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Season 1, Episode 12: Overcoming Betrayal

Guest: Sheri and Kyle Keffer

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Sheri: So I come home and I go into the office and there is this pink Post-it in the center of Kyle's office desk, it says "Thank you for everything you do. I really appreciate you," with a heart. And I'm like, "Alright who gave him that?"

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.

If you've ever experienced betrayal or perhaps a relationship disappointment by a current spouse, a former one, a parent, a dating partner, a family member you're going to want to listen to today's podcast. Because we're going to be talking about betrayal, its effect on our heart, and how we can overcome it.

And to that end let me just offer a word of caution to you, the listener, you can't listen to somebody talking about betrayal and not have it resurrect some of your pain or perhaps guilt if you were the one who hurt someone else. So here's my suggestion: practice some good self care as you listen to this podcast. Feel free to start and stop or take a break whatever you need. Take care of yourself.

What we're going to try to do is to safely and compassionately explore what is bound to be some painful experiences for some of you. We hope to bring some light to your circumstances.

Kyle and Sheri Keffer are both therapists. That's dangerous, for a marriage, I would think. Kyle is a licensed marriage and family therapist and a certified sex addiction therapist.

His wife, Sheri, is also a marriage and family therapist and certified sex addiction therapist. You may have heard her before on the radio program New Life Live. She's a regular co-host to that program with our friend Steve Arterburn. She's recently authored a book, *Intimate Deception: Healing the Wounds Of Sexual Betrayal*.

Now here's the thing about Kyle and Sheri, they've both been through their own trauma, their own betrayal, their own loss.

You guys are therapists. You've also walked some pain in your life. Is there value in telling a painful story?

Sheri: I think so. I think so, and you say that, Ron, my heart rate went up because you made me remember how long it took for me to even tell my story and to put it out there publicly in my book, especially when it meant I had to bring the best of me and the worst of me forward.

Because I knew I couldn't just tell part of the story and I knew I had to look at what happened to me. Then in the deepest part of me I had a look at what needed healing. What in my past may have influenced what I was doing right in that moment so I have a betrayal story and crazy enough-- I used to say this, I said, "If I tell this story truly no one's going to want to come see me as a therapist."

How it started is I was on New Life Radio and there was actually a pastor's wife that called in. She was in the midst of living with the betrayal of her husband. I think I was in with Milo Yerkovich and Steve Arterburn, and I felt like the Lord just said, "Go, go, go, tell it."

So I addressed her and I just said, "Hey I don't know if you know my story but I too was married to a pastor and then bleh." Right? But that was the first beginning, the guys that I had been working with both of them neither one of them had heard my story.

But it mattered because that one person mattered, and then God begin to open it up from there.

Ron: It's interesting that you mention that because Steve Arterburn is a friend. He and Misty spoke together at our Summit on Stepfamily Ministry, and our Blended and Blessed livestream event. Steve and I have spent some time together talking about stepfamily living and life, of course they're a blended family.

I've actually heard him tell his side of that story. How shocking it was for him to all of a sudden hear from a colleague, who he'd worked with and respected tremendously, a side of her life that he didn't know anything about.

It was live and on the radio and you came out big and bold and just trusted God in that moment to share the story. Your book, *Intimate Deception*, certainly lays all that out there and it tells that story. It turns out both of you have had previous marriages before being married to one another and both of you experienced betrayal. Do you mind telling us some of that story?

Sheri: Yes, just the quick snapshot is I was married to a pastor and in the term of our marriage there was pornography, affairs, and prostitutes. So I never fought so hard for any one human being, in order to try for us to get past that. But what I learned along the way is it takes two people that are both that committed to the recovery. We were in

counseling for four years. During that term of counseling he was having affairs. We were going three times a week; myself, himself, and then as a couple. But our therapist didn't know. So I didn't know. She didn't know. It came out.

Kyle: My story isn't quite as public as Sheri's because it's in her book. Yes, my marriage had been kind of on the downhill for quite a long time. Discovered some betrayal and that kind of brought everything to a close, but it was a very, very hard time because at that same time a lot of other things happened in my life that brought me to somewhat of a crossroads.

Actually it's what brought me to a new ministry. I was a national sales director for a computer software company. I lost that job shortly after everything came out, after the divorce was filed. So I had lost my marriage, I had lost my home, I had lost my job. I was kind of at a crossroads.

Ron: Wow.

Kyle: One of things that I've heard Sheri say on several occasions is that although her marriage was a casualty and some other things, were her life was nothing but. And I love to quote that because while if you'd have talked to me in the middle of that time I would've--I couldn't even see out from that point.

I look back now and go, "Wow! God has not wasted a moment and really has brought me to a place now where I can really see my life affecting others. It has become much more of a ministry than I thought I would ever have.

Ron: You know, as you were talking a minute ago I just wrote down the word "costly." I was just listening to all the things you lost in the midst of the fall out of that betrayal and, my, it was tremendously costly for you.

Sheri: It decimates. It can really decimate a person, Ron, and it's interesting because I met him in the fray of that, right? It's crazy enough when we met, he was living in a house that a woman was renting out five rooms and he was living there with his teenage son, sharing a room.

I met him in really a dark time. I knew he was a good guy; I knew he was a guy of integrity, but I knew he was also digging out from having lost a home and jobs and where you live and so much.

