

FamilyLife Blended®

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Season 1, Episode 8: Parenting After Divorce

Guest: Linda Ranson Jacobs

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Linda: If you are married and your husband died or your wife died, you would feel empathy for your children, you would hurt with them and when they cried, you might cry with them. But for some reason in divorce we don't feel that empathy with the child, maybe because many single parents are so angry that they can't pull out of that.

I mean there was probably six months to a year, I don't even know what my kids ate. I just existed. So I wished I had known then what I know now; I would have parented differently.

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

Every parent cares about their child's well-being. But how does divorce or being a single parent or married in a blended family affect parenting? How do you care well for your kids? What do your kids need from you? If you've ever been through a divorce, are married to someone who has, or if you're in a position to care for or minister to a child who has experienced parental divorce, stay with us for the answers to these questions.

My guest today, Linda Jacobs, developed and created the DivorceCare4Kids curriculum, DC4K it's called. She's a leading expert on children of divorce, children in stepfamilies, and kids with challenging behavior.

Her newest book is *The Single Parent: Confident and Successful*. And let me tell you, Linda has been there, done that. Linda was married. Had two kids. Then experienced divorce herself. She married again, gained two step children. Then her second husband died. Currently she's married to Bruce for sixteen years and has two stepchildren in that relationship. All together she and Bruce have 5 grandchildren and 5 step grandchildren.

Now Linda and Bruce live in the panhandle of Florida, which means they know all about hurricanes.

You work with kids in divorce. It's like being hit by a hurricane, right?

Linda: Yes.

Ron: Let's just ponder that for a minute. The winds blow, you batten down the hatches, you try to preserve everything you can. But it's a massive force that affects everything in your world, your life, your possessions, creates fear, hardship, pain, disrupts. I mean, it's there, right? Then when it passes, it leaves devastation, it leaves heartache. You've got clean up to do, restoration and trying to rebuild can take years. Am I hitting all the markers?

Linda: You are. I'm imagining the children in that environment when their personal things disappear and their personal things are so important to them. Maybe they have to move from house to house and they don't get to take everything with them that they want to take. They live in the middle of a hurricane for years.

Ron: Losing possessions. That seems like a little thing but it's not a little thing.

Linda: You know, Elizabeth Marquardt wrote a book called *Between Two Worlds* and this is one of the comments she makes in there, that children become possessive of their things because their things are what they attach themselves to. So where I might have been attached to my dad and he leaves, maybe Daddy gave me this teddy bear so I attach myself to that teddy bear because it was Daddy's or it smells like Daddy.

Ron: Representative of Dad.

Linda: Yes, and I have Daddy's golf ball and I will not let that golf ball out of my sight. Or I have Mom's scarf that has her perfume on it. There are just so many issues with their things.

This is amazing too--as they grow up, many adult children of divorce will have a nest around them all the time. Like their night stand might be all full of little tiny things or trinkets or maybe their coffee table or the end table next to where they sit on the couch has all those little things around them. They seem to never outgrow that need to have their things, their possessions around them.

Ron: Okay, I want to pause for just a minute because I'm just realizing that someone's listening to this and let's say they have been through that hurricane and they have seen their kids suffer and it's been hard for them. Even as we talk about some of these realities for children, don't parents sometimes feel guilty?

What should they do when they're listening to us for the next few minutes and they feel that guilt or that pain or that heartache come up?

Linda: Well they shouldn't feel guilty.

Ron: Okay.

Linda: I don't want them to feel guilty. I don't say these things to make people feel guilty. I want them to know what their children are going through. You know, when I was writing DivorceCare4Kids, when my husband left I was in complete shock. I had no idea that we were going to be getting a divorce.

When I was writing DivorceCare4Kids and it took me, you know, several months, I kept calling my daughter, she's in the Air Force in England, I'd say, "Julie, I'm so sorry, blah, blah, blah, blah." So one day I call her and I said, "Julie, I was just doing this research, and I'm so sorry." And she goes, "Mother, get over yourself. We are fine." But I was carrying a lot of unnecessary guilt, which I think a lot of us do that.

