

# FamilyLife Blended®

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## Season 1, Episode 7: Eternity Is Now in Session

Guest: John Ortberg  
Air Date: May 6, 2019

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**John:** Many people when they think of the word heaven, we often have a cartoon picture. Images are really powerful so we'll think about gates and clouds and harps and so. We think of it as this pleasure factory that if you could just get there, of course, you would be happy. Then we wonder why doesn't God just let everybody, or at least more people, go there.

**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.

Okay, when you're taking your kids somewhere in the car, have they ever said, "Are we there yet?" Well, mine have. I must confess sometimes it's *me* that's complaining about how long it's taking to get somewhere. When are we going to get there?

Well, on today's podcast John Ortberg says that in life, as in the car, we're often asking, "When are we getting there?"—to heaven, that is. Oh, and by the way, what is heaven somewhere out there someday have to do with my life today?

John Ortberg is the senior pastor of Menlo Church in Northern California and the best-selling author of multiple books including *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*, *Everyone's Normal until You Get to Know Them*; and *The Life You've Always Wanted*. His latest book and the topic of our conversation today is *Eternity Is Now in Session*.

I realize people listening to this podcast, doing all sorts of different things. Perhaps you're in the car right now. Maybe you've even got kids sitting in the backseat and we all know what that means, they're asking the question.

**John:** A classic question that kids ask in the car is, "Are we there yet?"

**Ron:** Yes. Yes.

**John:** Are we there yet? They're always in a hurry to get there. We go through life that way. When we have families, little kids come along—we just had our first grandchild this last year.

**Ron:** Congratulations! That's great!

**John:** Six months old. If I'd have known grandkids were this much fun, I would have skipped the kids part and gone directly to grandkids. It's so interesting now to think about when our kids were little, often we just wanted them to hurry and rush and get to the next level.

Now to have that next generation here and to be aware vividly of how quickly things move, it's very sobering, wonderful but convicting experience. Often for blended families, the complexities of how do you juggle mutual allegiance, relationships and so can even add the complexity to it.

It was my friend Dallas Willard who used to say that we think of eternity as something that you have to die to enter into, something way out there some place. But actually eternity is going on right now. God dwells in eternity. I have actually a sign in my office right here, "Eternity is now in session and anybody who wants to can enter into it right now."

**Ron:** I think I heard Dallas say once that if you want to go to heaven the time is now. [Laughter] Something like that.

**John:** Yes.

**Ron:** But that's not the way we think about heaven. That's not the way we think about eternity. We're in a hurry to get somewhere. We want the kids to get somewhere. They want us to hurry up and get somewhere. Don't we think about heaven as this thing that is off in the distance that almost has nothing to do with my life today?

**John:** Well, I couldn't agree more, Ron. I think a lot of what I do in this particular book is to try to look at words that we often think we understand but that we often use a little differently than the writers of Scriptures use. If we can get closer to what they actually understood, and particularly to what Jesus understood, it will make a tremendous difference to our life and our faith here and now.

Many people, when they think of the word heaven, we often have a cartoon picture. Images are really powerful so we'll think about gates and clouds and harps and so. We think of it as this pleasure factory that if you could just get there, of course, you would be happy. Then we wonder why doesn't God just let everybody, or at least more people, go there.

Whereas, when the writers of Scripture and Jesus in particular talk about the afterlife, the idea of heaven is primarily, it will be about life with God. In heaven, God will be very hard to avoid. It's not like going to Oz where you had to track the wizard down someplace. You will always be in the presence of God.

Now that's kind of sobering. Because when you think about it, that means that there won't be any place to run off and sneak in a quick sin. [Laughter] If I would like to still have the opportunity to be judgmental or superior or self-promotional or greedy or lustful or deceitful, there's not going to be a place to go do that.

Learning, what does it mean to live in God's presence? We primarily do that—it is a reality—it's a spiritual reality and we mostly experience it in our minds in that ceaseless flow of thoughts and desires. I can begin to live in the conscious awareness of the real presence of God, His love, His favor, His power, His guidance, and I can do that right now.

Actually, I think that's part of why the notion of things like *living in the present* or *gratitude* or in our day people talk about *mindfulness* a lot. I believe what all of that reflects is our deep hunger to live with God in the kingdom of heaven here and now. Interestingly *now* is really where eternity intersects with our lives.

