

FamilyLife Blended®

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

Episode 18: The Blessing and Your Blended Family

Guests: John Trent, Kari Trent-Stageberg

Air Date: October 21, 2019

John: I remember sitting there for a long time, which for me was probably a minute or two, with just silence. I couldn't take it anymore and I remember saying, "Mom, I guess this means you don't love us anymore." I'll never forget she sits up and she goes, "This has nothing to do with love! I will always love you, but I am tremendously disappointed in you!"

I knew right then, "Okay it's two in the morning I've just been brought home by the police and she still loves me." It's like something broke inside me.

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.

Before we jump into our conversation with John Trent and Kari Stageberg, I wanted to remind you that we just released the 10th anniversary edition of my video curriculum *The Smart Stepfamily*.

This week is the Summit on Stepfamily Ministry and if you're not going to be able to join us in Chesapeake, Virginia, for that I want you to know that the All-Access Digital pass is available. If you're interested in that digital pass just go to the show notes and we'll let you know how you can get ahold of that.

Have you ever put money into a vending machine and nothing came out? Maybe you tried again and again it devoured your money without giving anything back. Yes. What are you feeling right about that moment? Angry. Frustrated. Unfulfilled.

Now imagine a child who spends much of their childhood or adulthood for that matter putting a little of themselves into their parent hoping to get back a word of encouragement or an, "I am proud of you," but they seldom or never get something back.

What that child wants is a parental blessing. What they get back is a question mark about their worth. Now that scenario might be something you've heard about or something you can personally relate to. On this podcast we're going to be talking about how parents and stepparents can bestow what John Trent calls "the blessing" on their children.

Now let me tell you something, there is so much promise for blended families in offering this blessing within their household. I think it builds up your child but it also has the potential to soften hearts, build trust, and bridge gaps between people.

But as you'll hear, it's not a magic bullet. It still requires commitment to the process and patience but there is real promise in today's discussion. Please take it to heart.

My guests today are Dr. John Trent and his daughter Kari Trent-Stageberg. You may remember Dr. Gary Smalley, great speaker and author on marriage and family relationships. John and Gary wrote the first edition of this book called *The Blessing*.

Now John and his daughter Kari have put out a new edition of this great book, *The Blessing*. John is President of StrongFamilies.com, an award-winning author and conference speaker and the founding chair of the Gary Chapman Institute at Moody Theological Seminary and I should add a really nice guy and a good friend.

Kari Stageberg, his daughter, is the CEO of Strong Families, an author and a speaker.

Here's our conversation:

You know, John, since you and Gary Smalley wrote the first edition of *The Blessing* millions of people have purchased the book and I would venture to say millions more. I know because of the ripples of what happens one person buys and reads but that impacts their marriage, their kids, generations on and on and on.

Millions of people have been impacted by the message of this book. It keeps selling. The publisher keeps coming back to you now Kari has joined you on the fourth edition of this book.

I'm convinced it touches a deep need in people's lives, that's why they keep buying.

John: Yes.

Ron: What is that need that it impacts?

John: Wow, well first of all I have lots of relatives, so they keep--

Ron: You don't have millions of relatives.

John: But not millions, you are right. No that's just God's grace. But I think you're right. I think really a couple of things. Are you familiar with a guy named Simon Sinek?

Ron: Yes.

John: Okay well he has this thing called the “golden robe” and he has a billion views on his Ted talks and things, but really what he does is really gets people to focus on the why question. I started to understand my why, that was so important to me, when I was working in a psychiatric hospital -- I know there’s been some question. I was *working* there --

[All laugh]

Ron: Are you sure?

John: In my internship--yes--and it's my first day on the job; this is how the whole book came about okay.

Ron: Okay.

John: So I'm at BBU Memorial Hospital it's in Dallas, Texas. It has a different name now. It was a long time ago. The locked-in, 23-bed unit psychiatric ward.

I'd never even seen a psychotic patient. I'm a doctoral student working for Paul Meier and Frank Minirth. I was their first intern.

Ron: Minaret and Meier, okay.

John: Minirth and Meier, have you heard of that? I'm a brand new intern, right, so they ask me to go down and admit somebody. How hard is that?

So I go down and it's a Wycliffe missionary lady that had had a break on the field. Her parents were there and they were Christians--this wasn't total Christian facility, but they were believers so we were in a little in-take room so I prayed with them. And took her in the elevator up to the third floor. Well, they didn't tell me as a new intern you do not take the violent psychotic patients in the elevator to the third floor, you walk them up the stairs.

[Ron laughs]

Kari: Good warning, yes.

John: Yes, so anyway I never saw the first punch which broke my nose again. It had been broken twice earlier but this one didn't help because you're not making great eye contact with people, right.

Ron: Right, right.

John: She is trying to kill me. I'm screaming; she's screaming. Of course they probably hear us coming up the elevator and think another intern or something. Well the door

opens and they restrain her and they have to restrain me because it's a girl, I can't hit her.

[Ron laughs]

John: You can't go anywhere in the elevator -- but have you ever broken your nose?

Ron: No I haven't.

John: You've got to stuff stuff up your nose, but you're locked in. It's a 12-hour shift, you're locked in. So I remember walking into the group room trying to orient myself after cleaning myself up as good as I could.

Here's this guy about my age and I go well so I sit down and I figured, *he's an intern* and maybe he got beat up his first day. So I sit down talking to him and he's very consoling. Then he reaches out and pats me and says, "Hey, you're going to do fine. I'm sure that was just an anomaly," and his sweater pulls back and his wristband -- he was a patient but he helped me a lot while he was there.

[Ron laughs]

Part of why it helped me so much was so I sat for the next four hours in a group room with a guy that had just, and this is no joke, he had just gotten his first "B" as in "boy" not "D" as in "dog" ever in his life.

Ron: Wow.

John: He was a senior in college and he knew with his dad and with just how he was raised that dad was a straight A student and this was in P.E. course. He gets a "B" in the course and he literally went back to his room and begged the teacher to try to do something.