Ron: Yes, so it would be understandable for someone listening to feel some of that, but you're saying that's not the point, that's not what we're doing. We're trying to move your hearts closer to your child in understanding, in empathy.

Linda: Right. Exactly.

Ron: I think one of the things we know about working with kids and helping kids and when I say kids, I'm saying young kids, I'm thinking teenagers, and I'm thinking adult kids, right, even when the divorce occurs with them as adults. Moving toward their heart with empathy is a great way of saying, "I'm here, I'm with you, you are not alone, I hear you." That doesn't fix their pain, right?

Linda: But you're walking in their shoes with them and that's the important thing. You know as we get through our divorce, we heal, and then remarry; our minds shift to that remarriage. But our kids are still hurting and so we still need to remember and walk with them through several issues as they mature too.

They just need to know that you still care. Because one person has left, even if you have joint custody and you're 50/50, still their family, there's been a death of their family. That's the whole issue is there's a death of their family and they have to grieve.

So if you are married and your husband died or your wife died, you would feel empathy for your children, you would hurt with them and when they cried, you might cry with them. But for some reason in divorce we don't feel that empathy with the child, maybe because many single parents are so angry that they can't pull out of that.

I mean there was probably six months to a year, I don't even know what my kids ate. I just existed.

Ron: Yes.

Linda: So I wished I had known then what I know now. I would have parented differently. But it is what it is so you keep moving forward.

Ron: That's such a good image. It's not that you don't care, it's that you're captured into your own experience of the divorce and the pain of that so it's hard to tune in with your children.

Linda: Right. When there's a death you're finished with that person. I don't mean to sound cruel about it, but that person's gone. But when there's a divorce you're dealing with lawyers, you're dealing with counselors, you're dealing with mediation or you're dealing with so many other things outside your family.

Ron: That keep churning up all the pain and keep making it really hard for you--yes. What's one thing, before we move on, what's one thing you wish you would've done when you were going through your divorce to stay in tune with your kids?

Linda: I just wish I would have given more attention to my children during that time.

Ron: Ah, 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: I totally agree that it's understandable that people would get sad and depressed even and non-functioning in many ways. I get that as a Dad who has lost a child. My wife and I often say after our son Connor died at the age of twelve that we just stopped being parents for two years for our other two boys. I get that.

You're just in a fog and yet you're saying if you can kind of pull yourself out of that and try to move toward your kids, a little time, a little attention, that goes a long way.

I want to go back to this hurricane metaphor. Things have been splintered. I remember the pictures after the hurricane in the panhandle in Florida and just this devastation. The homes are splintered everywhere. So you're saying a kid is in that. What if the hurricane passes through and a child finds himself all alone? That just adds to the trauma of the experience.

Linda: Right. Right.

Ron: How valuable it is that somebody is there holding them, with them, close to them.

Linda: Right.

Ron: They need that.

Linda: They need that. I think that's where the church can step in, in families of divorce. They can step in and help mentor those families, help mentor those children. Just be there for those children. Just like, in my area everybody's rushing down to Panama City to take food and take toys and things to the kids because they're concerned about the children.

Yet we don't do that when there's a divorce in the family. How many divorced families do you know that there was a casserole meal brought in after the person left?

Ron: And if there is one, you may get a week's worth or a little bit of time and attention and then it passes.

Linda: Then it goes, that's right.

Ron: Then you're on your own. That's certainly going to be true for people post-hurricane in a real life hurricane situation. There's a lot of attention in the beginning and then that fades over time. But you're right, people need ongoing continued support. We, the church, can and should be involved in that.

So let's go back a little bit more; there's this fracturing, this hurricane that came through. It's scary. We don't know what now to do. And you're a fifteen year old, or you're a twenty year old, or you're a five year old, and your parents are in different places, you don't know what it means. How are you trying to make sense of this as a child and how can a parent step into that?

Linda: The parent that's living with them, is that what you mean?

Ron: Yes.

Linda: I tell people, "You need to study your children. You need to form a relationship with your children." And they go, "I have a relationship, I'm the mother, I'm the dad." No, you have a different kind of relationship now because when your other parent was here you supported each other.