**Ron:** Okay, there was a whole lot in what you just said there. Boy, I'd love to unpack that just a little bit.

Heaven is not this thing that's just off out there somewhere. Heaven is something that is now because God has brought through Christ the kingdom to this earth. We'll come back to *kingdom* here in a minute. I know that's another one of those words that we don't always use the way they use it in the New Testament.

But you're saying that to have an awareness and a consciousness of God's activity and connection in our life right now, not just something that we're going to go to someday where we get all this reward and sit on a cloud and play a harp.

But it's the experience of relationship with the Heavenly Father and that is something He is pursuing in us right now. If we only had an awareness of that, man, I begin to think, how would that begin to make a difference in my life as a husband, as a father, if I lived every moment with an awareness that heaven is here and I am trying to bring kingdom stuff to my world?

What kind of difference do you think that would make in somebody's life if we *lived* that way?

**John:** I remember reading a story years ago. It's true as far as I know. These couple of students who were in Christian college were going door to door talking about God and faith. The question they would ask is, "Are you interested in eternal life?" They knocked on one door and a mom answered it. She had a baby in one hand and a vacuum cleaner in the other and a little toddler pulling on her leg. The house is a mess—dirty dishes, diapers. They asked if she was interested in eternal life and she said, "Frankly, I don't think I could stand it." [Laughter]

The idea is eternity is about more than just duration. It's about more than something that is unending. It's a different quality of life. Jesus in the Bible actually defines eternal life one time. It's the only time eternal life is defined in the Bible is in John, Chapter 17, verse 3. He's praying and he says, "...this is eternal life..." He's praying to His Father, that they might know You, the Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

In other words, eternal life is defined, not as being in the pleasure palace someday after you die, but it's an interactive, participative, experiential life together with God that begins here and now.

What that means for me is that my primary goal in each moment of life is to remain in conscious contact with God. There's a wonderful real simple little book called, *Practicing the Presence of God*, by a guy that was known as Brother Lawrence. He just worked in a community in the kitchen. He called himself the lord of pots and pans.

But he created a resource that's become a classic and spiritual life was really as simple for him as adopting a goal. But what makes this revolutionary is it is unending from moment to moment to say, "My primary aim will be to be in conscious contact with God right now."

As you and I are talking now, we don't have to rely on ourselves. I don't have to depend on, "Can I think of something clever to say?" I can simply be aware of and dependent on God in our conversation and say, "Now, God, would you guide my words? Would you guide Ron's words? As there are people who are listening, would you bless them? Would you help them to hear exactly what it is that You're meaning?" Then we have entered into another spiritual reality.

That's my job as a dad. That's my job as a husband now. I'm not trying to do this on my own. I'm trying to surrender in any moment, "God, what's going on inside my spirit—anger, impatience, ego?" How do I let that go and seek purely to be a vehicle of God's love and God's power? The ease and freedom and qualitative difference of life that's available in doing that is something that people have been discovering ever since the time of Jesus. It is the pearl of great price. It is the life that is we all desire more than we want anything else.

**Ron:** Right. Right. Okay, so I've got to jump in because I've got to dumb stuff down for me. [Laughter]

**Ron:** I'm fully aware that if you and I are having a conversation like we are now and all of a sudden a third party came and stood right here among us, and maybe it's my wife, maybe it's one of our children, maybe it's a friend, or maybe it's a non-believer, all of a sudden the presence of that third party dramatically affects what you and I say, how we carry ourselves, if we say it this way or if we say it that way, if we say it hard or we say it soft.

We're consciously aware of that and it affects our relationship. If it's somebody in the room that we like, we both mutually like, we feel comfortable, we trust, then all of a sudden we're relaxed and the conversation can flow freely.

If, on the other hand, it's somebody we don't know, we're not sure of, then maybe we're a little guarded and cautious. As you're talking about God and walking around life mindful of His presence in our lives, that we're bringing heaven to our world now, all of a sudden to me it's like that warm presence of that third party who is here that I trust deeply, intimately, and I'm comfortable with.

But you know, at the same time, I really don't want to share necessarily the worst parts of me in a conversation out loud with you knowing that He's listening in on that.