If his roommate hadn't miraculously -- I think it was the Lord -- just come back to the dorm room, he would have bled out and died.

Ron: Wow.

John: Bottom line is: is it was so tough hearing the story of living with never measuring up and never measuring up. Maybe he could but now he knew he never ever would and I couldn't go back home.

That night, guess what I'm reading, well that night I'm preparing because the next day, my wife and I are teaching a Sunday school class with young couples. I read Genesis chapter 27 with Jacob and Esau. You remember that story.

Ron: Yes.

John: I'm a twin. I've always liked that story because, frankly, because my mom always liked Jeff best.

[Ron laughs]

But there's Jacob and Esau, and so Jacob gets the blessing--we won't go into all that.

Ron: Right.

John: Tricks his way into it.

Ron: Right.

John: But he gets it, right?

Ron: Yes.

John: He walks out the tent. Who walks right in?

Ron: Esau, who thinks he's going to get the blessing.

John: And says, "Arise my father and eat of your son's game that you might bless me," and in his dad goes, "Well who are you?" And he goes, "Well I'm Esau your firstborn." He goes, "Well who was it that came and ate of all of it and I blessed him and yes he shall be blessed." Meaning back then, I mean, I don't have it. I know you're the oldest but the younger got it and you don't get it.

When Esau heard the words of his father it says in Genesis 27, "He cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said, 'Bless me even me also O my father.'" Now I had read that, you've heard that, a lot of people it's, yes, but I'm telling you that night it was literally like scales falling off my eyes because now I had a word for it. Do you see what I'm getting at?

Ron: Yes.

John: Now I had a word for that guy that I was sitting with. He didn't get the blessing but I didn't know exactly what it was so that's really where blessing became my doctoral dissertation. It became this book that Gary and I did, and now awesomely Kari. Just great voice for processing the whole millennial thing and has written a bunch of new stuff. So that's really where this whole thing came about was I heard all these echoes in my own life and heart and we can get into some of those.

Ron: Yes.

John: So I saw it in the life of others, I saw it in my own life and right there in Scripture and it all came together.

Ron: Now Kari as you been listening to the story and I know you've heard it before, I'm sure you have.

Kari: Yes, a couple of times.

Ron: But at the same time now as John said you are part of this project. It's kind of like one generation, the next generation, getting to join in and communicating this to everybody. I can only imagine the kind of reflections you have about how this one day in your dad's life has so influenced his ministry, his career, your life.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: Your family's lives, generations moving forward, and now you are being a part of this. I mean, where do we begin in terms of how you've seen this one day impact your family?

Kari: Yes, well first of all what an honor to get to be a part of that legacy with him and Gary and just what an honor to get to be a part of it. I think one of the great things about my dad not to brag on him too much or he'll kick me off the podcast.

[Ron laughs]

But everything that he writes about he did with us.

So really what you're reading in *The Blessing* are things that he's actually done in our family. But for our family and for so many families out there as a parent you can do all the right things, you can say all the right things but your kids still have a choice. For a huge period of my life I chose not to believe it and even really questioned *is God who He says he is* and walked away from faith and ended up actually in an abusive relationship.

When I came out of all of that I'll never forget sitting down with my dad and I was thinking he was going to tell me, "Get lost, we've had enough, you've put us through it," and he put his hand on my shoulder and he just said, "Kari, it's not about where you've been it's about where you're going."

He gave me his blessing so I've really seen it. That gave me permission. It gave my dad an answer to why his dad had bailed out and how he could heal but it gave me permission to continue to move forward with the Lord with God's calling on my life, so the blessing for our family has it really has, like you said, impacted generations.

Ron: Okay so there was a whole lot in what you just said. There are many layers. I'm trying hard not to forget all of them.

[Kari laughs]

We're going to come back to a couple of them in a minute about you heard the blessing that you didn't quite internalize it or believe it. Just let me jump off at that one spot about you desperately in that moment very much wanted your dad's love, approval. What he ended up giving you was the blessing.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: But you still needed that so desperately even as an adult; that's the why, right?

John: Yes.

Ron: It's that we all want that approval from our parents.

John: Yes.

Kari: Yes. That unconditional love and acceptance, absolutely.

Ron: Absolutely and it seems to me, guys, that it's a really good thing it's a God-given thing and yet that's fragile like because our parents are imperfect. I'm a parent I know I'm imperfect. Should we want the blessing from our parents?

John: Yes.

Ron: And to what degree?

Kari: Yes.

John: Now that's a great question, but you know a big part of that is, I think, tied in with the first time you hear the Father speak, God the Father speak, in the New Testament is when? Jesus comes up out of the baptism. He's just been baptized, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and then there's this booming voice, "This is my beloved Son." He blesses Him right there.

Ron: Wow.

John: I think there is a deep need. Lewis talks about, CS Lewis who's a great theologian talks about this thing called the weight of glory. The weight of glory. Now wait a minute. Wouldn't you think that's -- okay God's so cool. He is really weighty, that's not it. It's the divine acceptance that maybe God—and actually He does—maybe God really could say to us that we're valuable. That we're accepted.

So, I think there's this divine echo and we want our parents to pick it up, but sometimes you're right with all the brokenness it doesn't happen. It didn't happen with my dad and there are some people listening where maybe they got a kid and they're thinking, *man that's why my kid is hurting so much today because they didn't get the blessing.*

Ron: Yes.

John: We could talk about reversing the curse and all of those things today, but it was a huge why. But once you get God's blessing, you can even bless people that never gave you the blessing.

Ron: Yes.

John: Which is what happened to us and it frees you so we're going to get to talk about freedom and encouragement. I want people just to think this isn't just a step into the past and let's stay there. Kari mentioned it, the blessing unleashes you to really, really go for life and love. It is really powerful so...

Ron: Oh that's amazing "the divine echo," I love that language. I know that's a two-way street, not only is there an echo in the sense that God created this need for the blessing into our family relationships, but when we either don't get it or do get it either way it reminds us that God is wanting to bless us.

