

# FamilyLife Blended®

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## Season 1, Episode 10: A Battle for Your Child and a Fight for Your Marriage

Guest: Mike and Kim Anderson

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**Kim:** I had a five-year-old daughter going in, like I said. She really adored Mike. They had a great connection and things were going really well there. But of course, the night before the wedding, she pulls me aside and says, “I don’t want you to marry Mike.” [Laughter] I’m like blindsided. “What’s going on here?”

**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.

What would you do if your child came up to you the night before the wedding and said, “Mom, don’t get married to this guy.” Well, you’ll hear how Mike and Kim Anderson handled that in just a few minutes.

Mike and Kim Anderson are the founders of Mike and Kim Coaching and co-creators of two online courses, *Step Families That Work* and *Step Families That Make It*.

Mike grew up in a challenging stepfamily and then married Kim in 2001, forming their own stepfamily. He’s a certified life coach and together Mike and Kim have been coaching and supporting step couples for over a decade.

But before they ever got married and started helping others, they came to my stepfamily conference. It was just one week before they married.

**Kim:** The weekend before.

**Mike:** The week before, that’s right.

**Ron:** Was that an okay thing or not? What was the climate like for you when you got there? [Laughter]

**Kim:** I was having a bit of anxiety because there was a lot of last-minute details to take care of for our wedding. But Mike was pretty insistent that we’re going to be there, we’re going, we’re showing up. I went kicking and screaming I guess you could say.

**Mike:** Yes.

**Kim:** But open to what you had for us. I'm so glad we went.

**Ron:** Do you mind if I ask? Well, I'm glad you were. Do you mind if I ask, "kicking and screaming," what was that about?

**Kim:** I didn't grow up in a blended family dynamic. I had a five-year-old daughter. I was a single Mom. But I kind of thought, "You know, this is going to be easy. You know, we're in love, what could go wrong? It's all good."

I was pretty naive honestly, and when, after listening to you talk, I think I picked my jaw up off the ground. I was just like, "Whoa, there are a lot of things that I haven't considered." Good things that I needed to consider but some stuff that I kind of had the blinders on.

**Mike:** Yes, I don't think Kim was quite ready to sacrifice two days of possible wedding planning and getting everything done and all that. Because we didn't hire a wedding planner.

**Kim:** No, I was doing it all on my own.

**Mike:** We were doing it all ourselves so I don't think she was ready to sacrifice that. But we were in very different places. I grew up--I was born into a stepfamily. Mom had two kids. Their dad left, met my dad, had me. Then my mom passed away when I was a year old. About seven years later, my dad remarried and my stepmom brought two kids of her own.

We were really dysfunctional. We had a lot of challenges that were rooted in all kinds of different dynamics. Here I'm falling in love with this woman who has a daughter and I'm going, "I don't know if I want to form another stepfamily."

**Kim:** He was terrified.

**Mike:** I was, yes. That's the word we used is terrified to form another stepfamily because I didn't want to create, recreate that dysfunction that we lived in as kids. For me, it was a no brainer and we didn't have a choice. [Laughter] We heard about this event and I said, "We have to go learn some things because I just can't walk into this marriage thinking that we may have to relive that past." I wasn't going to do that.

**Ron:** That's what you did. You didn't want to repeat the past.

**Mike:** I didn't want to repeat the past. I said, "We're going to go get this help." So we did and it was incredible and it kicked off a journey for us, not only in our *own* marriage, but now at this stage in our journey being able to invest in other couples.

**Ron:** Well, I have to say when I listen to you guys talk, it's a real honor for me to go to churches and speak on stepfamilies and stepfamily relationships. I really enjoy that and still continue to do that even today. Yet I'm always a little mindful that there are people there who receive it in very different seasons of life and in different ways. For both of you—I mean, you were there like insisting, "We're going to do this because I don't want to repeat the past."

**Mike:** Right.

**Ron:** Fear was driving your decision to be there.

**Mike:** Absolutely.

**Ron:** You're annoyed and irritated. [Laughter]

**Kim:** A bit, yes.

**Ron:** Yet, willing to go.

**Mike:** But I've never annoyed her since then, Ron. [Laughter]

**Ron:** Wow! That's fantastic!

**Mike:** Clearly, that is not entirely true. [Laughter]

**Ron:** Kim, but you were there but you heard things and it impacted you and it made you think.

**Kim:** Yes. The interesting thing is we went in in different places and we also came out of that seminar in different places. I was in a place of, "Wow, we need to learn more." We just immediately set out getting your curriculum, leading groups, and just learning more, helping other couples along the way, and just journeying with other stepfamilies. Mike came out of it with a lot and he can share about this, but a lot of reflection about his family of origin who he had been estranged from for eight years at that point.

**Mike:** Yes, the way I describe it is that the weeks coming out of that experience, you didn't offer me excuses for why my childhood was the way it was, but what you offered me was explanations.

When I was able to understand the position that my dad and my stepmom were in and the challenges that come with that, then compound that with *their* family history and *their* challenges from their childhood and all those ghosts from the past coming back into play for them, I started to realize, my parents, maybe they just did the best they could.