Ron: Yes, digging out. Wow, what an image. Like you get buried under all these costs and you're trying to regroup and find your way and you have kids. Kyle, you had a son you're trying to protect and care for and nurture and all of that is going on it's--it can feel tremendously overwhelming.

I am imagining somebody listening to us right now going, "Okay, that's where I'm at. I am--I have not taken the step, first step, towards recovery. I am still just trying to begin to think about digging out."

Sheri: Yes. Just breathing.

Kyle: That's really the encouragement I try to give when I have clients in this space. It's one step at a time. If I looked at the long term, if I tried to envision my life, there was no vision at the time. There's no way to envision that you just have to trust that you can see just far enough to put your next step forward, and then the next step forward, and then the next.

That's the way you get through it and then there will come a time when you'll be able to see much more of a future. Then you can look back and you can see the journey that you've made one step at a time. There is encouragement in that.

Ron: Yes. So Sheri you were making your own journey because you had experienced your own betrayal so we're a little ahead when you meet him you're still digging out or what tell us a little bit of your story and where that where you were at that point in time.

Sheri: Yes, well--is what's really funny, Ron, is we have, I have a screensaver of Kyle and I on one of our first dates. I love the screensaver, it takes me back to one of our first dates together. He doesn't like it, and the funny thing is is because he was sitting there with me at the table, we just went in and had some an appetizer, that was it and he has this horrible memory of, "I don't even know if I can pay for that thing, much less she's not gonna pick me. I don't even know why I'm in the race." Right?

Ron: Wow.

Sheri: I had been digging out for a number of years and it doesn't mean that I don't have triggers; in fact, part of what kept me single again so long, Ron, is I had some negative beliefs some shame beliefs that I've gotten wired in and through my betrayal. And it's a funky thing--our brain--so the way the brain works it wires in shame in order to protect us. So these negative beliefs, these shame beliefs stick to *us* like Velcro.

So one of them that I had was, "I can't trust anyone." And another one is, "I can't trust my judgment." I was single again for seventeen years. I had dated guys and I had guys that would fight for my heart, but one of the men that I was dating at one point said, "Sheri, it's like you've got a python wrapped around you. You just can't get out of the fray." He was right.

I would get closer to making a decision to be with somebody and I could literally, Ron, feel the blood draining out of my body. I just got so scared. So I think it's really important for those of us that have experienced betrayal as much as I hate it to be that we're the ones that have to get in and do the work, we have to do the work.

We've got to do the deep digging. We've got to get some trauma therapy. You know, you might need some EMDR which stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing to change those negative beliefs.

You might need to do some group therapy. *I did.* I remember being in a group, Ron, where it was a mixed group, it was Townsend and Cloud had an offshoot with a guy by the name of Dr. Mark MacMillan and we met for a couple years. Half girls, half guys.

I remember looking across the room at one of the guys in the very first night of the group and I looked at him and I said, "You scare me." And the guy said, "You don't even know me." Telling, right?

Ron: Yes. Exactly.

Sheri: Because I had been so wounded that I was having a hard time even being in the same room with men. That is common for at least for women, I don't know if it's a different experience for men, but for women I know they have felt so hurt and so betrayed they're scared of the other gender.

Ron: Yes. You've already started talking about self protection and how shame can serve as a function even in that direction ironically then it becomes part of a problem at that point. We'll come back to that in a minute, I want to unpack that here in a second.

But let's just do a quick high level because I realize that there's people listening to us right now that the betrayal came in a previous marriage relationship. Maybe it came in this relationship, or a dating relationship in between the two. Whatever the story is, it's just that lingering residue that's holding on.

We just want to get real down into that residue. Talk about what it is, and what do you do about it, so you don't remain a slave to it forever. Some of the high points from your book just real quickly let's just hit some of these and maybe just give a quick description and then we'll unpack them. You talk about in your book, *Intimate Deception*, that people, the road to recovery really involves a few things.

You've got to understand the effects of betrayal on your mind, body, and soul. You've got to work towards some relational safety in your current circumstances. Then you've got to try to be empowered to live that way.

So once you see the map doesn't mean that you can actually walk the territory, so you've got to work along with the Holy Spirit and a community of people to help you walk that out. Do you mind just commenting at a very high level about those three things: understanding the effects, working towards relational safety, and then being empowered to live that way.

Sheri: It's interesting the word "betray" has two different meanings in the ancient Hebrew. Now there was a time when Hebrew was written when it was more word pictures, like Egyptian is written or Chinese is written. There's two words; the first one is "rhema" and what that means is "what comes from a person of chaos," and the second word is "badad" which means to betray, to hide, to pillage. Right? To offend, to be deceptive.

So when betrayal happens it's someone knows their cheating on you. They're not not aware. They know but there's a feeling of being duped, "How did I miss this?" So some of that answers the first question is the impact of sexual betrayal. I have something that I call the dirty dozen and we kind of touched on in a little bit just talking about Kyle, but it's the discovery trauma, right.

It's the person that finds--whether it's a male or female--finds that picture of they've been sexting with somebody else, or maybe they turn someone's computer on and there's porn there, or maybe there's a phone conversation or a card or lipstick, or you're noticing one of the spouses is covering their phone and hiding things.

