to figure this out.

One reason I teach so much about parent and stepparent roles is because this helps create solidarity around the role of the stepparent. It helps you figure out who you’re supposed to be. This is a process of talking with your spouse and trying to figure out what role you’re going to play in the home.

I shared that once with somebody and they said, “Yes, but don’t you just lose yourself completely in that process?” We’re not saying it’s up to other people. You are a part of figuring out what this is.

You see, the best self-care is centered in holy living first and foremost. Who Jesus calls you to be is what will bring most honor to your own heart and bring you most satisfaction to who you are in your family and in your important relationships. You have to decide with your spouse what that looks like practically in your home so you can move together in the same direction.

A final thought from Melanie is coming up. But I just want to remind you, if you want more information about our guest you can find it in the show notes. Check it out at the

FamilyLife Blended page at FamilyLife.com/podcasts. Please know that we love to hear from you. Your feedback means a lot to us, and positive online reviews are *really* appreciated.

Subscribe to this podcast on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you download your podcast. Just search FamilyLife Blended with Ron Deal and remember to look at the show notes for additional resources. You can also learn about our other podcasts on the FamilyLife Podcast Network. And maybe, just maybe, if you like what you hear, you'll help us spread the word. Tell a friend, a family member. Post something online. All would be greatly appreciated.

Don't forget this weekend *Blended and Blessed*®, Saturday, April 27th. This event is designed specifically for blended family couples. You may be thinking to yourself, "But it's so close. How can I become a part of that?" That's the beauty of the internet. This is a livestream event.

If you happen to be in the Minneapolis area, we'd love for you to join us live in the audience, but you can just go online and register and be a part of the day on your smartphone or on a laptop or with a group of other people at your local church. The website BlendedandBlessed.com will tell you how to do that. I hope you'll join us.

Now a final word from Melanie:

Melanie: Early on in our marriage, I felt like I was on an island all by myself. I know a lot of stepmoms out there feel that, "I must be crazy. I'm on this island all by myself." You know you're out there raising your flag, going, "Can somebody please just get on this island with me." My husband will say—sometimes he goes, "I don't want to get on your island." He doesn't want to be in my mind and experience all the emotions.

So one thing that I used to say to him early on was, "I just want you to get on my island. Just get on my island and know what this feels like because this is tough. This is gut wrenching. This is horrible. You're not a stepdad you don't get it."

I don't say that much anymore *but* he tries to understand. He came home—this was many years ago—he came home one day and he said, "I had an epiphany." I'm like, "That's great honey. Great." I'm cooking dinner. My youngest is just a baby.

We get done with dinner and all five of us were at the dinner table and he said, "I want to say something." He turned to me and he looked at me and said, "I am so sorry," and he apologized. He said, "I'm so sorry I haven't tried to understand more of what you have to do to run this family and to be a stepmom and to be a mom." He just apologized.

He says, "I'm on your island now because," he goes, "I had lunch with a good friend today." His good friend is a full-time stepdad. He asked his friend, "What is it like?" His

friend said, “It stinks.” Because let me go on to tell you a story that his friend who is the full-time stepdad went to every single wrestling match, but who got invited to the banquet at the end of the year? Not the stepdad.

When he said that to my husband, “It stinks. It’s rough. It’s hard.” The light bulb went off in my husband’s head going, “Wow, it must really be *tough*.” When he came home and had this huge apology, it was that empathy that he had for, “You know what, Honey, I get it. It’s tough. I’m sorry I haven’t tried to understand more.”

We were all in tears. It was a really pivotal moment in our family life and even in the unity of our marriage for him just to say, “I *am* your number one cheerleader, and I will do all it takes to support you through this role.”

Ron: How did that make you feel?

Melanie: I was just like, “Somebody gets it.” Not that he truly gets it, but to be empathetic to the pain and the hardship, the challenges that I face, and to have grace for when I need it the most. It was just so comforting.

Ron: Melanie, thank you for being with me today.

Melanie: Thank you so much, Ron. I appreciate it.

Ron: I appreciate you. The book that you’ve co-authored *Daily Bread for the Starving Stepmom*—great resource. Appreciate you being here with us.

Next time we’ll hear from Helen Wheeler and Rodney and Lisa Webb about dealing with challenging co-parenting situations and parent alienation.

Helen: People get so caught up in the anger and the hurt and the frustration from the divorce. Maybe they think the other person is the sole cause of it so there’s a little bit of revenge that they try and do. What better way to hurt a parent than by using their child against them.

Ron: That’s Helen Wheeler and Rodney and Lisa Webb next time on FamilyLife Blended.

I’m Ron Deal, thanks for listening. Thanks to our FamilyLife legacy partners for making this podcast possible.

FamilyLife Blended is provided by FamilyLife and is a part of the FamilyLife Podcast Network.

We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you've benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider [donating today](#) to help defray the costs?

Copyright © 2019 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com