It wasn't perfect and there were certainly some inexcusable things that happened. However, it went a long way for me being able to forgive both my dad and my stepmom. After we were married about a year and it was about eight or nine years of estrangement, we were actually able to reconcile.

**Kim:** —reconcile.

**Ron:** Wow! Okay, we've got to unpack that because that's really significant. On the one hand, hearing about stepfamilies gave you some perspective on your own childhood, developed some compassion and empathy, it sounds like, for your dad and stepmom.

**Kim:** Oh, yes.

**Mike:** Yes.

**Ron:** That opened your heart toward them in a way that it had been closed.

**Mike:** Yes, absolutely. I wanted nothing. They didn't know that I had been married. They didn't know anything about my life, because I didn't want them to be a part of it. I didn't invite them into that. I think it really struck me about a year into marriage, one of the things that struck me is, "What happens if I get the call someday that something happened to Dad and I never even at least tried?"

I had to hold some really strong boundaries. It was—our home was abusive. My stepmom had anger problems. Dad was just not equipped to stand in the gap, and so he tended to shrink into the background and we weren't protected. I had to hold some strong boundaries still. So I just started with a letter. I didn't give my phone number. I gave a return address thinking that I'm probably never going to hear but at least I tried.

Then it was a month, maybe six weeks later, a letter showed back up. We were kind of pen pals for a little while. [Laughter]

**Ron:** That's neat.

**Mike:** Then that finally was, "Here's my phone number." Then it just kind of kept going from there.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Ron:** Wow!

**Mike:** Then about ten years ago, my stepmother passed away. Now we're dealing with adult stepfamily stuff too because now my dad's remarried again after losing two spouses to death now. He's remarried again and my new stepmom has three kids of her own. My dad has now seven stepkids and me.

**Kim:** —and one biological.

**Mike:** It's a very interesting dynamic.

**Ron:** Yes, wow! I just want to encourage the listener. There may be somebody who's going, "Yes, you know I've got that estranged relationship." It's interesting how when you develop compassion for people doing the best that they knew how to do, that all of a sudden maybe the bitterness wall comes down a little bit.

**Mike:** Absolutely.

**Kim:** Yes. I think that's one of the softening points was learning about how difficult it is for a stepparent who is thrown into that authority role. How that really sabotages that relationship with the stepkids. We realize that his stepmom really was pushed into that role and Dad kind of backed off.

You know, that's a hard place for a stepparent to be. We started realizing how difficult that must have been for her, just to be thrown in and be in charge and not to have a lot of support as far as discipline from the biological parent.

**Ron:** Yes.

**Kim:** You can see where bitterness and anger can come into play for a stepparent when they're thrust into that role.

**Ron:** The information helped you get some perspective and compassion for them.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Ron:** Let's talk about your family. You're at this event a week before you get married. It's opened your eyes around a few things. Then what happens? Did you get married a week later?

**Mike:** We did.

**Kim:** We did.

**Mike:** Yes, we still got married. Thank you, Ron. I appreciate it.

**Ron:** Didn't completely scare you guys away from that.

**Mike:** No.

**Kim:** No. You know, I had a five-year-old daughter going in, like I said. She really adored Mike. They had a great connection and things were going really well there. But of course, the night before the wedding, she pulls me aside and says, “I don’t want you to marry Mike.” [Laughter] I’m like blindsided. What’s going on here?

**Ron:** Okay, so I imagine that you had a sense that she was going to be okay with this.

**Kim:** Oh, definitely. She was even affectionate towards him going into this.

**Ron:** There was something there. The relationship had developed to some degree.

**Kim:** There was something there. Yes.

**Ron:** Then she throws you a curve, “Don’t marry Mike.”

**Kim:** Yes.

**Mike:** That’s right.

**Ron:** What did you do?

**Kim:** Well.

**Ron:** How’d you feel about that?

**Kim:** Oh, my heart just sank. That’s that position of wanting to do right by your kid but what do you do? I tried to find out what was going on. She was five so she didn’t have the best communication skills. She kind of hemmed and hawed and thought about it. Then she blurted out, “Well, you know, he talks too soft on our answering machine so you shouldn’t marry him. He’s a soft talker.”

**Mike:** That’s right. Soft talkers—you’ve got to dump that dude.

**Kim:** She was filled with some conflict.

**Mike:** Yes.

**Kim:** —definitely some mixed emotions. She really cared for Mike and wanted me to have a relationship with him but, of course, “What was to come, what was the impact going to be, and how was that going to change our relationship?” There were probably some fears.

**Mike:** To note that only about six months prior to our wedding, her dad also remarried.

**Kim:** Her dad had also remarried, yes.

**Mike:** She also experiencing this in her other home. She's moving back and forth between these two homes with big changes all in a very short period of time.

**Ron:** One of the things we tell blended families, couples before they get married, is to recognize that when they get married it's a gain for the adults and on some level, doesn't mean it's bad, but on some level, it is a loss for their children.