**John:** Yes.

**Ron:** But man, that's great to know that God is here, I can be mindful of Him, I can be aware of Him, I can even have a little side conversation with Him as you and I are talking. But if I just think God is up there somewhere, has nothing to do with who I am, where I am now or that He is standing beside me as a judge and jury, and if I do one thing wrong. Those are two totally different pictures, right—the warm trusting presence versus the judgmental, harsh, angry person that I need to be concerned about. You're saying it's the warm, trusting presence, right?

**John:** I couldn't agree more. It's a funny thing Ron, I find I've been a follower of Jesus for a long time, I still struggle at the heart level to deeply, consistently believe that God loves me all the time.

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** There will often be moments when I feel inadequate or I'm just aware of how messed up I am, that I'm angry, that ego is still such a large role in my life. There's something inside me that actually almost resists that notion that God really does love and care about me.

It's a lot easier for me to talk to somebody else and to say it to you, to say, "Well, yes, Ron, of course God loves you." But I actually think for all of us this notion that we are loved by God is maybe the fundamental battle that we struggle with. It's not just about something that's warm and fuzzy.

Often there's a high cost to it because it does demand that I surrender my life and will to God all the time and let go of sin. Sin always cuts me off from the love of God. That's what's so dangerous about it.

Then it's very striking when you look at the life of Jesus one of the dynamics that you see is, for Jesus the line between praying to God and talking to people gets so thin that

it's almost nonexistent. When somebody comes to Jesus and they need a healing, sometimes He will talk to His Father and say, "God, heal this person," and sometimes he will talk directly to the person and say, "Be healed."

But I think what that reflects is exactly what you were just saying, if there's a third person present with you and me and I see that person, I may be talking with you but I know that person is hearing what I say.

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** Even though my words are addressed to you, they are also in my mind very clearly going to be heard by this other person. I believe that Jesus was so conscious of the presence of His Father that all of His words, even spoken to other people, are also knowingly addressed for His Father.

**Ron:** I just got to back up for a second because I can completely identify with what you just said about feeling inadequate before the Father, feeling at times unworthy of His love, and perhaps even unloving. My shame tells me that.

**John:** Yes.

**Ron:** I do think that's a common experience. I don't think you and I are the only ones who wrestle with that. It kind of goes back to this image we have of this third party with us. Is God with us as judge and jury or is He with us as a loving grandfather who is just the guy you want to hop up in his lap and you feel so comfortable with?

The way Jesus portrayed that relationship with the Father is clear that it's the warm loving presence that we can feel comfortable with because He was, as you said, talking almost interchangeably between the vertical and the horizontal what was going on with—how He was interacting with God and how He's interacting with others.

If I'm mindful of that as I'm interacting with my wife, I think that changes how I respond to her. If I know He's there and if I'm aware of that, not out of guilt, not out of shame, but out of an awareness that somebody else is in the room, this informs how I bring the kingdom of heaven to this very moment right here and now.

Don't you think that informs how we parent, how we'd interact with people we don't get along with, all of the above?

**John:** It's a very striking thing. Again, I think a lot of us just don't think about it much. The first command that Jesus gives is, "...love the Lord your God with all your heart...soul...mind and...strength." Now part of what's wonderful about that command is it means that God wants to be loved. That's a very powerful thought that *God desires to be loved*. Another implication of that is God is lovable.

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** God would not command us to love Him if in fact He was not a lovable being. A good question for everybody to ask right now is, "Is the God that I believe in and think about a lovable person?" What qualities make somebody lovable? That they're gracious. That they are kind. That they are well meaning towards you. That they are good. That you can trust them.

We all do theology. We all think about God. We all have a picture of God. If your picture of God is not a picture of an eminently lovable being, happy, joyful, gracious, then you need to get rid of that picture and find another one. All of that is wrapped up in that single initial command of Jesus, "...love the Lord your God..."

Often we turn that into an obligation of something that we're supposed to do without thinking about God being lovable. We actually make Him unlovable and think of Him as somebody that's putting this burden on us. But if I'm living with a lovable God, then He and I together will be able to love my spouse, my ex-spouse,—

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** —my child. Then all of a sudden I have resources beyond myself to carry into my relationships with other people and those relationships teach me about God. When I look at my little grandchild when he's sleeping and there's a peace to him. I'm just filled with delight. He just started sitting up. Most people are capable of doing that. He's not the first person to ever sit up. But my delight and wonder when I saw him sit up a couple days ago was just boundless. To think, God is that way towards me.