John: Right.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: Isn't that hard sometimes to rely on that blessing from God or to hear it? Kari how'd that work in your life?

Kari: Yes, I think for me God really just felt very abstract. I kept hearing: connect with Him, pray, listen to the Lord, and it just sort of felt like, *I don't know how to do any of that and is he even really involved or really active in my life?*

It really was that place of surrender of just saying, "Okay God my way clearly is not working, let's try it Yours." He began to show me piece by piece that I was His beloved daughter and that He did choose me and that He wasn't a God of rules and vindictiveness but a God of love and redemption.

Getting to watch that story play out but it is a process and you do have to trust Him. He loves us right where we're at, but he doesn't want to leave us there.

Ron: Yes.

Kari: He wants to move us down a road of feeling of healing and redemption with Him and sometimes that requires removing some of those things from our lives that are blocking us from really experiencing that.

Ron: Okay Kari, let me follow up one of the things I'm aware of having worked with a lot of blended family couples now in therapy, in particular for 25 years, and then ministry for 25 years. One of the things that I'm aware of -- and this is an opinion so I may not be right about this -- that people who find themselves in blended family situations, not everybody-not even close to everybody, but many have had multiple wounds on their heart.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: Going back to family of origin, maybe a first marriage, maybe you're a child and Mom and Dad divorced and you're caught in the middle with loyalty issues, all that kind of stuff, and so they come into a blended family. Now there's even more confusion about roles and relationships and bonding and connecting with new people and trying to figure out authorities in your life if you're a kid.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: So finding a blessing is even more challenging.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: The need for a blessing is even more challenging. So I want to dial back down to something you said. You said you couldn't hear it from God for whatever reason it was abstract, it was hard and then somewhere something changed and now you're hearing God.

What changed? What was different in you that allowed you to hear Him at that season of your life where you couldn't before?

Kari: There were definitely a couple of things that changed but the biggest one is, I had been in that abusive relationship and I really had just reached the end of my rope. One night he had gotten really violent and left and normally he would just go in the other room and play video games or something but that particular evening he left. I just remember saying there was just a different feeling in my heart of, *God, either you get me out or I can't do this anymore* so I just said, "Okay God I don't care what You do I don't care how You do it, if You're real get me out."

Ron: Wow.

Kari: Ten minutes later there was a knock at the door and a friend who had a safe place for me to stay -- that wasn't the end of the story. The average victim actually goes back

seven times, and that was probably number five on the journey of my story. But that was the first time where I really felt like God was listening.

But that's the thing, God opens doors for us but we have to choose to walk through them. Sometimes that's a process and just like with the blessing someone can be giving it to you but at some point you have to choose to say, "All right, you know what, I may not believe all of that but I am going to try to believe at least a piece of that and then another piece and then another piece and really start walking that journey of blessing."

Ron: I hear the word surrender in what you're saying. You surrendered more to God and your ears were open in some different way.

Kari: Yes, absolutely. Yes, it took a lot I was pretty stubborn so [laughs] but surrender is key.

Ron: Yes. So as I'm listening, I'm thinking about our listener. I'm thinking, yes maybe this is number four or number five or number six, and whatever the roadblock is for you in your life and you're thinking, "I just don't know how to hear Him," well maybe just once again revisiting surrender and trying to listen with a deeper level of trust. Is that the beginning maybe of hearing it?

John: Yes, in a lot of ways. There's a great verse that we get people to just camp out on. It's Deuteronomy 23:5, it says this, "The Lord your God," now listen to the repetition coming up, "the Lord your God was not willing that the curse rest upon you."

So there's this blessing and then there's the curse, okay. Earlier in Deuteronomy it says, "You know I've set before you a choice life or death, the blessing or the curse." Life means movement. Okay you want to get moving? You don't have to, you can choose death. That stepping away. Are you going to move towards? Are you going to step away?

That's the choice of blended families, that's the choice really in any relationship. Are we going to step towards? Well man, they're not cooperating. Well, are you going to step toward them: life or death? Are you going to do blessing or curse?

Blessing means "to add, to add value, to weight"

You know, my mom -- single parent mom -- I was a mess. I have a really smart twin brother. My older brother was great at athletics. I was great at getting in trouble, kicked out of school. I was the angry, single-parent kid and just a mess, but I thank God that my mom in particular and that's where I saw it first in her and I'm telling you that's why everybody needs at least one person in their life that's crazy about them.

So it's a choice. She had to choose to keep seeing value in me. Wait a minute guess what the curse means. The curse means "to dam up the stream" so instead of adding value/add you subtract.

So let's go back to that verse real quick. "Now but the Lord your God was not willing that subtraction rest upon you." That's what so many of us feel. Somebody has walked away. You know the woman at the well.

Ron: Right.

John: What did Jesus offer the woman at the well? Do you remember?

John and Ron together: Living water.

John: So the Lord was not willing that all that subtraction rest on you but "the Lord your God" -- second time -- "turned the curse into a blessing for you because" --third time-- "the Lord your God." And I think that's what Kari's saying. There was a time she had heard it, we had blessed her --what do you think Kari? -- probably every night.

Kari: Yes, I still remember the blessing song you and Mom created.

John: I know, we would sing to her.

Kari: It didn't rhyme, but you know.

John: But it sounded great when Cindy did it because she has a great voice. But she wasn't hearing it, okay?

Ron: Yes.

John: If you have more than one kid guess what they're going to respond differently. Some kids are like, "Give it to me right now," other kids are like, "Well prove it to me."

Kari: Yes.

John: I think a lot of times in blended families--

Ron: Yes.

John: --then it's like, "Yeah right I've heard that before but somebody has left."

Ron: Yes.

Kari: Yes.

John: So that's the subtraction part.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: Right.

John: But that's where you just have to sit there and you say, "Lord okay independent of their response--" and let me tell you, it's about two at night, I'd been out with some despicable people like me, but the cop brings us home. Beats on the door.

My mom's a rheumatoid arthritic; she comes struggling down the hallway, woken up in the middle of the night. He yells at us on the porch there and then sends us inside. I remember sitting down at the table with my mom. She doesn't say anything, which is worse than being yelled at.