So little Johnny wanted to do something, so he asked Dad and his dad said, "Go ask Mom." He asks Mom. You know we've all, as little kids we were all caught in the middle of that.

It's kind of funny now, but you know then when there's no other parent in your home you parent differently. Because you have to fill in *all* the roles now. We have to form a new relationship with our children.

That means we've got to observe our children and very few parents observe their children after a divorce. So we need to observe them, we need to--I say don't question your child when they came back from the other parent's but just say something like, "So did you have a good weekend? Here's what I did." Just form a conversation, but not to question them, but as you talk things will come out and you'll find out what they did and how they felt, and what was going on.

Ron: Connecting into that means you're not alone, I'm here with you, and we're getting through this together.

Linda: Right. Exactly.

Ron: You used an analogy when you spoke at our Summit on Stepfamily Ministry, you said, "It's kind of like an iceberg, what you see above the surface, the externals of a child going through parental divorce is one thing, but under the surface is a whole lot more." You talked about some big emotions there. I remember I took some notes: clingy, dependent, fearful, anxious, regression. Do you mind just talking around a few of those for us?

Linda: Sure, I'd be glad to. So we have these children, we have two or three children. If each of them are like an iceberg, and they each have different emotions below the surface that we don't see or we maybe don't even know about, and you have them in one room in the house; here we have these big icebergs bumping into each other, so we have a constant war.

But there are a lot of things that are going on under the surface. I say under the skin in a child. So many children are clingy, kids who weren't even clingy before. At the conference I told about going to the Tulsa State Fair with my eight- and twelve-year-old kids, and them just attaching themselves. They were just like glued to me. I don't know if it was the crowds. My son said, "I'm afraid I'm going to lose you and I can't find you."

So the issue of safety is huge in these kids, and the issue of security. You can keep telling them, "You're safe and I'm here for you," but you have to keep telling them that over and over, year after year.

Ron: Then you've got to back it up.

Linda: You've got to back it up.

Ron: Because if you say, "I'm here for you," but then you're not, when it's your turn for the weekend or whatever.

Linda: Right. So the clinginess that goes on for quite a while with some of the kids. Some kids are dependent. Where they were independent before, now they have to have

your help; "Help me brush my teeth. Help me comb my hair." "You've been doing this yourself for years." "I know, but Mom, I need you to help me brush my hair."

And then little boys, they want you to help pick out their clothes or whatever. It's just some phases, I hate to say stages, it's more like phases that they're going through and they will come back and forth and maybe in two or three years they might be clingy again for a while.

And of course there's sadness and there's anger and just every emotion. One emotion that surprised me was being embarrassed. These children--especially at church--my kids and others I've known are embarrassed that their parents are separating or that their parents are divorced.

Ron: That they have an awareness of how other people view that.

Linda: I don't know if they have an awareness or if they're imagining it. I haven't figured that out yet. But there's definitely some feeling there about being embarrassed. Like my daughter; she's maybe 13 or 14 and she said, "You know, Mom, what I notice at church? The preacher only preaches on homes that have two parents. We don't fit on those Sunday mornings."

I'm under a wonderful pastor right now and he's always, forever, saying, "Now whatever kind of family you're in, a single-parent family, widowed family, blended family," he's always including all these type families.

Ron: Now there's a whole lot more we could talk about in terms of the immediate impact of a divorce on a child in the immediate aftermath. Much like with a hurricane and it blows through and there's just destruction.

Then everybody's just trying to pick up the pieces and look around and go, "What now do we do and how do we move forward? Are we going to move back to where we were or are we going to another part of the United States where it's safe?" Safety keeps coming up over and over.

When the winds have blown that hard, been that devastating, wouldn't you think people in the path of a hurricane, the next time the wind just picks up a little bit, even though that's a normal thing to have happen, that it might just remind them?

Linda: It might.

Ron: I think that's human nature and we get hypersensitive to, "Oh no, is it happening again?" Maybe that's why that clingy stuff happens with kids, like, "I don't want to lose you now, I don't want to lose another thing." So they do that. Let me ask a question, okay? That's short term; what's long term? What do we know about children, divorce, and the long-term impact?