Those are the discoveries. There is deception trauma. Add that, I created a term called "Intimate Deception Betrayal Trauma." But it is--it came out of a 100 women, Ron, that I had talked to/you know did some research with and 65% of them when I asked them, "What would you say is worse--" while both of these things are horrible "--would you say that the actual sex acts that you discovered, that you found out about is worse or would you say it's the continued patterns of lies?"

Sixty-five percent of them said, "It's the lies." Eighty-eight percent of them said, "I'd stay if there weren't all these lies." So the financial trauma that comes out, the relationship breach, you know that sometimes there's even treatment drama which is a concept that's come out of well-meaning people, in an attempt to try to help might say things like, "Well how's your sex life been?" And, "Maybe you need some new lingerie."

So there's layers of trauma, family stuff, so those need to be treated. Part of it is because that shame that wires to us can keep us from healing. It's almost like a broken bone like a broken arm and that bone it heals but it heals crooked.

Ron: Yes. Yes.

Sheri: I was just sitting with a couple recently where there was multiple affairs and I was trying to help this husband understand because he was minimizing the fact that there'd been multiple affairs. I said, "It's kind of like she had a broken bone from the first affair and then you went and broke her broken bone!" I said, it's, "It hurts," and actually causes what I found in my research is Post Traumatic Stress symptoms.

Ron: Sure, sure.

Sheri: Seventy-six percent of the ladies 3 out of 4 and a 100 people, 3 out of 4 women had clinical symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress of that has to be treated.

Ron: Yes.

Sheri: Well you mention the second thing was...

Ron: The second thing was working towards relational safety.

Sheri: Yes.

Ron: So Kyle I wanted to ask you the understanding piece, it seems like there's a lot of layers to what Sheri was just saying. Because they're so many different betrayals, so many different pieces of the story, understanding it could take some time, I would think? Then I'm trying to wrap that whole finding relational safety part in there. How do you find safety when you keep uncovering another layer of betrayal?

Kyle: Well that's a great question and there's a couple of ways to go about that when you're dealing with couples that are working through this situation. You do need to establish two things in a relationship: truth and safety.

One of the ways to establish truth in the recovery process is to go through a clinical full disclosure and putting down everything that has gone before in a document that is worked on with qualified and certified therapists in the process.

This is a very painful process.

Ron: It is very painful because you're putting it in black-and-white. You're saying, "This is what happened." And you can't minimize it when that happens.

Kyle: But what it does when you put it in black-and-white is that it generally allows the partner to get their arms around the totality of it, and then come to a place of a line in the sand, as it were, and then moving forward from there so that's where truth begins. A lot of times in our practice we utilize a polygraph on the back end of that in order to substantiate the truthfulness of the document, because there's no point going through the trauma of the disclosure without knowing that it's complete.

Ron: And that one of the casualties it sounds like of repeatedly lies is that you never know whether you've got all the truth or not. You have to kind of analyze and consider that. If somebody's listening right now and they're in a new relationship is there some usefulness in them going back and putting in black-and-white some of the things that happened in the previous betrayal in a different relationship? What do you guys think?

Sheri: That's an interesting question. You know when we do a therapeutic full disclosure it is a sacred document and truly there's so much to it that I don't want someone to be hearing us and go, "Okay, I'm going to go home right now and do that."

Ron: Yes. Yes.

Sheri: Because we don't have them put the details in: hair color, body size, because then those become more triggers for the betrayed. Every brunette out there now is an enemy. So I just want to have a note of caution. We've been certified and that'll, you know, you'll show people credentials but those are the folks where credentials--

Ron: It's helpful.

Sheri: --know how to do this. They've been really trained. But if you're asking, so Ron, if I have experienced betrayal would it help to write some things down for Kyle my new husband, so that he-- is that what you were asking?

Ron: That's not what I was asking but it's a good question why don't you keep going with that. [Laughs]

Sheri: Well I mean so I call him my "kinsman redeemer," because I needed somebody that I could really trust. I've got to tell you, Ron, integrity was the *most* important thing when I was out there dating again. I could have met some really great guys.

Ron: Right.

Sheri: They could have bought me a house on the side of a mountain and an airplane to go with it and I would have said, "No thank you." I need integrity because I did not want to go through that again.

So there were some things in our courtship that happened that you honored integrity. We didn't have sex before we were married. I didn't meet his son until we've been dating for about year. You know, we were really intentional in how we dated.

But through that process I had to sift this relationship. Now that might scare a lot of folks that are listening because they might go, "Woe, that sounds kind of intense," but I needed to know, that I know, that I know that I could trust him.

Ron: Absolutely.

Sheri: He met my friends. I sat down with--we had dinner one night--with Don and Kelly and I asked over dinner, I said, "So is there anything I need to know about him? Is there any character flaw is there anything that I need to know that I don't know?"

Kyle: And Don, just as a context, Don was my accountability partner, my rock, in the midst of the final years of my marriage. He counseled me entirely through the end of the marriage through the divorce and then actually is a pastor and ended up marrying Sheri and I when we remarried.

So he knew everything so when we had dinner I sat there with a level of trepidation with, "Oh my. What is he going to say?" Not that I was trying to hide anything but he knows all the warts.