Ron: Yes exactly.

John: Do you know what I mean?

Ron: Right.

John: I remember sitting there for a long time, which for me was probably a minute or two, with just silence. I couldn't take it anymore and I remember saying, "Mom, I guess this means you don't love us anymore." I'll never forget she sits up and she goes, "This has nothing to do with love! I will always love you, but I am tremendously disappointed in you!"

I knew right then, okay it's two in the morning, I've just been brought home by the police and she still loves me. It's like something broke inside me. It's tough man saying, "I'm going to choose to bless."

Ron: Yes.

John: But you can make that choice and it can make a huge difference in somebody's life.

Ron: I want to chase this a little further because I see a couple of challenges in blended families in particular for the parent and stepparent to do just what you're talking about. For the listener who's wondering, *how do you give a blessing?* We'll cover the five elements. Hold on, we're going to come back to that in just a minute.

But let's talk for a minute about how do you move toward? I love that description, moving toward as life/moving away as death, carried into the Hebrew words in the Bible.

How do you move toward a child who doesn't want you there? Or is confused about your presence in their life -- a stepchild perhaps? Or an adult child who's your biological son or daughter and they've been through hard things you've now married somebody else they feel like you've abandoned them or something for whatever reason, they're not sure they want your blessing.

How do you maintain that sense of you said it "independent of their response" you keep trying to offer as your mom did you in that moment, *I still love you, I am disappointed*, but you continue to be there? Where do you find the resolve to do that?

Kari: Well I think some of it really does come from knowing that you have the blessing yourself because when you know that you are unconditionally loved it's a lot easier to give that to someone else even if they're not responsive. That doesn't mean it doesn't hurt or it's not frustrating or it can't be a challenge but I think really when you know in your heart of hearts that you are unconditionally loved it frees you up to be able to take those continual steps.

Really it's that last element of the blessing. It's that genuine commitment of saying, "No matter what, good, bad, ugly, I am going to be there." Continuing to say that. And they really are -- I was one of those people that I needed someone to prove it.

My poor husband, Joey, when I met him about six years later after all of that it was I had so much fear around, *well you're just going to bail out too or you don't really mean what you say*. It was those continual/small two degree, continual consistency those were the things that really dismantled my armor to help me say, *you know what you really mean it*.

Ron: Okay, I want to key in on that because I had the same thought before we started the podcast. The five elements of the blessing we're going to walk through them but I'm going to ask you guys to start with number five first for the very reason that Kari just said.

Maintaining a sense of commitment to supporting the person you're blessing: spouse, child, stepchild, whoever it is. Commitment I think in a blended family in particular has to be established first because you may not get the receptivity that you're looking for. You may not get an immediate response.

Kari: Yes.

John: Right.

Ron: A thank you and appreciation. So you've got to have that as the foundation. Tell me about that, maintaining a sense of commitment. Talk about that element.

John: Well I'll jump in just to say water has a hard time rising above its level. You ever been to Seattle?

Ron: Yes, I have.

John: Okay you know, they have these boats that come in and they go into these locks and then it raises them up and then they can move forward. But you need something to lift you up, is what I'm getting at.

Let me give you an example. So I was a mess and then all of a sudden my senior year I meet this guy. He's a big 6' 4" Ex-Chico State offensive tackle, named Doug Baer. I'm and he was my YoungLife leader. Ever heard of Young Life?

Ron: Yes.

John: Worked with high school kids like--

Ron: Yes.

John: --me that were incorrigible. Didn't go to church. We went to the library occasionally on Sunday, but we never went to church. But we started going to Young Life because of all the cute girls. Then I started listening to Doug and a bunch of us -- well he tricked six of us on the football team into going to this Billy Graham movie.

[Ron laughs]

This guy gets up and this is what I remember, okay so do you know what I mean? At a Billy Graham movie, they do an invitation.

Ron: Yes.

John: Well I had never heard an invitation. Everybody thinks everybody's heard but we didn't hear. This guy goes, "Do you want to change the pictures of your life story?" So five of the six of us walked down and give our lives to Christ.

Ron: Wow.

John: Four out of the five of us are still going on with our faith. One of us is already in heaven; Don died in a plane crash. But I'll never forget and I'm almost done, so stay with me on this. Guess what he gave me when I walked down there? My first Bible. He'd put a card in there and he'd underlined where it was. It was Hebrews 13:5. Hebrews 13:5, says this, "For He Himself has said 'I will never leave you nor forsake you,'" and he goes, "Okay John, I want you to go home and I want you to read this 100 times."

Now he's meaning it metaphorically, read it a lot. I thought he was being serious. So I go home that night and I've got my piece of paper so I go, "For He Himself has said I will never leave you nor forsake you. One." "For he himself..." I started doing a tally thing. I get to about 60 and I am weeping. My dad bailed out when I was two months old. When I did need him, he was an angry alcoholic. I wanted his blessing so much, but I never got it.

I was so angry and hurt -- of course I took that out on my mom. She was the only one there in a single-parent home. We were horrible. The few times she went out on a date we tried to ruin them. We were just a mess. But I'm telling you I read that and all of a sudden I am weeping and I realize *wait a minute this guy named Jesus just came into my life with genuine commitment.*

It's like once you get the blessing from Him, man you're able to give it to somebody without the expectation because your cup's full.

Now that doesn't mean people can't punch a hole in your heart and emotions it's a choice and everything else but I'm telling you that's where genuine commitment begins is knowing that there's somebody that loves you and is never going to bail on you so that's what you get to model.

Ron: I want to comment on something John just said deep in that story, and then we'll come back to the other elements of the blessing. Maybe Kari, maybe you can talk a little bit about Meaningful Touch.

But to the person listening right now I just want you to hear the narrative there when John's mom went on dates, they tried to ruin it.

[Kari laughs]

John: Yes.