Linda: Well we know from a study that Judith Wallerstein, a psychologist in Southern California, did—[she] wrote several books. The last one was, *What About the Kids?* If you want to know anything about children in divorce you need to read that book. But she's says it takes children--most children, I mean we're talking typical average, not individual children--most children, ten years to process the grief over the death of the family.

Many people say, "Well they should be over it by now, that was two years ago." Well, this is the death of their family for goodness sakes. *Nothing is ever* the same again for these kids. In order to say, "Hi Daddy," I have to say, "Goodbye Mommy. I'll see you later. Hi Dad." This is all within seconds this is taking place.

So their lives are forever changed. So then in the long term as they grow, mature, and start dating and getting married they're thinking, "I don't know how to do a marriage because my parent's marriage split up, so what do I know about being in a marriage?" Which is why a lot of adult children today tell us they don't get married, they cohabit.

Ron: They cohabit. They're not sure if it can last and if it can be there for them.

Linda: Right.

Ron: So that impact is very significant. Just the "Hi Dad, Goodbye Mom" is "I'm split." I've heard some children of divorce talk about feeling split in terms of their identity. Like, you know, I'm half dad, half mom. That's part of who I am. Who I am, and when they're together, I feel whole being in their presence and that's as life should be. But when they're not, like, which part of me is with you, which part of me is over there? Do you think there's a sense of again feeling split, just even over time?

Linda: I think there is with a lot of children. Some do well, but a lot of children it's like, "I want to be like my dad, I want to be like my mom. I am half my dad, I am half my mom." A lot of children are proud of their roots. That's why we have so many people going on the different "learn about your ancestry" type thing. It's just something we want to know, about our ancestors. Here they are, they feel split.

Now some adult children will tell you that they don't when they're in the room with both parents. It's not an occasion that happens a lot, it may be once a year; every two or three years they have to be in the same room with both parents. They don't know who they are. "I don't know if I'm like my mom or my dad. I don't know who I am." They're an adult but they still don't know who they are.

Ron: I think part of it for some kids is if they know there's some ongoing bitterness and hostility between their parents, "I don't know how to play this moment in such a way that keeps peace for them, that doesn't antagonize them. So who do I have to be to help the two of you be in the same room together?" Every one of those questions makes me

realize that there's a second guessing of their own identity and who they are as it relates to their parents. I think that is one of the hidden impacts that parents often don't quite realize.

Linda: They don't know what to do with it even if they do realize. You know saying things like, "Oh you're just like your dad," is very exasperating for the child, because yes, I want to be like my dad. But if you said something like, "Wow, you know your dad was so handsome when he was your age and you look so much like him." And you build him up, "Your dad was so smart. I'm not that smart, but you got my heart. You got your dad's smarts, you got my heart," that type thing.

As parents as we go along, being bitter about that other person, we married that other person for some reason. They had some good attributes when we married them, evidently. So I think we do need to build our children up in what they are like about their dad. I think that's just really important.

Ron: Right, don't blow more winds of fracturing into their heart and life. Put that to rest, let that be something in the past. Comment on positive things about the other parent and the part in your kid that you see that you enjoy that's like that. That helps them kind of settle and rest into who they are.

Linda: Right.

Ron: I think if they feel splintered then they don't know even how to adopt our faith. If they feel like they can't quite find who they are, they're always having to figure out who they are in light of who their parents are, then how do I internalize faith to be something that's mine? My parents both are believers perhaps, but how do I make that me? There are some real challenges in that.

Linda: Oh my goodness, that's so important. After divorce you might have a child that goes to this denomination for two weeks and then this denomination for two weeks and the kid goes, "See I'm going over here, do I kneel? Do I raise my hands when I sing? Do I wear shorts or do I have to wear long pants over here? Do I have to--" you know. Thankfully both the parents are taking them to church.

Ron: Yes.

Linda: That's better than when one parent sits out in the forest, and says, "We can worship God out here so we don't need to go to church," which happens a lot too. But those are important things for children.

Ron: You know, it seems to me that kids are constantly monitoring their parents after a divorce. What's going on with Dad? How's he feeling? How's he feeling about me? How's he feeling about Mom? Is he okay? Is he falling apart? Is he depressed? Is he functioning well? Do I not have to worry about Dad or do I have to worry about Dad?