**Mike:** Right.

**Ron:** Things are changing again. I think adults generally really minimize that.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Mike:** Absolutely.

**Kim:** I think we were prepared because we had heard from you not to underestimate the loss that kids experience.

**Ron:** Did it help—I'm just curious—did it help slightly even, ever so little—

**Kim:** It did.

**Ron:** —for you to know that's somewhat expectable so that when your daughter said it, maybe it when through a filter of "Well, this is not as bad as I thought"?

**Kim:** Yes.

**Mike:** Absolutely.

**Kim:** It was definitely helpful. I was able to stay in the conversation, hang in there.

**Ron:** Not panic.

**Kim:** I didn't panic. I didn't dismiss. I hung in there with her. We got through it. She was happy at the wedding. We have a couple pictures of her, kind got this little look on her face like, "What's going on?"

**Mike:** When we work with other couples and we talk about this whole kid's-perspective idea, how do we slip into their shoes and really understand that loss that you're talking about? We've got this great picture of us up on the platform in our wedding outfits.

**Kim:** We're just shining, you know.

**Mike:** —all three of us.

**Kim:** —just joy filled.

**Mike:** Kim and I are smiling and there's little Anika right in front of us with the biggest frown on her face. We look at that picture and we're like, "Yes, there's where she was."

**Kim:** Yes.

**Ron:** That is a snapshot.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Ron:** Now if somebody's listening to us right now and they're thinking, "Oh no! Should I feel guilty about this? Should I feel horrible that I'm putting my kids through?" what would you say to them?

**Kim:** I would say, first if you're carrying a burden of guilt, get some help with that. That's just not something you want to carry around. But as far as our experience goes, Anika has benefited so greatly from having Mike in her life. Definitely has not been easy but it's just amazing.

**Ron:** There you go. Keep the long-term view.

**Kim:** I can't even imagine where she would be if she didn't have Mike in her life. I mean she—

**Mike:** You're playing the long game. You know what I would say from a stepparent perspective is, do everything you can to get yourself into that child's shoes and try to understand the things that they've experienced. Because every experience they've had leading up to their relationship with you is going to color the way that they connect with you. You need to understand that before you start heading down the road assuming that they're all on board and excited and it's going to be the *Brady Bunch* experience, right? Because it probably won't.

**Ron:** We're talking with Mike and Kim Anderson today of [MikeandKimCoaching.com](http://MikeandKimCoaching.com). They've walked this journey, and now you're helping other people. Before we get to that, I want to just pick up where we left off. You get married. You've got a five-year-old, Kim, and you guys get married. Kim, you're divorced, okay so you have an ex-husband. Is your daughter moving between the two homes?

**Kim:** She is.

**Ron:** Okay, and then you guys get together and you have two children of your own.

**Kim:** Right.

**Mike:** Correct.

**Ron:** Okay. It's somewhere in the story there became some problems with the other household, yes?

**Kim:** Yes. You know we were pretty good, peacefully co-parenting for the first ten years after our divorce. But that's one of the funny things about co-parenting is that things can radically change. You don't have a lot of control over what's going on in that other house and the attitudes.

**Ron:** I'm sorry. Say that one more time. [Laughter]

**Kim:** You don't have a lot of control—

**Ron:** —over what happens.

**Kim:** —over what's going on and what the attitudes are. I tell you this story with a big question mark still in my mind as to why it happened because we don't have the answers around why this shift in attitude occurred.

But at some point my ex kind of got it in his mind that my daughter no longer needed us in her life. He just decided that she doesn't need to come to our house and she doesn't need to have a relationship with us. I'm sure it was around control, but he put her in this position of, "If you want to be loved and accepted by me, you've got to reject your mom."

**Ron:** Oh, goodness sakes. How old was she when this started?

**Kim:** She was twelve, so a very rough age already.

**Ron:** Right.

**Kim:** To be put in this position was, it was excruciatingly tough—

**Ron:** Oh my goodness.

**Kim:** —on all of us.

**Ron:** How did that impact her?

**Kim:** Well, she got lost, honestly. My daughter was gone. She became a robotic puppet for him.

**Ron:** Wow!

**Kim:** She would come, when we did see her—we went from 50/50 visitation which we had done, like I said, for years and years, to down to what was it at the lowest point? Like maybe—

**Mike:** It was 11 percent of the time.

**Kim:** Yes. She would come with attitudes and all kinds of reasons why she shouldn't be there. Repeating things that he had told her to say to the guardian ad litem, to the counselor. She just wasn't there. There was a few times, moments where she would break where I would see her, "There she is! Ah, she's still there!"

But then it would all shut down. As soon as it came up he would put more pressure on. We didn't have a clear understanding of the kind of emotional and verbal abuse that was going on. We found out later.

**Ron:** I was about to ask you, what was the cost to her? Let me just comment that one of the things we know about kids who are in these situations is there is some emotional cost either real or perceived in their relationship with the parent who is saying this to them, "If I'm nice to Mom, if I enjoy my stepdad, Mike, then you know I'm losing something with Dad."