Ron: Why would a kid do that? Well deep in that story is this narrative of a kid who didn't have the blessing from Dad, didn't know who he was, didn't know God's blessing on his life, and he simply doesn't want to lose what he has.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: If Mom moves in a direction away from us that feels like death to a child.

John: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: Mom's movement is always toward us but now Mom's movement is toward -- she's giving life to some other relationship. That feels like death to a child.

John: Yes.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: And a blended family that's where that tug and pull comes, Parents, you just need to hear that that rises out that emptiness in a child to the point where what they do on the outside is tried to ruin your date, try to ruin this, try to get in the way of the relationship, don't receive the relationship, don't necessarily trust the new people that are in their life.

Sometimes that's the way all those ripples out and it's not so much about *you* as it is about *them* desperately needing more blessing in their heart and their life to know that they have not been forgotten and that they still hold value.

John: Yes.

Kari: Yes.

John: For us -- I probably shouldn't tell you this story but I'll tell you anyway just to encourage some parents out there -- so I remember one time one of the dates my mom went on. She said, "All right, I'm going to be home at 10," let's say it was 10. Okay 10 comes and she's not there.

So we thought, "Oh well okay 10:15, 10:20," so we thought of something funny to do is we'd go into her room and we'd take something out of her room. She had like a night stand thing and we moved it out of the room. Well now it's 10:30, she's still not there we keep moving furniture.

[Ron laughs]

We're like almost in high school so we're three boys--well actually it was just Jeff and I. Joe didn't do it but the point is we start moving all of her furniture out on the back porch. Okay she gets home about midnight and we're still up but we're acting like we're asleep. She takes forever, she drinks coffee, she does something in the kitchen forever, and then she finally comes down and opens the door and we've literally moved everything in her room, the bed and everything, out on the back.

Ron: Oh my goodness.

John: Of course we did have to put the bed back for her to go to bed and everything else in the morning.

Kari: How grounded were you after that?

John: Well I knew we were -- yes, so we were a mess. So at least you can go, "At least my kids weren't as bad as them." Okay?

Ron: Yes.

John: But I hear you. It's like *well how dare you?* You know, again when the police brought us home I was grounded for weeks. We hope you're hearing that. Genuine commitment doesn't mean the lack of discipline.

Kari: Right.

Ron: Good.

Kari: Or boundaries.

John: Boundaries. You don't let people just dishonor -- and that's the tough part but man I'm telling you if you look at somebody, it says where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. It says in Scripture.

So bottom line is when you say to them *you have great value to me*, okay, but we can wear down. You know Isaiah 40, "Even young men stumble badly, yet those who wait on the Lord--" You've just got to say, "Lord--" like with Kari when she was struggling and man for 5 years, we lost her. There is nothing harder than somebody stepping away from you and the Lord and everything else but every time we'd meet with her, again, we didn't pay for her rent to go do tough stuff, but I think you knew. Right? That you were--

Kari: Yes. Absolutely. You guys were so intentional with that and it was incredibly helpful even though I couldn't hear it through the lens of hurt that I was living in at the time. But I still have some of those letters that you and Mom wrote to me and gave me during that season.

I think the cool thing about genuine commitment is when I think when it really is coming from a place of *I'm going to love you regardless of your response* it keeps it from becoming codependent. I think sometimes people struggle to differentiate genuine commitment from codependency where, *well if I do this then they'll do this, this, and this and everything's back to normal or back to good.*

I think you really have to go into it with that expectation of they might not respond and that's okay I'm doing it anyway to keep it from getting funky on that codependent side.

Ron: So I'm hearing a couple of things. Number one, you can ascribe value to someone and say no at the same time.

Kari: Yes, absolutely.

John: Yes.

Ron: You can set boundaries, you can impose consequences, and ascribe value to them. In fact you can say, "Because I love you so much, this is why I'm saying no," right?

Kari: Yes.

Ron: But I'm also hearing, Kari, the continual presence of your parents moving toward you during that season, even though you couldn't hear it, it was still accumulating value, so that when the day came you could hear it, it was all waiting for you.

Kari: It's a war. I think for anyone that has lived through abuse it's a war. It's really that war of the lies that are being spoken over you and the war that is truth anything that is truth that is so hard to actually receive that because you're hearing all the lies.

So yes that was critical. There were moments where I would read those letters and cry and just want to believe that that was true. I'm so thankful that God got me to a place where I was really willing to say *you know what I'm going to try I may not believe it today but I'm going to try to believe that that's actually accurate because this other is killing me.*

Ron: Wow. That is so good.

John: Well in a blended family very often you've got somebody that they've divorced, they remarried, and then they're sending the kid in a home where they're trying to give them the blessing and then you're sending them back to a home--

Ron: They're not.

John: It's like, remember Ulysses was -- the story this guy goes away for seven years to war. They declared him dead and his wife was supposed to pick another suitor. So she goes, "Okay well I'm going to as soon as I finish this thing," so she would weave all day but then she would unravel all night.

And that's what you kind of feel like. I'm weaving the blessing into these kids and then I'm sending them back to this home and they're unraveling it. Well they're not unraveling it all the way.

Kari: Yes.

John: What I'm getting at is you can put a safety stitch in there--well the Lord can. The only way that you're able to do this -- I mean it started off with me saying, "Realize the

Lord's never going to bail on you," so now you've got the security to love -- I remember my mom looking at me when I was so angry, just spitting mad, saying stuff.

I remember she'd say, "You know you can get as mad as you want and then you can just get glad because I'm not going anywhere and I love you." I just walk out the door. But I'm telling you, I marveled that how great she was. Now do you remember going away to college?

Ron: Yes.

John: You know that day?

Ron: Yes.

John: So I packed -- single parent I'm the last one to leave, my older brother's gone, Jeff's gone. I had such bag grades I went to junior college on probation. Anybody can get into junior college.

Kari: That's impressive.

John: I know anybody can get into junior college but I wrestled in college. I would have never even gotten in without somebody bending the rules frankly.