Mom. Do I have to worry about Mom? Do I not have to worry about Mom? How's she feeling about me? How's she feeling about Dad? How's she feeling about-- They are constantly monitoring the emotional climate of their parents' world.

I think that moves children to a natural place of caretaking for their parents, yes?

Linda: Yes, it does and that's--It's supposed to be the other way around. The parents are supposed to be taking care of the children.

Ron: Right.

Linda: But the children are becoming 'adultized' you might say, or something like that so now they're having to be the caretaker.

Ron: Okay, so I want to say something that kind of weighs heavy on my heart even as it comes off my lips. All right, so help me with this. It seems to me in that situation that we would invite our listener who is a single parent or a divorced parent, maybe you're already remarried, maybe you're still single; in either case you've got to take care of you so that your kids don't have to take care of you.

How do they do that? How do they care for themselves so that they don't inadvertently put that off on their child?

Linda: Well I think you know, I work for the organization that created DivorceCare, so whether you go through DivorceCare or something else, I think every parent should go through some type of group support program, so they have a place to talk about what's going on in their lives.

I tell people going through divorce, single parent, or even widowed, you find one or two people to talk to and that's all you talk to. The whole world doesn't need to know all about your personal life.

The other thing is the more you talk about it, many times it becomes that loop in your brain and you say "he did this and then he did this" and it gets worse and worse and worse. Then you kind of exaggerate the story a little bit and you're looping and looping through, which a lot of it is not really true. It's just what you're assuming to be true. So if you find somebody to talk to, or if you go to DivorceCare or you go to a church program or some type of group support, that's the place that you learn to take care of yourself.

When you take care of yourself then you can begin to take care of your child. But as long as you're healing, you're like an invalid emotionally; you can't take care of your kids.

Ron: Like an invalid. Oh that's such an image. Another word, Elizabeth Marquardt, in her book *Between Two Worlds*, talks about how she learned in her survey of kids that have been through a parental divorce, is that I think it was less than one third of them ever had anybody in their church reach out to them.

If we're trying to help adults, single parents or maybe in a blended family but you went through a divorce, if we're trying to help them be okay so that they can care for their kids, the church needs to be involved in that.

Linda: Absolutely.

Ron: Then we can be in a continuing arm of care for the children. But if we don't ever make contact, we've got nothing to offer.

Linda: That's right. I had been divorced I think at least two years and a lady from my church called and she said, "I want to bring you dinner tonight." I was like, "Whyyy?"

[Laughter]

She said, "Well, you know you're divorced and I never did anything for you, and if your husband had died I'd have been everywhere and done everything for you, but the Lord just laid it on my heart this morning that I need to bring you dinner tonight." I was like, "Well okay, I guess."

So we drive up to our house, we were driving up to the house and my son goes, "Why is Mrs. Harmon's car here?" I said, "She's bringing us dinner tonight." And he goes, "Whyyy?"

Ron: [Laughs] The same thing you said.

Linda: "Well because when your dad left, she felt bad that she never helped us out." And he goes, "Well isn't that nice!" It really impressed him that someone would think from the church to do something for us.

Ron: The message there of course is, "We love you. We care for you. God loves you and cares for you." We represent the Gospel when we put hands and feet to it, so that's something everybody can do. Everybody can do that.

Linda: I have another short little story about my son. We were in this church and they said, "Well, now next Sunday is the Father/Son fishing trip." Or next weekend. We had just joined that church. My heart just fell. Brian wasn't there, he was with his dad and I was like, "Oh no, how am I going to address this?"

So after church this guy came up and goes, "Is Brian going to be coming to the Father/Son fishing trip?" And I said, "Well I guess you didn't know his father's gone." He

goes, "Oh I know that. I guess you don't know that I have daughters only and I need a son that weekend. So will you call Brian tonight and ask him?"

So he called Brian and Brian goes, "Well, I don't know. I don't have a tent." "Oh you do?" "Well I don't have any fishing gear, my dad took it all." "Oh, you have some? Well I guess I can go."