Ron: Yes.

Kyle: If he decided to point them all out, I was like, "Uuch!" But by that time I was okay.

Ron: So here's what I want to hit at because you have just hit on a very important subject for our listeners, that I have found in my experience. And it's just this lingering fear. It goes back to the self protection, to the shame issues, to the how do I know I can trust anybody again, how can I lower my wall and allow myself to risk in loving and giving to somebody else.

You guys had a moment there where before marriage this all came to a head having dinner were full disclosures let's get it out there. Lots of people listening are going, "Okay, we're five years into our marriage and I still don't know how to trust. I still don't know how to give all of me to this person." Let's speak to that for just a minute like what do you do if you're finding yourself in that situation?

Kyle: Ron, I think you bring up a really good point too. Even once you do all of these things there's going to be triggers that harken back to some of these destructive discoveries or destructive moments in our life.

So we're never completely over them; it's how you then manage them afterwards, because even having gone through that Sheri and I have had some times when there are situations that trigger each of us into that, "I need safety," or "I need clarification," or "I am just scared, I'm not trusting." We have to walk through that even on the back side of all that we've done.

Sheri: So let me share a story, all right?

Ron: Okay.

Sheri: This is recent. So this was couple months ago, I had some people come and clean, and you know when cleaning crew comes every couple months there's stuff they find that's been under the chair or whatever so I come home and I go into the office and there is this pink Post-it in the center of Kyle's office desk and it says, written very simply, it says, "Thank you for everything you do. I *really* appreciate you," with a heart. I'm like, "Alright who gave him that?"

I immediately thought of somebody who was a client of his that tends to come in short skirts. When I see her it triggers me just to see her in the waiting room because I am like, "Why are you wearing that short of skirts to see my husband?" I'm already getting revved up, it's a trigger because it's a threat. So I knew I needed to talk to him about it but I was hurt, scared, and mad.

Ron: Yes.

Sheri: All three of those. So I took that little pink piece of paper, I put it next to our bed behind, you know, a water bottle that I have there. I knew I'd need to say something but that night I just didn't want to deal with it and I went to bed. Of course I crawled into bed I'm like not touching him, I'm like rolling over this way, I'm like you know.

Ron: Yes. The message came through loud and clear.

Sheri: Yes.

Kyle: Yes, it did.

Sheri: So then I got enough courage up on Saturday morning to open up the dialogue and so what I did after we woke up, I had went and pulled out the pink piece of paper. I said, "I found this it was on your desk and I just want to know who it's from because I'm really hurt. Who wrote this to you?" I am--I mad, I'm upset.

I'm saying, "I think it might be the girl at your office." You know I start unwrapping it. And he looks at me and he said, "Sheri, that's your handwriting. You gave me that and I have it on my desk because it encourages my heart."

I wept.

I couldn't believe that after all this time I'd been triggered again and I had this whole story in my mind about this person and I couldn't even recognize my own handwriting. That's real, raw Post Traumatic Stress triggers, just like somebody has been out on the battlefield, right?

Ron: Absolutely.

Sheri: A plane flies over and that you think they're going to shoot down on you. I mean it was, it was that real to me. So he held me, he let me cry, he didn't get upset, he just loved me, kinsman redeemer, through that moment because they are not always that easy. I've had some other triggers that...

Kyle: I do want to point out too is that part of the process in a blended family is learning how to deal of those triggers. I love to say, "You know, yeah, I handled that one really

well and that one came out really clean.” But you've got to have a level of grace in the relationship for your betrayed partner, even if you weren't the betrayer.

I use that in my counseling sessions constantly is that I wasn't the betrayer here's my wife's book but I'm the new guy. However there are times when I get accused because of a situation that creates a trigger and it's going to be really, really important for the spouse in blended families to learn to manage those situations with grace and dignity.

Ron: I appreciate you guys sharing that story. That is so real. I just have to capture the process that you went through because I think that's the take away for our listener. So the note was a trigger and there could be a million different triggers, right? Sights, smells, sounds, whatever imagination: some real, some perceived. Whatever they are, it's a trigger. Then you got scared, afraid somebody's moving in, something is going on. I can't trust my husband's heart.

Sheri: And angry-don't leave that one out.

Ron: I'm angry.

Sheri: Because I'm mad. Mad at him. Mad at her.

Ron: Right.

Sheri: Just whoever she is.

Ron: Right so anger gives birth to being withdrawn, and pulling away, trying to find safety, and then you find the courage, you said, to come to him with that. How difficult that was to kind of muster that up, to push through the fear and say, “I've got to--we've got to deal with this,” and try to bring it in a way that's palatable as hard, as difficult, as awkward as that moment is.

And then to discover that there was some truth on the back in that in this case was very reassuring and your heart was able to go back to saying, “I am safe with him. It's okay.” But the flip side there was Kyle you had to be receptive and merciful and grace filled and not make it personal, “Hey you're accusing me unfairly,” and go into that rift, but to try to be extending yourself in love and care for her in that moment. That's got to be a discipline of yourself.

Kyle: It is. It is a discipline you've got to listen to understand. I usually make a distinction in my sessions between listening to hear and listening to understand.

Ron: Yes.