**Mike and Kim:** Yes.

**Ron:** Do you have a sense of what the cost was for her?

**Kim:** Complete control from the other household.

**Ron:** You're losing my love and affection.

**Kim:** Yes, Yes, and control over her whole life, her extracurricular activities, her friends, her everything. At a stage when she should be venturing out and making decisions for herself and figuring it out, she was under his thumb completely and it really stunted her growth.

**Ron:** I know your heart was—

**Kim:** Oh, it was the hardest thing I've ever had to go through.

**Ron:** Did you get to see her on a regular basis through that time?

**Kim:** We did see her. Of course, he would intrude on that time and schedule all kinds of activities during that time.

**Ron:** Her attitude wouldn't be good so it'd be really hard.

**Kim:** Oh, yes. It was hard to be around her.

**Mike:** It was difficult. What was interesting is when we would have like—this was about a three-year period, so we were in the family court system for three years. Lots of time, energy, resources, everything went into this. I think what was interesting is there were times when we would have vacations.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Mike:** We would have some extended time with her. It took a day or two, but once that day or two passed, the walls started to come down.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Mike:** She was away from—we would travel somewhere and all of a sudden, we're like, "There she is."

**Ron:** "There she is."

**Mike:** "There she is."

**Ron:** You could see the light come back on.

**Kim:** She would emerge.

**Mike:** Yes.

**Kim:** But it could have just as easily be shut down if she called him, and you would see. There was a vacation we were on, and she got to go rock climbing for the first time with my brother. He's a rock climber and she was just loving it. She's kind of an adrenaline junkie. She was having so much fun and enjoying herself and she wanted to call and tell her dad.

I said, "Yes, call him," and her siblings in the other home. She was so excited to tell them about her big feat. You could just physically see her just slump by his reaction. He just shut her down. Didn't want to hear about it. Didn't care.

**Ron:** That's the thing, if you're listening today and you know someone in that situation or you are that parent who's doing that to your child, you have to have that image in your mind of this girl slumping over. Going from joy to complete shutdown.

**Kim:** For hours after that. It was awful.

**Ron:** Essentially, what you're asking them to do is to give up their joy, to give up their ability to enjoy life and people and relationships in the other home for *you*. You're asking them to take care of *you*, and that's not right. It's costing them their childhood.

**Kim:** In fact, it's just the opposite. She was wanting to *share* with him.

**Mike:** Yes.

**Kim:** She was *wanting* him to know and to be known by him and he was shutting that down.

**Ron:** Yes. Okay so have things improved?

**Kim:** Well—

**Mike:** Well, so we're several years passed this whole season now. What happened essentially, we had this three years in the family court system and there's an amazing story of God's providential hand on this that we experienced.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Mike:** We wrapped that time up in the month of October. I can't remember the year that it was. But we felt like we had lost after three years of battle. I think we were at 30-some-odd percent of our time with our daughter.

**Kim:** She still had the walls up.

**Mike:** She still had walls up.

**Kim:** He still had—

**Mike:** We just absolutely thought that why have we been through all of this.

**Kim:** We were crushed.

**Mike:** I got to imagine, like the disciples right after the crucifixion, has got to be going, "Why did we go through all this?" Like, "Really? And now it's just over." That's how it felt. That's how we felt.

**Kim:** We couldn't believe it.

**Mike:** Literally, one month later, Thanksgiving weekend, the most terrible thing to happen happened but it brought healing and redemption, and that was that her dad crossed the line of physical attack in her home.

She locked herself in her bedroom, went out her window. She came to our home and by the next week we were immediately back into the court. The judge said, "Now we're done." He said, "I've been listening to this. I don't want to hear any more of it."

The guardian ad litem finally got to a place of saying, "Okay, now we can do something different." The guardian ad litem essentially said, "I knew something was coming."

**Kim:** We all knew.

**Mike:** We had to let it be her decision. Otherwise, she would just keep running back. Then she called for one last meeting and she said, "I just want you to know this young lady has been through all of this. She's used to a parent who is very authoritarian. You two are much more authoritative, allowing her to make decisions for herself, and she's not going to know what to do with that freedom."

We thought, "Ha-ha, whatever! You don't know. We're so joyful. We're going to get time with our daughter." And her walls were down. She was back.

**Kim:** She was feeling it. Yes.

**Mike:** It was like this instantaneous return of our daughter.

**Kim:** We were joyous, yes.

**Mike:** We went through a really difficult time just in our home of her making really poor choices.

**Ron:** The person was right that once the thumb of control was lifted?

**Kim:** Yes.

**Ron:** Okay and that makes sense, I mean—

**Mike:** Absolutely, yes.

**Kim:** Yes, because she finally had some freedom, some say in her life, and she didn't know how to handle it.

**Ron:** Right, exactly.

**Kim:** Because in those young and formative years when she should have been making decisions and failing and learning, that was removed, and so now she looked to her peers to make her decisions. So whatever environment she was in, she looked for someone else. She just—yes. It was three more years of rebellion.