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** God loves it as I'm able to do things. God's not neutral about that. It's so wonderful to think about that. Part of what that means is I don't have to be a slave to my work anymore. I don't have to worry about, "Am I achieving enough? Am I doing enough? Am I impressive or smart or...?" I'm simply loved by God and I can retire. [Laughter]

**Ron:** That's great. We're talking with John Ortberg today about his book, *Eternity Is Now in Session*. One of the things that you talk about that I think is just so important for us as believers to grasp is that part of living the kingdom and being a part of the kingdom is not just waiting someday for what will happen but bringing God's kingdom to earth now as you say, "bringing a piece of the up there, down here."

It makes me think about, I have the privilege of partnering with God in bringing the kingdom to this earth.

**John:** Yes.

**Ron:** Not just sitting around waiting for Him to finally do something to fix all that's broken, but I actually have a role in joining Him in that. I'm not sure many Christians walk around with a sense that we are joining God in that activity.

**John:** Yes. Let's talk about that idea of God's kingdom because that's a word that gets thrown a lot but can often be a cliché.

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** In the Bible, of course, in Jesus day kingdom was an important word. They used to have kings back then. We don't, so it's a little harder for us. This guy Dallas Willard who's been very helpful to lots of folks including me used to talk about the fact that in the Biblical sense everybody has a kingdom. It's very much related to your will. Your kingdom is what Dallas would call the "range of your effective will." Your kingdom is where what you want to happen happens.

**Ron:** Is that what a two year old discovers? That they have a kingdom.

**John:** That's why a two year old's favorite word is *no!* [Laughter]

**John:** And their second favorite word is *mine!* What they're learning is they have a kingdom. Those are actually great words. We all struggle with it when two year olds learn them. But it's much better that they learn them than they do not because they're learning that they have a will. They have a kingdom and that starts with their bodies.

That's why it's such a miracle when a little child learns how to walk and how to move and how to grasp things. It's matter, atoms coming under the reign of a personal will. That's a miracle. Well, that's kingdom. That's a real good thing that we all have kingdoms. But then our kingdoms get all junked up with sin and we become selfish and we fight over our kingdoms. A kingdom is a system of personal power, so a family is a kingdom.

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** But then you get in the backseat of a car and the kids start fighting over, "If you cross this line, you've come into *my* kingdom." Then Dad gets upset because he thinks the car is his kingdom. So we get into all these battles. All of our kingdoms are broken.

It's interesting, Ron, I know a lot of the work that you will do is with blended families. Sometimes in the church, there can be this idea that if there has been a divorce, if there's brokenness in a family, it can't experience the fullness of the kingdom of God. But of course every family is broken, every human.

**Ron:** That's right.

**John:** Genesis is basically the story of one blended family after another. There's Abraham and you just go right on through. It's in those broken kingdoms that God comes to bring restoration and healing. When I was growing up in the church, I often thought God's going to just destroy this world so our prayer is kind of like the old Star Trek "beam me up" prayer, "Get me out of here and take me up there."

But the prayer Jesus teaches us to pray is, "Our Father Who is in Heaven, Hallowed be Your Name." People recognize what a wonderful person you are and then, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Now that line, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" is really an explanation of what does it mean for God's kingdom to come? God's kingdom coming means that His will is being done in our little kingdoms. We are aligning our little kingdoms with His great kingdom.

**Ron:** Yes, you know, you mentioned blended families there and broken families and how sometimes we need to remember that we're all broken. When it comes to kingdom, it seems like sometimes even within church we have a competition of kingdoms. Like, who is best fit for being here? One of the narratives I hear from divorced people, single parents, somebody in a blended-family situation, people who have had very public sins in their life, whether they be sexual sins or related to pornography or something like that or an affair or something, they talk about the shame they carry when they walk into church.

**John:** Yes.

**Ron:** And how one person looks at them differently than others. They feel second-class. That's a big narrative that we hear a lot in our ministry. I want you to put your pastor's hat on. You are one, so let's just keep that hat on for just a second and talk about even within a church context what do we do about that?