I remember leave and I drive off and I realize I'd forgotten my sunglasses, which in Arizona is a big deal, right? So I turn around and come back. Now Mom was fine, she never cried. She was fine, *hey all right, see you*. I come back and I walk in to get my sunglasses and she's sitting at the kitchen table crying.

Ron: Wow.

John: Well I bet she probably did that a 100 times with me as a kid. So we're not saying, oh Pollyanna, you've got to just not be emotional.

Ron: It's easy. Right.

John: Go back to Isaiah 40, "Why do you say a Jacob and assert O Israel my way is hidden from the Lord," that means cloud cover in Hebrew. God obviously you can't see what's going on or you'd step in. It says, "Or the justice due me escapes the notice of my God." That's like saying, "Man I do this for you Lord, and I do this and this is what I get? Where's the justice in that? My kid's off the rails or whatever.

So you can't out logic emotions. So when we talk about the blessing that's one of the things where we're trying to say to people here's these five things you can do but it's not a formula. It just helps you have an attitude based on God's love. So I'm glad you went

to five because it really is the bottom deal. We probably ought to run through those pretty quick too right?

Ron: Let's do it. So we're talking active commitment's what we talked about so far. We're just saying that's the heart to support this person and continually offer a blessing to them.

John: Yes.

Ron: What are these mechanisms that you call the five elements -- well we've got four more to go. The four elements meaningful touch, spoken word, attaching high value, and picturing a special future. Talk to me about those.

John: Okay, all right.

Kari: Appropriate meaningful touch really is exactly what it sounds like. It's using touch in an appropriate way to instill value in someone else. You know placing your hand on their shoulder, holding their hand, giving them a hug, appropriate meaningful touch. Sometimes today especially with everything that's going on in our society touch can be a little bit scary or we're hesitant to engage or if touch was really broken for us it can be hard to step toward others in that way.

But every time a blessing was given in Scripture there was appropriate meaningful touch or the laying on of hands. So it really is a critical part of instilling value in someone around us. In fact, there was a study that just came out where it said women need eight to twelve small meaningful touches a day to feel secure in their relationships. That's not find their shoulder and go 1,2,3,4,5. But it's throughout the day. So we need that, we see that with NICU babies that they heal faster when there's touch.

Ron: Right.

Kari: There's all of those studies that support the physical benefits as well as those emotional benefits.

John: I can remember my mom was rheumatoid arthritic so -- have you seen their hands? You know they're really bad. This is just in tough shape, so she would drive us to school before she went to work -- single parent right -- we had to get out of the car and hug her before we went into school.

Ron: Wow.

John: So every year we made her drop us further and further.

Ron: And further.

John: Then by junior high what? It's inside at the door. You know just *get it over with Mom*. She would give us a hug and we'd stand there stiff as boards so three boys.

Ron: Yes.

John: But I'm telling you every day at school, so that's a big part. Number two: spoken message, Kari, jump in there real quick.

Kari: Yes that's really using our words. For so many people they can say, "Well I knew I was loved but I never heard it." We have to say it. It's so critical for people to actually hear those words. So what we encourage you to do with the blessing is to say it and/or write it down, both is really a good way to do it so they can keep it.

Like I said I kept so many of those letters and in fact when I was at college every week you and mom would send me a card in the mail that just had a little blessing on it and hey we're praying for you or whatever was coming up and I still have all of them.

So really using our words to bless people which goes into the next element which is attaching high value. It's not enough to just say, "I love you." We need to be speaking into these areas of value and really unique characteristics that God has given each and every one of us.

Ron: Okay, I want to jump right in there for a minute. Blended family applications. What if you have a stepchild who doesn't want you to touch them?

Kari: Yes.

Ron: What if they're not sure they like that you love them?

Kari: Yes.

Ron: Right, so you can say it in spoken words but it's not necessarily received well. I mean, my first thought is, and I'm really curious what you guys think, but my first thought is that word appropriate that you used a minute ago.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: You have to find what is appropriate for this relationship.

John: Right.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: What works here? If it's a fist bump or a high-five that's acceptable touch, right, for a particular child.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: Then that's what you go with, yes?

John: Yes.

Kari: Exactly.

John: In clinical studies, the safest place to just tap somebody on their elbow. Isn't that interesting? So and you're right some kids are so broken if you even raise your hand to them they might even freak out. So we're not saying again this isn't a formula what we're doing is saying okay look for times where it's appropriate to do the high five or the fist bump, or pat them on the shoulder.

But again with my mom, I tell you we'd just stand there stiff as a board and act like we hated it. We didn't, but we'd act like we hated it. Then you use your words. I carry a letter with me that my great uncle -- I never knew my dad really, but my great uncle.

I met him accidentally, walked into the library at SMU and saw this office. It had Robert M. Trent, I just poked my head in the door, I was a goofy college kid. The door's open and here is Robert M. Trent and I poke my head in and I go, "Hey Uncle Bob I'm your long lost relative John Trent from Arizona." Just as a throwaway line, total -- His eyes open, he goes, "Are you Joe Trent's boy?" That was my uncle.

Ron: Wow.

John: Well actually my great uncle. It was my dad's uncle. I didn't even know he had any relatives in Texas, you know. [Ron laughs] So he invited me home, got to love on him and his wife of 40 years, they didn't have kids.

Long story short is at the end of his life Aunt Sally had already died and he wrote me a letter and I had to do the -- If anybody has somebody that's really old and you're the one that has to make the decision on the end of life issues. He goes, "You're going to be getting something in the mail." He's dying. So I'm the one that has just say no heroics. So he sends me a letter and he says at the end of it he goes, "Well you've helped me so much, I know you will in this area." He goes, "I love you because you are my son."

Now my dad never chose to put his name -- I carry his name, but he never chose to verbally say it. I've carried that letter with me all my life--well, since college. So anyway spoken words that say *you've got value* and that *you've got a special future*.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: John, I am thinking of a stepparent who's listening to us right now who goes, "You mean I have the potential to add that much value to my stepchildren that they would

hear something from me that they couldn't hear from anybody else,” not that you become their parent. You're not replacing anybody. We're not saying any of that. But you become another person who has the ability to attach value to who they are.