**Ron:** She was in your home at that time.

**Kim:** Yes, full time.

**Ron:** How old was she when all this happened?

**Mike:** She was fifteen.

**Kim:** Fifteen.

**Ron:** So twelve when the alienation process started, fifteen at this point when she's back in your home, and things were really rough at that point.

**Kim:** We went from fighting for her, investing everything we had into freeing her from this situation to when she turned 18, we had to ask her to leave our home because things were so—we had to set some strong boundaries and do the tough love thing.

**Ron:** I've got to just pause. Let's talk to that listener for a minute that's in the middle of all this. Whatever their story is they are in the middle of hard. I'm thinking about you guys. How did you protect your marriage in the midst of the stress? What did you do to stay alive? How did you protect your own kind of wellbeing, your relationship with God?

**Mike:** Well, throughout that court battle, we didn't protect our marriage. We saw it as really noble that we were going to allow some of the energy that we would have put into us to be put on the back burner because we were after saving this child.

Here this is near and dear to Kim's heart because this is her daughter and at the same time it is near and dear to my heart because of the environment that I grew up in. I got it. I was like, "I know what this poor kid is going through. How could we not fight for her?" So we didn't invest in our marriage.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Mike:** It was on the tail end of that that that we almost lost our marriage because we didn't make that investment.

**Ron:** Okay, I've just got to say, I totally get that. Like, I don't blame you at all. I mean on the one hand you are 100 percent after rescuing this child from her situation and I mean, flip around at the other side. "Yes, honey, let's go out and have a happy dinner and go on a date and enjoy ourselves. While knowing at the same time that our daughter is over here miserable and sick and stressed out, but we can enjoy life."

**Kim:** I was in a pit—

**Ron:** That doesn't make sense.

**Kim:** I was in a pit of depression during a lot of that, just emotionally distraught. There was no way. But I remember that season of Mike being my whole support. I mean, I was crumbling left and right and he was just there. He was holding me up. He was my shoulder to cry on. He was the one praying for me constantly and just in there with me. I mean we came out of that season as a united team in fighting this battle but our romance—

**Ron:** —took a hit.

**Kim:** There was no romance.

**Mike:** Yes.

**Ron:** What about God? I mean was He distant? Was He close?

**Mike:** Yes. [Laughter]

**Kim:** All of the above.

**Mike:** Which day are you talking about, Ron?

**Ron:** Yes, yes.

**Kim:** There were times when I was just so angry at God because we felt Him telling us, “Fight, fight, fight. I will provide. I will carry you through.” Which He did.

**Ron:** And then, but the action wasn’t there in the response.

**Mike:** It didn’t feel like it.

**Kim:** We just couldn’t get it.

**Ron:** Absolutely.

**Kim:** I also got a little—at my worst points when I was just done and distraught, God would give me a picture of her heart of where she really is. She’s still there. She’s still bonded to you.

**Ron:** Don’t give up. Don’t be defeated.

**Kim:** She needs you to fight for her. She needs you to know that you’re going to be there when she’s ready.

**Ron:** You know I've come to call that "daily bread." You know, it's "give us this day our daily bread." It's not just physical sustenance to sustain us but God in really hard times—I've seen that even in my own life—that you get just enough. But let's not minimize. This stinks.

**Mike:** Yes, absolutely.

**Ron:** This is hard. You are agonizing day in and day out. Then you wake up one day and realize your marriage has drifted. Where did that lead you?

**Mike:** Well, we had a couple of discussions about are we going to continue this on.

**Kim:** It all came to a head on our worst vacation ever.

**Mike:** We had probably the worst six-hour drive home—

**Kim:** —from this trip. We left early.

**Mike:** —three days early with our younger kids going, "What's going on? We were having fun." [Laughter] We're throwing things in the van and we're getting out of there. Super awkward drive home.

**Ron:** It's amazing how you can be sitting right next to each other and be so far apart.

**Mike and Kim:** Yes.

**Mike:** And then we had about—

**Mike and Kim:** —a three-day standoff.

**Mike:** —after that.

**Kim:** We didn't speak for three days.

**Mike:** Exactly that—right next to each other but just worlds apart.

**Kim:** When you're running dry in the romance department, as far as a step couple goes, it's the stepfamily dynamics that just completely—

**Mike:** —amplify.

**Kim:** —shred you apart. I mean we thought we had stuff down. We'd been married—

**Mike:** —ten years.

**Kim:** —yes, ten years. We thought we'd things down and it was around parenting. It was around all those dynamics. The stuck insider, stuck outsider. All those things and it just compiled and compiled and compiled. We were heading out on this trip and, man, the last straw hit and we just crumbled.

**Mike:** It was all around parenting and parenting agreements—

**Kim:** —and around Anika, yes.

**Mike:** —so not being able to—yes.

**Ron:** Did all that—this may be over simplifying, but did all that stress just basically get turned towards each other?

**Mike:** Oh, yes.

**Kim:** Yes and our family of origin stuff. The abandonment issues, all of it just bubbled up to the surface, and we realized man we have some work to do.