Here's a story that I hear from people, "You're divorced and you're in a blended-family situation. We're glad you're at our church. We want you to be here every week. We would love for you to tithe. Your money's good here. We think you'll get into heaven someday but you can't teach fourth grade Bible class because of your life history."

**John:** Yes.

**Ron:** Now I understand because I was in ministry in local churches for 20 years of my life. I understand we want to put forth good role models, examples, and that there's thinking behind the judgements that we sometimes make about people. But at the same time, I think we lose the opportunity to hold up, "Look what God has done in this person's life. Look at the repentance in their life. Look at the redemptive work happening in their life." We lose the ability to put *that* in front of people because we're so busy trying to somehow figure out who's in and who's out.

There's a lot there. Can we talk around that for a little bit? What are your thoughts and observations? I mean, how can we keep God's grace in all of our lives front and center and not let it get pushed to the back?

**John:** That idea of keeping it front and center, I think, is a wonderful way of thinking about it. I've been learning a lot, Ron, over the last couple of years from Alcoholics Anonymous, the twelve step.

We have three kids that are all grown up now and one of them has been in AA for about five years. That journey together has been a time of great learning. As you can imagine, painful just thinking about that process going on in our family and with our child. Part of what's very powerful in AA, AA itself grew out of what was call The Oxford Group which was nothing more than an attempt to recapture discipleship in the 20th century.

**Ron:** Right.

**John:** That morphed into the twelve steps in AA but it came right out of Jesus-oriented discipleship. Part of what is indispensable to AA is for people to do a fearless and searching moral inventory and then to confess to God, themselves, and another person all of the truth about themselves so there is no hiding. It's the transparency and the authenticity that are indispensable to spiritual power.

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** One guy who writes about this had a statement that I think is so good. He said, "Actually the presence and power of AA is a prophetic statement to the church because often people gain the power to become sober in AA. But if they're doing church, they don't gain that same power from a spiritual program." He said, "Part of what AA recognizes is that the recognition and public confession of inadequacy is itself a spiritual achievement to be celebrated."

**Ron:** Absolutely.

**John:** Recognition and public confession of inadequacy.

**Ron:** Wow.

**John:** That's what gets lost in the church and often in real superficial ways. We'll think, depending on the church, "Married person, good. Divorced person, —"

**Ron:** —bad.

**John:** —second-rate."

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** And not look at the fact that the true inner condition of that married person might be an absolute cesspool.

**Ron:** I think there's a lot of people who are still married and have broken their vows. We somehow say, "Well, they're okay because they're still married." Whereas somebody who is in a different situation is not.

Proverbs 28 comes to mind, verse 13, based on what you just said, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." That's the confession thing that AA puts out and does so well. We've lost that, I think, in the church. In fact if you do confess your sins, then all of a sudden we somehow put you into that category of being second class.

**John:** Yes. It's very interesting having spent a lot of time thinking about this topic and looking at places like AA, I've come to a deeper appreciation of what always looked like a weird story in the new Testament to me about Ananias and Sapphira. It's a husband and a wife and they both give money to the church but they pretend to give everything and they only give part. They both get killed, which seems a little severe.

**Ron:** Yes. Yes.

**John:** Now, we don't know what their eternal destiny is. Again, God is a loving God. But I've come to understand the reason that weird-looking story is in the new Testament is precisely because of what we're talking about. The only way that spiritual community has power is when people are honest about their inadequacy and their flaws and their brokenness. Anytime one person gets vulnerable about that, it's contagious.

As long as there is authentic confession and forgiveness going on, any sin can be healed and there is great power in the community. As soon as hit and miss comes in, that healing power gets blocked. That spiritual life gets blocked. That's what happens with Ananias and Sapphira. It's the first time in the new community of the church that people choose to deceive, pretend, and hide. That cuts off the forgiving, healing flow of the Spirit and it causes a form of death.

I think that's why that story is included in the book of Acts. Very often, it's the spiritual quote-unquote achievements that we're the most proud of and that we want to show other people that actually become *the most destructive forces* in our lives and in our church.