So I took him up on Friday night and he's real apprehensive. I'm driving away and he's standing off to the side and I'm going, "God, am I doing the right thing, just putting him out here? He's just standing off to the side. Please let somebody see him."

So we go all Friday night and Saturday, and Saturday night comes and I hear a car in the driveway, and then I hear this door open and he comes running in and he goes, "Mom, Mom! I had such a good time. You just won't believe it, I got to fish all night long and I got to camp. And you know what? They invited me to sit around the campfire and they gave me coffee to drink."

[Laughter]

I'm a Mom that doesn't drink coffee. That was a big deal to him. That one weekend did so much for him in being accepted into that church and it was just a simple fishing trip was all it was, but it was huge for him.

Ron: Yes, that is awesome. Okay let's fast forward a little bit. Because now we're thinking kids, divorce, long term, somebody--Mom, Dad--is getting married. Forming a blended family. Does anything with the new family and the adjustments related to that intersect with the past experience of divorce?

Linda: Absolutely, because a child still has the death of their family. They're still hurting. Remember ten years to process the divorce, process the death of the family. So maybe you've been divorced five years and you're healing and you're doing well and you've dated somebody for quite a while and now you're ready to get married. But the child is still suffering.

Ron: There's still stuff going on under the surface.

Linda: Right, like that iceberg.

Ron: And we know loss reminds you of loss. So wow, Mom's just not home as much anymore; she goes out on these dates. She seems to be texting this guy and kind of engaged with who this person is, and I can't always get her attention like I used to. So that's a little loss moment that reminds us, it reminds a child of loss in the past.

That taps into the fear, "Oh no. Is this another hurricane? Is this what we've got going on? How's this going to impact me? I don't--I know it's my mom and me and we get

along great, but is that now changing?" So it's important for people to remember that those things will intersect in a child's heart.

Doesn't mean--I'm always quick to say this--it doesn't mean you should stop dating or you should never get married or if you're already married that you should not have gotten married. Doesn't mean any of that. But it does mean that your experience of moving forward might not be experienced the same by your child.

So what kind of advice, what kind of words would you offer to somebody who is perhaps in the dating phase or maybe already married, just in terms of connecting into that experience in their kid?

Linda: I think we always have to be truthful with children, truthful on their developmental level. So if we're starting to date we just need to say, "I have a special new friend that I like. I'm not ready to introduce you yet, but one of these days I'm going to introduce you to my new friend."

And you go slow. You go through holidays and birthdays. You go through a year of doing different things together. You know what, children know, they know what's going on.

I had a Dad one time, he goes, "I want you to talk to my second grade son." The son lived with the Dad, didn't see the Mom much. "There's something going on with him." I said, "Are you dating?" He goes, "Yeah, but my son doesn't know." I said, "Are you kidding? I knew when you walked in the door you were dating. You're like a seventeen year old." He said, "No, he doesn't know at all."

He brings the son in and I said, "So what's going on in your life?" and he goes, "Well my dad's dating. He doesn't want me to know that he's dating, but I know he's dating." I said, "Well do you know who he's dating?" He said, "Yeah, I do know who he's dating." I was like, "Well, who's he dating?"

I didn't know who he was dating but the kid knew. Kid knew all about this relationship. "So what makes you think your dad is dating?" "Oh man, he's just so happy, he's laughing all the time and whenever I'm not there he thinks I don't see him calling or texting on his phone."

The kids know. They always know. So we have to be truthful with them. Don't hide your life from them all the time.

Ron: I think that's very important that you say that. What's that old phrase, "Kids are very good observers of their environment, but they're poor interpreters of their environment." They don't always know what it means or what it adds up to. And, by the way, they will make up a story if they don't know what it means, and they will tell

themselves, “Oh, this is what it means.” And that may be on target, that may be off target, but they know it. They have a sense of what’s going on with us.

Linda: Especially children of divorce. Many times they become very intuitive. They read their parents’ body language very well.

Ron: That can serve them well later in the workplace when they grow up, right?

Linda: Right.

Ron: There’s some independence that comes from being a child of divorce, and some different things that actually build some strength into children. But it always has a little bit of a down side too. Like, “I don’t know how to invest in relationships because I tend to hold back.” Or, “My intuition gets me in trouble sometimes.”