Kyle: Listening to hear is the words that are coming out but when somebody is hurt or triggered those words, that's not really what's going on underneath the surface. You've

got understand and so in this case I recognized that there was some kind of trigger going on and I could move in that direction but I botched it a few times.

Ron: Yes. Yes. So again the take away there for me is finding calm in the midst of that storm enough to reach for each other, when it's so tempting to push away from each other and that is what betrayal does, right? That's what the trigger moves you towards isn't it?

Sheri: It does and you think about that chaos that happens within. That person you know now all of a sudden I've been betrayed and now I have some chaos going inside of me. You talk about calm; in those ancient Hebrew word pictures the word "shalom" for "peace" means to "establish authority over chaos."

Ron: Oh my goodness! I wish we could do that every single day! I'm writing that one down! Keep going.

Sheri: It's what it means like what to get to that place of peace and sometimes peace only comes after courage. Sometimes peace only comes after I cried out after we talk about it. If I hold it in I stack and then I, you know, either blow like a volcano and he doesn't know what it's about or I pull away.

Ron: Okay you said "stack" hold on. Unpack that what does stack mean?

Sheri: Stack means I might be being upset by some things are going on in our relationship and yet not bring it to him. I'm expecting him to just, you know, somehow know what I'm upset about or read my body language, and so I stack, stack, stack, and don't tell him, don't talk, minimize, try to swallow it.

Ron: Got you.

Sheri: All those things. I grew up in a home where we didn't talk about stuff. It wasn't okay to share your opinion. It wasn't okay to be honest, it wasn't okay. There was no one mining my heart, M-I-N-I-N-G, like digging for gold. So for me to go to that place and actually that's kind of the vulnerability for both of us we can both do this:

Ron: Sit back-to-back.

Sheri: We could go back-to-back. We can both kind of shut down and try to get power that way. It's skewed entitlement really. It's, "I think I'm right." "I think I'm right." But then there is no connection in that place, there's no way to move through that chaos, you just create more of it.

Ron: And you know one of the things that occurs to me is happening within that is, "I'm hoping that you're gonna prove to me that you really love me as much as I want you to

love me. If that happens then I don't have to be afraid anymore that you betrayed me or that I can't trust you and so I'm trying to hint you into proving your love for me."

To me that is so understandable and yet self defeating for so many people. I want listeners to hear the self defeat in that, "If I just go hint around or passive aggressive or whatever it is and you don't come to me, you don't get the message, you don't figure out exactly what I need, then now I have more evidence. I'm stacking evidence against you that you're untrustworthy and my heart's just closed a little bit more towards you."

I'm undoing myself. The hard part is finding responsibility for me, finding courage like you did, and moving toward him with whatever didn't feel right so that you're not stuck with your backs back-to-back.

Sheri: I love my stepson. I love Coleman. Sad day when Connor and I, my first husband, made a decision on our front porch to not have a baby, to not have kids because of the pornography issue that had taken over our world and our relationship. So we chose and I have never had a baby. I've had a longing in my heart for kids and so Coleman has been a redemptive gift to me and loved that my blended family actually came with a son.

My first husband Connor had a child, out of wedlock, that was a boy. I remember the first time I saw him it was like something in my heart almost an ache and vengeance at the same time it was like I wanted to say, "He's mine. He should be mine." But he wasn't, right?

Ron: Right.

Sheri: We made that decision. So this redemptive part of this blended family, Coleman has been a delight. He was in our wedding ceremony and just it's been cool. But let me share this: so I don't know what it has been but when we've gone on vacations on to this certain vacation place that we go to, it has felt like there is this magnet pull where I would observe Kyle and Coleman kind go off and be by themselves in a bigger way than they would do it when we were just together like we'd have him over we'd go out to dinner.

We'd have lots of outings and lots of times with family and I never experienced it until-- It's like Gollum, I just kind of felt like he'd get with Coleman and it was like "precious" [said like Gollum says it.]

Ron: [Laughter]

Sheri: And I was on the outside. I couldn't break in.

Ron: [Still laughing] That was a pretty good impersonation, by the way.

Sheri and Ron: [Laugh]

Sheri: So okay there was some dynamic happening. I know I have a family history, I have some wounds from there. I didn't feel--I felt on the outside because of the mental illness in my home. But it was such a weird conundrum, why does it happen here? So we had a situation and I was seeing it happen again. We'd talked about it before but never really did anything with it; stack, stack, stack.

So during this event, I was so upset about the time that he was spending, because I felt like I was on the outside, that I decided to not go to dinner. I was at dinner but I said, "You know what guys? I'm going-- I'm not feeling well," which wasn't honest, right? I mean my heart wasn't feeling well but I wasn't sick but I just said, "I'm not feeling well. I'm going to go back the room."

Well I was just mad because I had not chosen to be courageous and bring it again. So I went and had a bowl of soup at another restaurant. So I'm there. Entitled. I'm eating my bowl of soup. Stewing in my stew, enjoying every bite, waiting for him to come to me-- just what you said.

Ron: Yes.

Sheri: I'm there by myself and I have this expectation that he should come and get me. I'm upset, I mean, he knew I told him I wasn't feeling well. I thought for sure he'll come for me. No! He had dinner with them and then they went back the room. I was really hurt and the fact that he didn't come for me made me even more hurt and more justified in my anger and resentment, right. As this blended family, I can't break, in I don't belong, I'm not enough to keep his attention, and so we had a fight.