**Ron:** What we're saying is we are bringing the kingdom to earth when we do things like confess our sin.

**John:** Yes.

**Ron:** When we get honest about our lives with one another in front of one another and own and take responsibility, I think that brings humility. It fights pride. It invites humility into our hearts where we stand before God. We're aware of His presence and we're saying, "Yeah, I've really struggled with x, y, or z. I've really wrestled with that and I need your help with that."

It opens the door for that other person who's hearing that or the church, if you will, to move toward us, to embrace us, to encourage us. Rather than us hiding and moving in isolation, it moves us together.

**John:** It's very powerful. When you go to an AA meeting, if somebody talks, the first thing they'll say is, "My name is John. I'm an alcoholic." And everybody says, "Hi, John."

**Ron:** Hi, John.

**John:** And celebrates the recognition of inadequacy, the public confession of inadequacy. Those are simply words to say, "I'm an alcoholic." But, Ron, as you well know, anybody who says those words at an AA meeting has been through hell. They resisted saying those words and they have been through unbelievable pain, embarrassment, humiliation. By the time they got to those words, there was a tremendous power in being able to say the words that they fought against their whole life long.

Now in the church, historically we talk about the confession of sin. We will have statements for public or private confession. But it's very rare in a church that to say, "I am a sinner," or, "I have done those things which I ought not to have done and left undone those things that I should have done." It's very rare that has the spiritual power in somebody's life that "I'm an alcoholic" does.

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** Part of the paradox of grace is often somebody who has been through a divorce, somebody who has been through something that feels painful and like a failure that's public is brought to a place of surrender and recognition of need that opens themselves up for grace, that people who have not been through that never get to.

**Ron:** Okay, so let's get real practical. How do I do this with my husband or my wife? How do I—I'm imagining a listener right now who needs to make something right with a former spouse. They need to make amends or they need to something. They need to at least confess.

I realize there is risk involved in all of that but let's talk around that. What would you recommend to somebody in terms of how to approach somebody you care deeply about? You've hurt them. You need to be real. What are your thoughts?

**John:** Yes. Step number one is look at yourself and ask, "Am I willing? Am I honestly willing to do this?" Now this doesn't mean that you're going to do it yet. Seeking to make amends to somebody or approach somebody always requires wisdom. It may not be clear what the right action step is. If somebody is in a relationship with a spouse that's been physically abusive they need to get out and get safe.

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** The church hasn't always been real clear on that and sometimes the church has sent messages particularly to women, "You have to just stay there and submit to that physically abusive husband." No, no, no. Get out! Get safe! The right action step will require wisdom and discernment.

But there is, I believe, a prior step which is, "If I have wronged somebody, if there's something messed up in a relationship, I've got to own what's on my side of the property line. Am I willing to do that?" I just have to be honest about that. If I'm not, then I have to ask God's help and say, "God would you give me a willing heart?"

**Ron:** Yes.

**John:** Then I would encourage listeners on a real practical level, Ron, before they seek to take that step, get a really wise deeply trusted friend and talk all the way through that situation with.

One of the most helpful things in my own spiritual life over the last couple years that I've started doing, I have a real good friend that I've known for over 30 years. Every morning we call each other up at 6:50 in the morning and we spend ten minutes and we just talk about, "Here's what yesterday was like, temptations I faced, where I fell, where did I get stuff right. Here's what I'm going to be doing today." We pray for each other and then we go into the day.

It's my friend, Rick. I have no secrets from Rick. Rick knows everything about my life, my emotions, my marriage, my sexuality, my finances, everything. I think for people to have a fully disclosing, spiritual friend where you have learned that they're trustworthy, you trust their character, you trust their confidentiality.

**Ron:** Right.

**John:** I would recommend it for anybody. If you don't have that, start praying and ask God, "Could you bring a person like that into my life?" And have somebody where if you need to do repair with an ex, you talk about that situation fully with a really wise friend to get their counsel and to be accountable to them.

Then you make a plan of action. Maybe you're going to write a note. Maybe you're going to have a conversation. Maybe it needs to be a phone call. But to make a

commitment that, “I’ll ask God to make me willing, I will seek to pursue wisdom, and then I will actually take that step.” It will bring freedom in people’s lives that they cannot believe.