**Mike:** And I, coming out of the childhood I came from, I had some real anger issues. I started to see some behavior that would come out of me during that season that reminded me of stepmom.

I never crossed the line of any physical abuse toward any family member. But there was a point where Kim was locked in the upstairs bathroom because she was afraid of me. I'd been throwing some things around in the garage and that kind of thing. That picture of my wife being scared to death of me, so scared in the middle of the night—praise God, the kids were still asleep—we didn't wake them up—how we didn't wake them up I don't know—

**Kim:** It was bad.

**Mike:** —but that picture was like something has to change.

**Ron:** That had to tap into your experience as a kid.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Mike:** Oh, yes. Like I said, I came ten years before that. I'm sitting in a room and *you* are telling me that I don't *have to* repeat the past essentially. I mean you didn't say those words but all of what you taught was like, "Oh wow, we can do something different."

Then I get to that moment and I'm going, "Oh no, this is the same. I can't do this." Before we got married, Kim with me was adamant, "If we run into a roadblock, are you

willing to go get help?” And I’m like, “Yeah, you know, we’ll go to counseling, whatever.” I want to marry her. Of course, I’m going to say yes, right?

We say that but we get to this point now and I’m like, “Okay, now’s the time. It’s time to go get help. We need help. We can’t keep doing this.” And Kim was like, “No, I don’t want to get help. I don’t want to get help.”

**Kim:** I was tired.

**Mike:** “I’m done.”

**Ron:** Funny how that works.

**Mike:** I know. It is funny.

**Kim:** I was so tired.

**Mike:** I said, after much talk with a mentor and prayer, “Look, if I’m going to lead this family, then I guess I’m going to lead this family.” And so I said, “I don’t know what you’re going to do but I’m going to go get help. I don’t know what this is going to look like together but I’m going.” So I did. I went and got connected. I started that process and it’s very—

**Kim:** And he started working on his stuff, too.

**Mike:** —started working on just me. And it was very quickly after that that Kim came in. I think it was about maybe eight, nine months of some pretty difficult work. But it was almost as if after eight or nine months, the fog just lifted and we were like, “Hey look! We’re still in love! We’re having an awesome time. We’ve been through some stuff.” What a deepening of relationship after walking through those things together.

**Kim:** Yes. We both had baggage that needed to get unpacked. It wasn’t just Mike’s stuff. I had my whole set of baggage from my previous—I’ve actually been married twice before Mike so this was my third marriage. I had all kinds of stuff I dragged into this marriage. We needed to do our own individual work. Then we came together and did counseling together for a season and that was really helpful.

**Ron:** Boy, my mind’s racing. I want to commend you guys on so many different things there. I mean, that moment where, Mike, you say, “I’m going. Whether you come with me or not, I’m going.”

I think a lot of times spouses get stuck and their spouse doesn’t want to go with them, and so they go, “Well, then what’s the point?” No, you go ahead and go. There’s some value in that for you. You never know what God’s going to show you and what you can

change about you. But even notice that the process of leading out influences the other partner.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Mike:** Absolutely.

**Ron:** Right? “You go first.” That’s always the way it is, “You go first.” It did lead. Eventually, Kim, you joined him.

**Kim:** I saw some changes he was making. I saw the value that he was getting from it.

**Ron:** Yes, kind of shifted your heart a little bit.

**Kim:** It really did.

**Ron:** So, “Now I’m willing to go.” So you go, and now that you’re both on a journey and the process will ultimately lead you back together.

**Kim:** I just wasn’t quite ready to do the work yet. I’d been to counseling before but there was some new work I needed to do. He was ready and then I got there.

**Ron:** I think we should note that the situation with your daughter is still going on. It’s still not resolved while all of this is happening inside your home, inside with your family. You’re raising two other children. You’re trying to save your marriage and there’s this, still this appendage that’s not fixed.

**Mike:** Right.

**Ron:** It’s so hard to be divided like that. Two or three things are wrong and you can work on one or two of them. You get some progress but then there’s one that just still isn’t what you want.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Ron:** What do you say to couples who are listening right now who go, “Man, I know exactly what that one thing is. Maybe it’s two things. Yes, there’s a lot of good things going on in our home but here’s one thing that’s really *not* okay.” What would you say to them about that feeling divided thing?

**Kim:** Well, I think one of the reasons we got to where we got was that we both kind of dug our heels in, “I want it this way,” and “I want it—” He wanted it that way and we both kind of felt, “Well, this is the right thing to do.”

We got hung up in that place rather than really listening to what was going on and the motives behind it. You know, Mike was trying to tell me how to parent my kid. That's how I saw it. "Don't tell *me* how to parent my kid. I know what's best."

But he really had some different insights and he wanted good things for my daughter. He wanted good things for me. He had a lot of value to bring. I just wouldn't hear it. I got really defensive and I took it personally. But when I finally listened to what was behind his reasoning and why he believed what he believed, you know, "He's right. I do have a parental blind spot here or there." You know there is some value in that.