Ron: I bet.

Kyle: This is, Ron, one of those places where I did not while she was sitting in her stew and stewing and feeling entitled I was defending. I'm like, "You know what I'm so over this. I mean I have spoken my undying true love and attention and I have demonstrated it in so many ways." I'd gotten to place of my own entitlement, so we were both standing on the entitlement square and in our entitlement that we should talk about, but--

Sheri: Coleman's my son, right?

Kyle: Right and so it was revolving around him but it really wasn't revolving around him.

Sheri: It's not his fault. We both said, "We know it's not Coleman. This is our issue."

Ron: It's just this stepfamily insider/outsider thing becomes the trigger that takes you back to those places of: I don't know who I can trust. I don't know who really ultimate

cares for me and is fighting for me, and is gonna keep me engaged in this. That's what is familiar given the betrayal stories that you've lived.

Sheri: Totally! You're so right. For me it's, "I don't matter."

Ron: Right. Back to that shame sort of stuff. I want our listener to really capture that because I think there are many different stepfamily triggers that really tap into old hurts and pains and betrayals from childhood, first marriage, whatever that back story is for you and it can be something that's not the same at all like, this is a stepson and my husband's spending time with his son that's a good thing. But somehow it feels like it's a bad thing a dangerous thing for me. That's a really common thing for people.

So again I appreciate that you guys are just talking through the natural progression of that if we don't find courage to move toward one another is that we just constantly move further and further away and things get more heated or more conflictual or more anger or whatever that that looks like. So was there a time where you guys tried to repair that?

Kyle: Well eventually yes well mean we did end up having the explosion that you have when you're both stacking expectations on top of expectations and then it erupts. It erupted for both of us and so we didn't enter the conversation in a good place.

Sheri: Yes.

Kyle: So it was rather wrenching.

Sheri: Then poor Coleman, right? He feels-he doesn't know what's going on, but he could feel the tension.

Ron: Sure.

Sheri: You know, I think you assured him it wasn't him but you know we needed help. Here are two therapists that you'd think would know the tools.

Ron: Yes. Yes.

Sheri: I go out the door when it's our issues and we had to go get therapy. We met with a therapist, and we had to talk some stuff through.

Ron: Sheri, thank you for that. I mean that's just the truth, just because we *know* sometimes what to do doesn't mean that we can always master our emotions in the moment and get it all right. I mean I take great solace from the Apostle Paul, in him walking through Romans 7, talking about, "Man I just keep on doing the things I don't want to do any more, like, I'm trying to put this to death." Look if he had some problems Ron Deal is going to have some problems that I just can't shake this side of heaven.

That's the reality of it, we don't need to feel ashamed of that we just need to say, "Somebody help me." You know to reach out, to talk to somebody a friend, sometimes it's a professional, but it's that point of saying, "If I just keep all this inside me that does-- that's not working too well. I need to reach outside of me for something to try to help give some guidance and some tips.

I love that you guys have those moments we go here we go again. Like, Nan and I do. We've been married 33 years, we still have, "Here we go again, like how did we get here?"

Sheri: You do?!

Ron: Absolutely!

Sheri: That makes me feel good because we're five years into the game and you know but I love knowing that, Ron. I love knowing that you guys after 33 years?

Ron: Yes.

Sheri: Even still you're working it out.

Ron: Around here what I love to say is that, "We're always working on our marriages because God is always using our marriage to work on us." Just as soon as we get this layer figured out He's going uncover another layer of ME that I've got to crucify on a cross and I've got to keep working on. This is a sanctification process, this thing called: relationship, marriage, parenting, family, blended family, it's all sanctifying work.

As long as I am humble enough to allow it to work on me there could be progress but if I go into pride and go, "I don't need this work," I don't think there'll be any progress. That's kind of where we get stuck sometimes.

Sheri, you say in your book that the most difficult part of recovering from intimate sexual betrayal, in particular, is what to do with sex. You know sex is one of those places that you can be there but not be there. You can give a little of yourself but not all of yourself. I think whether the betrayal is in this relationship or a previous relationship, there's a real temptation to only bring part of you into your sexual experience.

Let's talk around that for a minute. What's going on there for somebody and what do they do with those feelings that make them withhold?

Sheri: Great question. So in the book my chapter on that is called, *Remember When Sex Was Safe and Skydiving Was Dangerous*. The truth of it is is I have jumped out of a very good airplane.

Ron: Why would you do that why? Why would you do that?

Sheri: I've done it but I'll tell you I would rather jump out of an airplane-a good airplane-with a parachute than go through what I went through in light of the impact to my sexuality and sensuality. So again we're back to this idea of shame.

Ron: Yes.

Sheri: I use some research that was done by a group of folks where they were looking at three movements of shame which is: to move away, or to move towards in a pleasing way, or to move against. So in my book I talk about it and I describe it in three categories; there's the turtle, which is "hypo sexual" meaning I pull in like a turtle would pull in. Hyper sexual which means I am like a golden retriever. I'm trying, I'm highly sexualized because I'm trying to keep you from ever wanting to leave our relationship sexually.