**Ron:** What we’ve got to do in order to do that is to break through the hiding and risk vulnerability.

**John:** Yes.

**Ron:** Because you’ve established that relationship with Rick for, you’ve got it going for 30 years now, so it’s—I’m sure it’s still challenging to be brutally honest about yourself with him. But in the *very* beginning, it must have been *really* challenging to do that.

**John:** Oh, yes. The first time I ever did. We’d known each other for ten years and then I decided I’d really like to—

**Ron:** —go to the next level, so to speak.

**John:** Yes—tell Rick everything. I knew him really well. We enjoyed each other. We were good friends. I knew he was trustworthy. I spent a long time just reflecting on my life and thinking about things that I wanted to confess to him. Then we had arranged to gather together. Then it took about an hour and a half to walk through, I’d just written a bunch of stuff down from early age on.

It was *very* embarrassing. It was *incredibly* vulnerable. I didn’t even want to look at him when I was done. I’ll never ever forget this, Ron, I finished and I was feeling so fragile and Rick looked at me and he said, “John, I have never loved you more than I love you right now.”

**Ron:** Wow!

**John:** It felt so good. I wanted to make up more bad stuff to tell him, just to get that.  
[Laughter]

**John:** What I came to realize in that moment was that we can only be loved to the extent that we’re known. This is a deep part of the way the kingdom works, as long as a part of my little kingdom is hidden, you may say to me that you love me but in my mind inevitably I will think, “Yes, but if you knew this about me,—”

**Ron:** That’s right.

**John:** “—you would not love me.” So I can only be loved to the extent that I’m known. I can only be fully loved, if I am fully known. Churches are often, unfortunately, places where people are even more likely to hide because we all raise the standard of

righteousness and good living. So instead of church being the first place we get real, it becomes the last place because we want everybody to think well of us.

**Ron:** I think that's very true in our own homes. Let's just bring it down to the smallest unit. Getting real at church is one thing. Getting real with my wife is a totally different endeavor. Getting real with Rick, your best buddy, is one thing. Laying it out for your spouse—

You know, I think this goes in a lot of directions. I've confessed sin and admitted things and apologized to my kids through the years. Far more have I done that than I would ever want to admit to anybody. But it's the truth. I blow it. I make mistakes. Just because I work in the field of marriage and family ministry doesn't mean I'm a perfect dad. That the most ludicrous thing in the world.

Yet, to do that means that I think I have more influence with my children because of that, because they see that humility. Because they do have the opportunity to offer me forgiveness and I think they move toward me. They feel safer because they know that I will be honest with them. I think a husband and wife relationship would work the same. It's just, we have to overcome that fear of being known.

**John:** This gets very deeply back to that issue of living an eternal kind of life now where I'm inviting Jesus to be present as we're talking all the time. Part of what that means is I will just be ruthlessly and chronically confronted with the need to die to my own ego and my own insistence on getting my way.

A very small example but mostly these patterns are built on small moments—they get addressed or ignored. We're in a conversation with another couple and Nancy mentions she has a meeting on Saturday night. In my mind, I immediately had this thought, "I didn't know you had a meeting on Saturday night. Why didn't you tell me that before?" I had these plans so I feel a little rejected. I feel a little disappointed. Then I withdraw a little bit. I don't touch her as much. I look at these other people more.

I don't even think about this. This is just so habitual and reflexive. Then I become aware of I'm just getting a little cold and a little pouty and I need to reconnect with her. I need to let her know this is what I felt. Maybe I think she should have told me and she didn't. So, I have to go into an area that might involve some conflict. I know for sure that I handled it badly. It's embarrassing because it's so childish.

That kind of thing happens. It happens most often with our spouses and with our children. Very often, we simply develop the habit of not dealing with it. We withdraw. We pout. Partly requires humility. Partly requires courage. Very often Nancy might do or say something that hurts me or that I'm angry about, and I'll say to myself, "Well I don't need to talk about that. I can be a bigger person. I can just be a loving person." I'm really not being loving. I'm just afraid to wade into conflict.

I think ego is a big problem. I think fear is just as big. Often in churches, in church life, we are guilty of terminal niceness, where we give ourselves credit for not going into conflict because we're being loving, but really we're just afraid.