He had to do the same process with me. There's a reason why I'm digging my heels in here. He had to listen to my perspective of, "Okay, I see that." That got us, instead of being on opposite ends of the table pounding our fists, "It's got to be this way," it got us to the same side of the table to where we could start to compromise.

**Ron:** Yes. What do you say to that person who's listening who's going, "Yes, but that's risky, Kim."

**Kim:** It's very risky, and you've got to be vulnerable to go there.

**Ron:** You had to trust him.

**Kim:** I did.

**Ron:** You had to let him into your heart. You've already been through two marriages. This isn't going well. He's not proving to be a guy that you can trust. Things are not happening well with your daughter. Your heart is in turmoil. How in the world can you talk yourself into trusting him and letting him in? How did you do that?

**Mike:** If I could interject. I would say that that didn't begin coming until I became more trustworthy.

**Ron:** Okay.

**Mike:** When I started doing the work that allowed me to—

**Ron:** —to be safer for her

**Mike:** Yes, yes—to be safer. To hold her with loving hands and not try to just get what I wanted.

**Ron:** We're back to you leading out, going first. Not just going to counseling but changing.

**Mike:** Yes, it had to happen that way for us.

**Kim:** His heart softened first for sure.

**Ron:** Then that led to yours.

**Kim:** I saw the softening and then that made it safer for me to let down my walls and then enter into some real deep dialogue.

**Ron:** You guys are a lot like me and a lot of other people I know that you've been through some stuff, and when you get your head above water again, you think, "We need to give back." Is that your journey? Is that how you got into coaching, doing stepfamily coaching? I mean, why in the world?

**Mike:** Well, yes. I think from a passion standpoint and a motivation standpoint absolutely. Not only is it that we've been through some stuff. I know for me personally my passion goes all the way back to the day I was born being part of a step—I've never not lived in stepfamily life.

I know how tough it is to be a *stepbrother*. I know how tough it is to be a *stepchild*. I know a *stepparent*. It's not easy but it can be really good. There are really wonderful relational things that happen that maybe wouldn't have happened any other way in my life.

**Kim:** Beautiful things have come through the struggle. Like when we meet with a couple that's dealing with what we dealt with through parent alienation or dealing with a really difficult ex, and we're able to listen and we're able to *really* understand the emotion and that turmoil that's in there and just *be* that person that gets them and that they can really be open and vulnerable with.

If we can do that—I mean that's just amazing. If what we've been through can help another couple, that makes it all worthwhile for me, and we had couples doing that for us.

**Ron:** Yes.

**Mike:** Absolutely.

**Kim:** They meant everything because a lot of times you don't know what to pray for.

**Ron:** Right.

**Kim:** You are just banging your head up against that wall going, "Okay, God, what are you want? I don't know." And when someone comes alongside and has a *deep* understanding of your emotional pain and can pray for you on your behalf, there's something just healing about that.

**Ron:** I'm sure people are wondering...have things improved with your daughter?

**Kim:** Oh, yes!

**Mike:** Yes, very much so.

**Kim:** Yes. I mean she still struggles to set boundaries with her dad and she's learning—she's learned how to have a relationship with him as best she can, which is great. I mean she needs to have a relationship with him and with his kids but she's learned to set boundaries, which is wonderful. But she's—yes, we have—

**Mike:** Not only that, that's all true and that's great she maturing. She's 23 now. She just turned 23 last month actually and she got herself back into school. She's gotten clean time, which has been incredible for over three years now.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Mike:** She's figuring it out. She's challenged by the things we all have been challenged by at twenty-three years old but she's figuring it out. She's wanting to do life well. That's pretty incredible. The fact that we now have just an easy, loving relationship with her.

**Kim:** Yes, she invites us in. It's amazing.

**Mike:** It's just awesome.

**Kim:** She comes to us for advice and she lets us coach her—it's awesome—just with life stuff. She trusts us and she's very loving and appreciative. We look back on that time and we sometimes talk about it, as painful for both of us, but she realizes what she put us through.

**Ron:** Yes.

**Kim:** At one point she even apologized, which we never thought we'd get and we didn't expect. It was a gift but she definitely understands a lot about what kids go through.

**Ron:** My conversation with Mike and Kim Anderson. I'm Ron Deal and this is *FamilyLife Blended*.

Mike and Kim have a little more to share in just a minute but I feel like there was something Mike said that got *lost* in our conversation.

Do you remember back at the beginning, he said coming to my conference not only helped prepare them for their blended family journey, but it got Mike processing his childhood, the family he grew up in? It gave him some perspective that he needed to

make sense of some things, which helped him to then find *mercy* for his parents, which then helped him *forgive* his parents, which then ultimately helped him *reconcile* with his parents.

I've heard this a lot through the years. I think it happens to a lot of people. Maybe even you. Maybe you're finding yourself reflecting back on your childhood. You know when you're a kid it's hard to process everything that's going on in your home and in your life. You have a child's perspective. You have a child's maturity and you're limited by that.