Linda: Yes.

Ron: So interesting. So being truthful with kids, being honest with them, engaging them around this new potential family and moving forward and recognizing--I think just this thought; if you as a parent just held onto this thought: *What brings happiness to my heart and soul*, new marriage, new family, whatever, *could be cause for alarm in my child*, in the sense that the winds are blowing again. Is there a storm coming? What does this mean for me?

Just a sensitivity to that idea, I think helps adults, parents move a little slower into the future. Helps them check in with their kid.

Linda: That’s the important thing, check in with their kid and talking to their child. You know when you fall in love you’re just, it’s all about that other person and you have to--

Ron: Really?

[Laughter]

Linda: Well I hope so anyway.

Ron: Yes.

Linda: But you just have to step back. You are responsible for other people, your children, one, two, or three, whatever you have, four. You’re responsible, so you’ve got to keep checking in. You’re not 15, 16, 17, you know, falling in love as a teenager. You’re an adult with children falling in love.

Ron: I’ve got to ask you something. What brought you into ministering to single-parent families and families in transition?

Linda: Well, I was running a childcare in Oklahoma and it was a high-quality program. We took a lot of children with diagnosed behavior disorders. We worked with a lot of counselors and things.

When my husband left, I looked around one day and I was like, “Oh my goodness. Almost all of these children with out-of-control behaviors that are diagnosed, going to therapists or a counselor, are children from single-parent homes.”

At the time I was looking for something to help me with my own children. There was just nothing out there in the mid-eighties. So I just started journaling, collecting thoughts. In 1988, I was asked to do a workshop for a group called Friends of Early Education of Tulsa, Oklahoma. I thought, there’ll probably be about 25, maybe 30 people at this conference. The workshop was called *Shattered Lives, Broken Dreams, or Broken Dreams, Shattered Lives* or something like that, I don’t remember right now. So I thought about 30 people.

So I’m at the Civic Center in Tulsa, and I’m going up the stairs and there’s all these people spilling out of this room and I thought, “I wonder what workshop that is.” As I walk by, it’s my room. People were so hungry. Nobody was ever talking about this.

So the fire marshal came up and ran a bunch of people out. He allowed me to have 80 people in that room. I had 25 handouts, but 80 people in the room.

From that time on, the next year I presented that same one-hour workshop 26 times around the state of Oklahoma. That’s what led me into really getting into this and helping people understand. I just could see so many hurting children.

Today if I just close my eyes, I just see all these children’s faces in front of me, that have been hurting, ones that we lost along the way, the ones that we helped along the way. So that I guess just being a single parent myself and loving children--I’ve always loved children, I’ve always had a natural knack to work with children. So that’s what led me into it and the Lord hasn’t let go of it yet.

Ron: Well we appreciate you doing that very much. I’ve got to ask you, there’s a bat story?

Linda: Oh no. [Laughs]

Ron: Can you tell one on yourself?

Linda: Oh yes. How many do you want? So when I was starting to write a book about single parenting, I said to my daughter, “You know, Julie, I’m going to have to tell these stories about you.” She said, “Oh Mother, you know you have to change names to protect the innocent.” I said, “But you aren’t innocent. And that’s why I’m going to be

writing with your name on it.” She said, “Well if you tell a story about me you have to tell the bat story and if you don’t, then I’m going to.” So--

Ron: You’ve been listening to my conversation with Linda Jacobs. I’m Ron Deal and this is FamilyLife Blended®.

Linda’s going to tell us that bat story in just a minute. Our conversation about single-parent families reminded me of an email we received here at FamilyLife.

It’s from a single mom who appreciated us talking about the needs of complex families. She said, “I show up at church every Sunday and not one couple or family ever says to me, ‘Would you like to sit with us? Would you like to watch the football game at our house? Would you like to go to lunch with us?’ While my child is in Sunday School, I sit by myself week after week. I even invite families to my home on a regular basis and sometimes they show up. But they never reciprocate.”