**Ron:** You've been listening to my conversation with John Ortberg. I'm Ron Deal and this is *FamilyLife Blended*.

It was a good conversation with John. He's got a little more to add in just a minute. But first, we talked about the importance of walking around day to day with an awareness that eternity is now and God is moving in and through and around my life. One way we can live that is simply talking to God repeatedly throughout our day. Some call it prayer. For sure, it's dialogue with Him and it orients you to His presence, makes you mindful of what eternity wants.

For example, you walk into a room and one of your family members is there. You could just fire off a little bullet prayer to God and just say, "Lord, what would You like for me to be mindful of in this moment? What could I do to encourage this person that's right in front of me? What could I do that would be helpful to them at this point in their life?"

In that moment, get this, in that moment, you are ushering the kingdom of God into the world, into your life, into your family. It's bound to have significance because when the kingdom of God shows up, life moves in the right direction.

If you want to learn more about John's book, *Eternity Is Now in Session*, you can find information in the show notes. Check it out on the *FamilyLife Blended* page at [FamilyLife.com/podcasts](http://FamilyLife.com/podcasts). You can also visit [JohnOrtberg.com](http://JohnOrtberg.com).

I want you to know your feedback means a lot to us. Positive online reviews, wow, that's really appreciated as well.

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If you'd like to do that just go to FamilyLife.com and look for the links and you'll be able to find it. Be sure to visit us there at FamilyLife.com/Blended for articles and videos and resources for blended families, including my *Smart Stepfamily* series of books and curriculum for churches.

Now here's the rest of my conversation with John. We're talking about fear.

**John:** It's very interesting that that command "Don't be afraid" is the most common command in the Bible. Most often, it's paired with a promise or a statement of assurance, "Don't be afraid, for I am with you." The old 23rd Psalm that a lot of people know, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me."

**Ron:** There's that presence of that third party, an awareness that God is with us.

**John:** That's exactly right. If I do become aware of the fact that I am not alone, that He is with me, another very striking statement Dallas used to make is that part of the message of the Gospel is this world is a perfectly safe place for you to be.

Now, of course, that sounds ludicrous because terrible things happen in this world.

**Ron:** Right.

**John:** But actually, that's precisely what Jesus's friends came to understand. That's why Paul says, what can separate me from the love of God? Then he goes through these terrible things including death and pain and stuff. No, I am convinced that nothing can separate me. Ultimately, even though I can go through pain or difficulty, I am in God's hands and nothing can take me away from that. I am ultimately in the safety of God's power in God's presence and I don't have to be afraid.

Now the deal with fear is I can say that but I cannot make fear go away by an act of the will. Learning to be delivered from fear involves a life of training. Generally, what that means is a willingness to be afraid and do the right thing over and over and over and over and over again.

**Ron:** There's an old phrase, "Do the thing you fear and fear dies."

**John:** Yes.

**Ron:** Walking through the fear in spite of the fear. Doing what we're commanded to do. I think it comes down to obedience at that point. Like, we've got to obey in spite of the fear?

**John:** Yes, that's exactly right. I do believe that fear dies but fear dies generally a very slow death. [Laughter]

**Ron:** Yes. Good point.

**John:** The deeper the fear, the longer that it takes. Part of that journey is simply recognizing—it gets a deeper point around emotions—recognizing I am not my emotions. Emotions are very important. To be aware of them is very important, but to realize I am not this fear or this desire. I am a child of God with an eternal destiny with Him who lives in His hand. Therefore I can be aware of this fear, but not be dominated by it and can choose to seek to do the right thing in the midst of this fear.

Next time we'll hear from Linda Jacobs, the creator of DivorceCare for Kids. She's going to talk about some things that divorced parents can do to help their children.

**Linda:** Yes, I just wish I would've given more attention to my children during that time.

**Ron:** Okay.

**Linda:** I mean I did later. We did funny fun things. But probably for that first year, I don't even know what they did.

**Ron:** Yes.

**Linda:** I don't remember. It was just all I could do to get home from work and stomp up the stairs and lay down on my bed exhausted.

**Ron:** That's Linda Jacobs next time on FamilyLife Blended.

I'm Ron Deal. Thanks for listening. Thanks to our FamilyLife legacy partners for making this podcast possible. Our chief audio engineer is Keith Lynch. Bruce Goff is our producer. Our mastering engineer is Justin Adams. And theme music provided by Braden Deal.

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