Sometimes as adults, learning how to grow your own family can help you reflect on what we call your family of origin, your extended stepfamily relationships that you have even now.

Let me just invite you, as you listen to this podcast over time, ask God to help you reflect, to give you insight into the family you grew up in, to show you what you couldn't have seen in your younger days through a child's eyes, so that you can now, perhaps like Mike, be an instrument of God's peace.

See here's the deal, at times, this process will be painful. It's usually going to be uncomfortable because it's going to bring up things that maybe didn't feel really good to you at a season of your life and may be confusing for you. But more often than not, going down this road is well worth it.

We'll hear from Mike and Kim in just a minute.

If you'd like more information about them, you'll find it in the show notes at [FamilyLife.com/podcasts](http://FamilyLife.com/podcasts). You can also learn about our other podcasts on the FamilyLife Podcast Network.

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Hey, I know you're invested in your marriage and your family so be sure to check out the articles and videos and resources for blended families that we have at [FamilyLife.com/blended](http://FamilyLife.com/blended). You'll learn all about my *Smart Stepfamilies* series of books and the curriculum we have for churches.

If you're interested in helping others bringing a ministry to your church or to your community, consider joining us for the *Summit on Stepfamily Ministry*, October 24 and

25 in 2019, in Chesapeake, Virginia. This is a two-day, ministry-equipping event. If you're interested, you should be there.

You may be a lay leader. You may be a senior pastor. You may be on staff or work with a church counseling center. Whatever your capacity, if you're interested in blessing others and learning how to do that, we would love to have you join us.

If you're new to stepfamily ministry, you'll learn all the basics, and if you've already got a ministry up and running, we'll help you network with others and learn about the latest resources and find encouragement as a leader. You can learn more about this event at [SummitonStepfamilies.com](http://SummitonStepfamilies.com).

Now here's the rest of my conversation with Mike and Kim. We're talking about what do you do when things are hard.

Okay, so somebody's still in the hard, what do you want them to do? Connect to somebody?

**Kim:** Yes.

**Ron:** —find some community, people to pray for them?

**Kim:** Yes, reach out.

**Mike:** I think one, have hope, first of all. Just because it feels like you're stuck in this forever experience right now, doesn't mean it's forever.

**Ron:** Okay.

**Mike:** It's a season right now.

**Ron:** Okay.

**Mike:** You can move through that season. But two, reach out for support and reach out for practical help because there's so much you can learn. You don't need to be a child psychologist and you don't need to be a therapist in order to run your family well—

**Kim:** No. There are simple things.

**Mike:** —move your family forward, I should say. There's lots of help out there. You just have to go find it.

**Kim:** I would add to that, be anticipating that God's going to use it. I mean, whatever you're going through on the other end of it, God has something He's going to use. I

mean, it's amazing what our daughter has been through was really difficult on her. It took a toll and she still struggles in certain things.

But her dad has since gone through another divorce, so those siblings that she has from that side are now stuck in that dilemma. They've got two parents battling back and forth and there's all kinds of stuff going on. And she's able to minister to these kids, these siblings, and understand what they're going through and talk with them about it, and we pray for those kids. I have anticipation of God using her later of ministering to kids that are stuck in these dynamics and *need* a place to process—

**Mike:** Absolutely.

**Kim:** —and talk. So believe and have hope that God is going to turn this into something for His glory.

**Ron:** Wow, that's really amazing. It's hard to keep that perspective sometimes when you're in the battle.

**Kim:** It's really hard.

**Mike:** It is. It is.

**Ron:** But to somehow have a sense that God is in it. You don't know where it's going to go or where it's going to end up. But trust Him in the hard and believe that someday maybe you'll see what those purposes are.

**Kim:** Yes, and be willing to put in the work. I mean I remember that one of the reasons I didn't engage in counseling was because it felt so huge. How are we ever going to dig our way out from this mountain?

**Ron:** Right.

**Kim:** It was just, oh, so overwhelming. But once we got in there and started shoveling and working on stuff, you know looking back it really wasn't that long of a period of time.

**Mike:** No, it wasn't.

**Kim:** I mean once we put in the effort and we were both in, it wasn't as big and looming as we thought it was. So be willing to just step forward and do what you can.

**Mike:** And it's okay. Some of the best work I've ever done is the hardest work I've ever done.

**Ron:** Next time on the *FamilyLife Blended* podcast, I'm going to talk with Michele Cushatt about making peace with the life you have and making peace with God.

**Michele:** I believed at twenty-seven because I was divorced that I was completely excluded from any participation in the kingdom. That being divorced meant that I was no longer qualified to do anything in God's name because I had committed what I believed was the unpardonable sin.

**Ron:** That's Michele Cushatt next time on *FamilyLife Blended*.

I'm Ron Deal. Thanks for listening. Thank you to our FamilyLife Legacy Partners for making this podcast possible. Our chief audio engineer is Keith Lynch. Bruce Goff, producer. Our mastering engineer is Justin Adams. Theme music provided by Braden Deal.

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