Okay, sometimes when we say “the church” we’re talking about the corporate structure or the pastoral team, but the church is us. So I want to invite you to look for an opportunity within the next week to encourage or connect with a single parent.

We don’t need to have a committee meeting or start a ministry. We just need to show kindness to a single parent. I suspect many of you listening to this podcast have been there, done that. You know how hard that road is. So you probably already have a soft spot in your heart. Let’s put it to work.

If you would like more information about Linda, you can find it in our show notes. Check it out at the FamilyLife Blended® page at FamilyLife.com/podcasts.

I do want you to know that we enjoy hearing from you. Your feedback means a lot to us. Positive online reviews, well, those are really appreciated as well.

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You can also learn about our other podcasts on the FamilyLife Podcast Network. And if you like what you’re hearing, please help us spread the word. Our marketing department is, well, it’s you. So think of a couple of friends or family members or a pastor you could share this podcast with. Or maybe post something online about FamilyLife Blended® podcast. We would appreciate it.

Again, Linda’s latest book is *The Single Parent: Confident and Successful*. It’s available wherever books are sold. I highly recommend the DivorceCare4Kids video curriculum that Linda helped put together. It’s available at DC4K.org.

You know, Linda also spoke at the 2018 Summit on Stepfamily Ministry, an event that our ministry puts on every year. You can get access to Linda's session and every session through our All-Access Digital Pass. I think it's just \$25, if you can believe that.

Better yet, here's another idea: you can join us for the next Summit on Stepfamily Ministry. It will be October 24 and 25, 2019, in Chesapeake, Virginia. The Summit is a two-day, ministry-equipping event for lay couples, pastors, children's ministry leaders, anybody who wants to learn anything about stepfamily ministry.

If you're new to stepfamily ministry, you're going to learn all the basics. And if you've already got a ministry up and running, we're going to try to help you network with others, learn about the latest resources, and find encouragement as a leader. You can learn all about that at SummitonStepfamilies.com.

Please remember we have tons of articles just waiting for you to read, videos to watch, resources you can learn about, *The Smart Stepfamily* series of books and curriculum that's designed for churches. All of that is available at our website: FamilyLife.com/Blended.

Now, here's that bat story from Linda:

Linda: The bat story is, I had a really busy day one time at work. I had gone in early because our cook was sick. Everything went wrong that day. Licensing came that day. I didn't have a substitute. There was no milk. It was just one thing after the other, just little things that kept happening.

So I stumble home, it was like, I had gone to work at six o'clock and it was seven o'clock that night. I was exhausted. The kids had already, you know they were teenagers by this time, they'd already eaten and everything so I go in and I put something in the dryer. Well our dryer door was broken, so my son discovered if we jammed a bat in it, it would stay closed.

So I jammed the bat in there, turned around and walked off and the bat fell. This--I didn't need this, this had been a bad day. So I slam that door shut and I jam that bat in there and I stood there and it stayed in until my foot crossed the threshold into the kitchen and the bat fell out.

I'm so frustrated. I--after several times--I grab that bat, I start beating that dryer with that bat. My kids come running in, "Mom, Mom what's wrong?" And Julie starts going, "Woah, woah, Brian back up, get out of the way, better the bat, better the dryer than us." They're giggling which made me start giggling, but it was just one of those moments I truly lost it. I just beat the fire out of that dryer. The bat still didn't stay in the door but I felt better.

[Laughter]

Ron: Yes, I imagine it felt really good to beat up that dryer.

Linda: Julie said--I don't remember this part--she said, "You came and sat down on the couch and you went, '[Sighs] I feel so much better now.'"

[Laughter]

Ron: Take away for our listener: everybody has a bad day. It's all right, you can live and breathe, and get up and go again.

Next time we'll hear from Randy and Gayla Grace about StepParenting with Grace.

Gayla: So now, not only did I take Jamie through a divorce, now we have gone into this remarriage and she's struggling to unite with a stepdad and step-siblings that she didn't have a choice about coming into a family like this. So then there was some guilt and yes, definitely being pulled on my heart that what am I doing to my kids?

Ron: Randy and Gayla Grace, 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, producer. Our mastering engineer, Justin Adams. Theme music provided by Braden Deal.

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