I may then cross some of my own boundaries sexually in order to please you. I have women that tell me that they do things that they're very uncomfortable with because they're afraid if they don't he will stray.

Then there is to move against sexualized against and I use the idea of the hedgehog. A hedgehog effect is a concept where there's two hedgehogs and they are kind of like little brillo pads and they try to get close to each other when it's cold. They're like porcupine quills, poke each other, and so they move away from that.

So it's this desire to be close but I'm going to quill you in the process. So that's where maybe more of the affairs happen. That's where you're hurt and you're trying to somehow deal with this pain and equal the playing field, as it may be. Or you're angry in the bedroom, however that is.

So those three different dynamics play out.

Ron: Sounds like you don't really want to end up in either one of those three.

Sheri: Yes, but those are all shame reactions to trauma.

Ron: Okay.

Sheri: We might have a shame-induced trauma reaction to the betrayal and so I think for us, I know in my marriage, I became somewhat of a turtle. I pulled in. In fact, painful story, there was a day where Connor came up to me and I had not showered for weeks. I didn't know I hadn't showered, I wasn't aware but there was a stench on my body that he-- and I came up to me and he said, "Sheri I just want to touch base with you because it's been several weeks and you haven't showered."

I used that unconsciously as a way of getting safe and so sometimes when there's been a sexual violation, whether it's in a relationship before the blended one, whether it's from

our past, whether you're a male or a woman and you've been somehow sexually violated molested, there's been some sexual event or events that have happened. You know when kids find porn early on whether as little boys or little girls they are both violated by that.

Ron: Yes, right.

Sheri: It changes the way they see sex and so it changes the way you really see a real relationship, so I know for us having waited until our marriage, I've got to tell you, Ron, it was really important to me sexually that I was with a man that didn't want me for one of my body parts.

Ron: Right. So Kyle, that integrity piece was just as important, Sheri is what you're saying about him as it related to the bedroom as it did outside the bedroom.

Kyle: And it's a matter of respect and value that was the other thing for me. I mean we have lost in our society that level of respect and value for the person because one of the things I talk about in my sessions a lot is that when you jump straight from, "Hi, my name is ___" to sex, you're not interested in the person. You're interested in the experience or the body part as Sheri said.

So you don't really get to know who they are and we have really lost that ability to find respect and define connection with other people. And the antidote to the three positions that Sheri described and to some of this dysfunction is really communication. It comes down to having the words, sitting across from each other on the couch or at a coffee shop and looking eye to eye and then talking.

Ron: Finding the courage to really talk about what's underneath what's happening like you had to earlier.

Kyle: Absolutely. And in our relationship, not sharing out of school is that some of the things we had to do early on is we sat on the bed in our bedroom and talked while we were just sitting there naked or sitting there together where we would talk and get to know each other and discuss that and discuss some of the fears some of the concerns. That communication would then inform me as a man.

Ron: Right. Kyle it occurs to me that what you were saying earlier like the moment when she had wondered about the note and was concerned what that meant and when she brought that to you that in that moment, you had to, you had to have mercy and grace and be looking out for her and reassuring her rather than getting, "I don't deserve this," getting defensive about you.

I'm wondering if that same sort of a posture has to come out even in a sexual relationship that this is in part about holding the other person and where they are now

rather than getting--rather than throwing a pity party about what with this is doing to you. Is that true?

Kyle: It is so true. It's trying to see into the inner world of your partner as often as possible.

Ron: That's really good.

Sheri: Yes. He's done a good job of helping me as a turtle get more comfortable with my body, with my sensuality. I am still growing, that I'll be really honest I wish at this point that I could even be more free but I see that as we continue to engage and I continue to trust him more and I continue to unveil and he continues to honor me, he continues to look at my eyes, he continues to tell me that he loves me, and I love your body, it's even though it's not perfect because it's not.

It's like what he says, "I love your body," and I--if anybody's hard on it, it's me because you know I'm coming through that veil of shame and so the more and more that he honors me and honors who I am, I can feel myself relax more and more. Again as my kinsman redeemer I'm like, "This is what sex was supposed to look like." Like I had no concept before so I am healing even still in my new blended world.

Ron: You've been listening to my conversation with Kyle and Sheri Keffer. I'm Ron Deal and this is FamilyLife Blended®.

We'll hear one last thought from them in just a minute.

You know, in our conversation we talked about shame and its impact on us. Leading researcher Brene Brown says, "It takes three things for shame to grow: secrecy, silence, and judgment." Secrecy implies that there's something wrong with you so you can't tell anyone; silence keeps the story inside where it festers and develops its own narrative inside you that keeps you imprisoned with the person who hurt you; and judgment just adds salt to the wound, and makes you feel blamed and bad for the stuff you feel ashamed of.

By the way, the antidote to these is talking with a trusted friend or counselor about what happened, breaking the silence, refusing to keep the secret, and placing the blame where it belongs.

Now the Bible has a term for this it's "confession." Sometimes you're confessing stuff you're responsible for, but other times it's just talking around what has happened. Saying out loud what has happened to you, and having it received and cared for by someone who loves you or is caring for you in that moment. It's breaking the power of the shame.