John: Yes and Kari, I mean again, you went through some really tough years.

Kari: Yes.

John: But it still meant something down the road. Now Laura you know chose to just do it different--the other sister--you know I mean? That's what I'm getting at some kids they're like, *bring it on, tell me*. They're just ready for somebody/anybody to go but then there's other kids that just really don't want to hear this blessing and I think we're talking a lot to them in this whole podcast.

Kari: Well, I think, I do think that's an important point. You might not see fruit of it today. It might be a long journey. We pray that it isn't but those seeds matter and I know that they did for me. I think you brought up a really good point earlier about how *I love you* can be really hard to receive. It can I think that's where that attaching high value really comes into play because what we ask people to do with a blessing is to pick a character trait.

It can be really, really hard to receive *I love you* but when you're saying, “Hey, you are kind. You are compassionate.” Like a character trait, something that's unique about them and you're speaking life into that. Those can sometimes be things that people go back to. I know for me those were some of the things that I came back to in those hard moments.

Ron: Kari, what I love about that is that that too is something even a stepparent listening right now who has a really difficult situation with a stepchild, or a biological parent who has a kid who's maybe spending more time in the other home and they're not coming to your house because of something that's happened in the past there's been some hurt or whatever.

You could still find ways of attaching high value speaking words of encouragement without the deep personal connection.

In other words you don't have to say, “Hey look you've got to love me to receive this,” like you could just--

Kari: Right.

Ron: --find something, a character trait, about them/a quality about them that you compliment. That's not going to feel too violating to somebody. You walk that delicate line sometimes of saying, “I care about you and I don't expect anything from you.” But I think if a stepparent or a parent in a tough situation can walk that delicate line then it

frees the child to just take what you've offered and set it to the side perhaps but it's still there.

John: Yes.

Ron: You're not asking anything immediately from them.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: They have space and time to eventually respond.

Kari: Absolutely.

John: Yes. Do you have a brother or sister?

Ron: Yes, I've got both. Two brothers and a sister.

John: Okay, so are either one of them really smart or were you the smart kid?

Ron: Well no. Yes, they're all smart in their own way.

John: Well okay. Well but I have a twin brother that's brilliant. Joe's super smart too, my older brother, but Jeff was -- he's an MD PhD. I called him the other day, "What are you working on?" and he goes, "You wouldn't understand."

[Ron laughs]

He's just -- he was a Scientific Director for the National Human Genome Project which is the real one. They're the ones that cracked the genetic code, now 25 years ago. So he is brilliant.

So watch how this whole blessing thing comes together with touch and spoken words that attach high value, and number four is man give them a picture not just of how valuable they are but how God can maybe do something in the future with that.

That's number four.

Ron: Okay.

John: Because kids tend to be literalists when it comes to what we say about them. They're looking for some light, *where should I go. Can I really make it* or whatever? Then there's that genuine commitment. But anyway it's senior year Jeff gets what on his big term paper? What did Jeff get? An A. That's all he ever got.

Ron: An "A".

Kari: An “A”.

Ron: Right.

John: If I don't pass the big senior term paper I don't graduate from high school. So I work really hard. I didn't start until the night before, and I didn't do footnotes because that looked hard. I'm really old but do you remember typewriters?

Ron: Yes, I've heard of them. Actually that's where I learned how to type.

John: Okay so but I'd ran out of typewriter ribbon. So I hand wrote, very legibly, the last two pages. So I turn it in but in my mind it's like the *Christmas Story*. Do you remember? With the Red Rider BB gun? And when he turns in the theme and the teacher is carrying him around the room all the kids are -- and the teacher is writing A+.

I'm thinking this is such a great paper on the Battle of the Bulge, I mean, I'm a high school student but they're going to publish this. That's what I'm thinking.

I get my paper back and there's all this red and I get to the last page and in big letters -- I still have the paper -- in big letters she is written D- and then she goes, “The only reason I'm giving you a ‘D’ is because I don't want to see you next year.”

Ron: Wow.

John: Well I'm thinking, “Well I don't want to see you either,” but I'm thinking, *I'm out of here* right. So I remember going home and my mom wanted to know if I passed because am I going to walk at graduation. I remember she'd already seen Jeff's paper which was an A.

So she makes me sit down and this is what she does, okay, so we're at the kitchen table a little bay window -- there is a little kitchen table, and she goes, “Hold my hand,” which we just hated it. We called it the “death grip” because rheumatoid arthritic -- what happened was she would -- if she wanted us to stay and talk to her she would hold our hand.

Real gently, she couldn't grab your hand, but if you pulled away it would twist her wrist and she would cry because it hurt so bad. So we called it the “death grip.”

Ron: Wow.

John: But what is that? Appropriate meaningful touch. Then she goes, “Bright eyes makes the eyes glad. Look at me, okay, look at me.” She goes now just *let me see your paper* so I hand her the paper.

She reads through the whole thing and then she looks up at me -- and by then my head's down. When she gets to the last page -- and I'll never forget -- she looked at me and she goes, "I don't care what that teacher said, you do such a good job of using words when you write, I wouldn't be surprised if God used you some day to help other people with your words."

Well, none of my teachers were telling me that, but I thank God I had somebody that would say that. Now again you may be sitting, *well I could do that and my kid when throw the paper back in my face*. Well, I did that a 100 other times but I didn't do it that day.

Kari: Yes.

John: So that's what I'm getting at is and Kari I think is saying that.

Kari: Yes, those seeds stay with you.

John: Yes.

Kari: Absolutely you know and you've told me things like that before and I remember you kept saying, "Kari you see people that are hurting and you reach out and meet with them and encourage them," and I remembered that. It's kind of that self-fulfilling prophecy.

Ron: Yes.

Kari: When you begin to speak those words of life over people those are things that stick. They're hearing so many negatives. Everywhere you go you're hearing those negatives. Those positives, especially when they're tied to a specific character trait like that, really stick with you.

John: Yes.

Kari: They can for your kids and stepkids as well.