Now here's a quick observation about blended families in the church particularly when divorce is a part of their stepfamily story there's a fair amount of shame that holds power over people and the church sometimes inadvertently adds to it by the way we respond. I think it's inadvertent, we're not meaning to add to people's shame but nevertheless if this has happened to you, if you feel that shame when you walk into church don't pull away from church life or church people and isolate yourself.

I mean maybe you did at some point the past and you're listening and you're recognizing, "Yes, I did that and I still am doing that." See here's the deal that just makes it worse. You're adding silence and secrecy to your situation which means shame grows. It's time to break that silence and seek out the support of a local church.

We think one of the best ways to do that is to get together with other blended family couples in your local church. Talk with them, tell your story, and connect with them and other church leadership so the church leaders can learn how to be more supportive to others in the future and that gives you an opportunity to connect with the larger community of believers even through social media.

That's part of what we're trying to do at FamilyLife Blended® when you follow us on social media you get connected with other people who have a very similar story as you. It breaks the silence and it helps you move out of the shame. People drowning in shame often feel pushed into secrecy and silence by the judgment of others. Take your power back, break out of that, find community in God's church with others in similar circumstances and break the shame that binds you.

If you'd like more information about our guests you can find it in our show notes. Check it out at the FamilyLife Blended® page at FamilyLife.com/podcast.

I do want you to know that we love hearing from you, your feedback means a lot to us and positive reviews on iTunes and various places is really appreciated.

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Maybe, just maybe, if you like what you hear, you'll help us spread the word. Tell a friend, share it on social media, whatever works for you that helps us we really appreciate it.

Wanted to tell you we've got a new video series coming the 10th anniversary edition of my video curriculum *The Smart Stepfamily* will be released in the summer of 2019.

Along with an updated participant's guide, this all new eight-session video study is a great small group series or a DIY enrichment program for your marriage and your blended family. It's available on Right Now Media and at FamilyLife.com.

For you ministry leaders who would want to use that series with a small group join us for the next Summit on Stepfamily Ministry, October 24 and 25, in Chesapeake, Virginia. This is a two-day ministry quipping event for anybody, lay ministers, pastors, couples leading small groups and classes.

Even if you're new to stepfamily ministry you're going to learn all the basics. We're going to try to help you out. If you've got a ministry already up and running, we're going to help you network with others, learn about the latest resources, and find encouragement as a leader.

That's October 24th and 25th 2019, learn more at SummitOnStepfamilies.com and remember if you looking for articles on a variety of subjects related to blended families, online videos, and resources we've got them. Just visit us at FamilyLife.com/blended.

Now before we're done a final word from Sheri and Kyle Keffer. You know as I read Sheri's book there was a theme that kept popping up so I asked her about it and it brought a tear to her eye.

In your book I noticed, and I read your book by the way, I read it all the way through. There is so much in this book, it is deep and wide, and anybody who's ever experienced betrayal in any relationship, past or present, I would really recommend *Intimate Deception* to you. But in your book you say more than once like I started noticing okay there's a theme here. You say, "Be kind to yourself."

Be kind to yourself. Someone who's listening right now who is going, "I don't know how to do that. What does that mean, be kind to myself?" What would you say?

Sheri: Yes, it brings up tears just hearing you say it because it sounds so good to my hidden heart that has been so rode hard and hung up to dry through so many different events in my life that that self mercy just hearing your words say it, Ron, and in trying to take that in to my deepest part of my bone and marrow, right, it's realizing that you don't have to be perfect.

You don't have to have this all figured out and so if you're one of those folks that are there today I just ask you to walk the journey out with me. It's 20 chapters of what you need to heal because truly I don't want you to heal broken. I want to give you everything that I could come up with in my mind, and things that I laid over my own life, tools and directions of what kinds of therapies and stuff like that that can help you heal and heal well.

If you can heal and heal well even though it's going to take work you have more to offer the one you're with.

Ron: Yes.

Sheri: Then they don't end up paying some price. It doesn't end up being costly for them because of your wound. They can't heal you. You can't heal you. I have to get on the gurney and I have to get some good healing to bind up those wounds and go into those places of Post Traumatic Stress, right, the shame and all of that in order to get free.

Ron: There it is. I think that's the thought. God, I can just hear Him whispering, "Be kind to yourself. I'm with you."

Sheri: "I'm with you."

Ron: "I'm with you. Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. You can you can rely on Me. You can't always trust people in your life but you can depend and rely on Me." What a reassuring thought that is that He would just whisper, "Be kind to yourself. I'm here, I'm with you, I'm forgiving, I'm moving, I'm working behind the scenes. I'm with you. You can be kind to yourself."

That's a wrap for Season One of the FamilyLife Blended® Podcast but don't worry we're already making plans for Season Two. In Episode One we'll hear from best-selling author Tricia Goyer about how childhood family experiences can creep into adult relationships, and we'll talk about calming angry kids.

Tricia: My daughter kicked a hole in the wall, she was angry. "Go ahead and call the case worker, I'm like, "We're not going to call the case worker. You don't have a case worker anymore, you've been adopted for two years." But still that's her go to thing that we're going to send her away and it's just something that's deep in that's been there since she was a little girl.

Ron: That's Tricia Goyer in Season Two of 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 our producer. Mastering engineer, Justin Adams. And our theme music provided by Braden Deal.

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