Ron: Kari, thank you so much for joining us today it's been a real joy to get some time with you--

Kari: Yes thanks for having me on

Ron: --and hear your story, and I appreciate that. John, I just have to say you're one of my heroes. [John and Kari laugh] I really mean that.

John: I'll pay back that money I owe you. [Laughs]

Ron: Yes you bet. I've spent my entire career in family ministry and you have impacted me in a million ways. It's made a difference in who I am and how I try to minister to other people and how I tried to love my own family. So I appreciate it very much. Thank you for being with us today.

John: Hey and thanks for your ministry and this awesome way to reach people.

Kari: Yes.

Ron: Thank you.

You've been listening to my conversation with John Trent and Kari Stageberg.

I'm Ron Deal and this is FamilyLife Blended.

Kari's going to tell you how to go online and take the blessing challenge in a minute, but before that, if you've learned anything or were encouraged by this podcast would you take a second and rate us? Give us a quick review, all of that helps others find us and gain what you've gained today.

You know most of our discussion seemed to be about parents blessing children but the principles apply to all relationships. John and Kari's book actually outlines ways you can bless your spouse, your friends, your coworkers, which brings me to a challenge.

For those of you with a former spouse I'd like for you to consider how you might give a version of the blessing to your former spouse. Now wait a minute, there's more, in front of your child.

Okay, I just lost some of you. Hear me out. Hang on, let me just talk through this for a minute. All right I am not saying become a doormat. I am not saying to give your former spouse everything they want, just be sweet and kind all the time. This is really about your child and what will benefit them. Just imagine how it will impact and improve your co-parenting, for example.

So imagine your child hears you say to your former spouse in front of the child. They hear you say *I really appreciate how much you give to our son. I love what it does for him.* You see how that might foster some peace between the households? It's kind of like an olive branch and ultimately it blesses your children. Who knows it may even improve your co-parenting as well.

Now I do want to clarify this blessing is limited in scope and affection so for example you going to comment on the value of the former spouse has to your children not necessarily to you specifically. Now sometimes kids kind of have this fantasy that Mom and Dad will get back together again, so you do want to be careful about what you say

and how you say it. You don't want to get their hopes up when that's not going to be a possibility.

The other thing I want to add here is that you want to set a good context for doing this. You want to make sure you honor your current marriage, like go to your spouse and affirm your commitment to them.

In fact that's your first point of action before doing this. Talk to them. Tell them what you're doing and why you're doing this. You don't want them surprised or wondering what's behind it, okay?

And if your spouse isn't comfortable with the idea then just delay, right. You don't have to do it wait awhile, revisit the subject see if things have changed.

But having said all of that consider what a blessing it would be to your kids to have some of the animosity pushed aside between you and a former spouse, to have a spirit of cooperation demonstrated between you.

A lot of people in America are really sick of the way our political leaders on opposite sides of the aisle criticize each other, call each other names, let alone give each other a compliment. Right? If you're tired of that then likewise you don't want to be that kind of co-parent. Your kids get tired of it. They would love some relief from that climate.

So just think about this that all I'm asking. I recognize this is not a suggestion that every person should attempt today, just think about it.

If you'd like more information about our guests you can find it in our show notes. You can also check it out on the *FamilyLife Blended* page at FamilyLife.com/podcast.

I do want you to know that we do enjoy hearing from you. Hearing your feedback, that means a lot to us. Positive reviews on your app or online all of that is really helpful for us. It helps other people find the podcast.

If you haven't already you can subscribe to this podcast on Apple podcast, Stitcher, or wherever you listen to your podcast and search FamilyLife Blended with Ron Deal.

Remember to look in the show notes, there's additional resources down there, links to information and different things you might want to know about. And you can find information about our other podcasts at the FamilyLife Podcast Network.

FamilyLife Blended is the leading ministry for stepfamilies around the world. We'd love for you to visit us online, check us out all the articles and freebies that are available. Just go to FamilyLife.com/blended.

We really are committed to serving you by providing excellent resources; book, video, audio, online resources for you and your family and your local church. I've been telling you about the 10th Anniversary edition of my video curriculum *The Smart Stepfamily* and the participant's guide, that's recently been revised and released.

In addition over the next few months we've got three book releases I want to tell you about: *The Smart Stepfamily Guide to Financial Planning* comes out in September 2019. Lauren Reitsema's book, *In Their Shoes: Helping Parents Better Understand and Connect With Children of Divorce* comes out in October.

The book I've coauthored with the New York Times best-selling author Dr. Gary Chapman called *Building Love Together In Blended Families*. That book will come out in February of 2020. All of these resources, if they're not available now, they will be at FamilyLife.com or wherever you buy your books.

If you're not planning to join us for the Summit on Stepfamily Ministry in Chesapeake, VA, this week, you'll be able to access it online that's the good news. Just go to the show notes and we'll let you know how you can get the All-Access digital pass for the Summit on Stepfamily Ministry.

Now here's Kari on how you can take the blessing challenge:

Kari: Yes, actually if you go to TheBlessing.com and click "Take the Blessing Challenge" it's really short there's just a couple of videos but it'll actually walk you through this process of giving your blessing. It even has a list of character traits that you can choose from. Sometimes it is hard to start brainstorming those ideas so we've tried to make it really easy. It's free on the website so yes just go to theblessing.com.

Ron: Next time I'll be talking with coauthors Greg Pettys and David Edwards about our newest book, *The Smart Stepfamily Guide to Financial Planning*. Now we've all seen headlines about celebrity families that are having fights over money after someone passes away and they're really haven't done their work to figure out how to manage all that as a blended family.

We want to help you understand that merger of relationships, family dynamics, estate planning, and how to manage money day to day.

Greg: We all are afraid of what we don't know. A lot of stepchildren do not know what their parent is going to do. They have question marks all their lives and then they find it out at the reading of the will, which is the worst situation.

Ron: That's financial planner Greg Pettys and estate attorney David Edwards next time on FamilyLife Blended.

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

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

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

Copyright © 2019 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com