

FamilyLife Blended®

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Episode 24: Blending Despite Betrayal

Guests: Darryl and Gwen Smith
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Darryl: In my mind, it wasn't betrayal because we wasn't married. I have another child. You know, that's what people do. I don't think I'm going to remarry Gwen. That's not in the game plan so the easiest way is to address it is not to address it. That's kind of how I would say we entered into our new reconciliation, knowing that God had called us to it. But walking in the will of God don't minimize or remove pain.

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

Before we jump in I want you to know that my new book, *Building Love Together in Blended Families*, coauthored with *New York Times* best-selling author Dr. Gary Chapman is available now. Gary will be joining me on the stage for FamilyLife's one-day livestream event for blended family couples called *Blended and Blessed®*.

That will be on Saturday, April 25th, 2020, in Houston, Texas. I hope you'll make plans to join us either at the live event in Houston or online. You can learn all about it at BlendedandBlessed.com.

You know sometimes relationships get off to a rough start. That's what happened to my guests today Darryl and Gwen Smith. Then it got worse. Darryl and Gwen Smith were raised in Chattanooga, Tennessee. After high school Darryl served in the Army for three years. He became a Christian while in prison in 1991. We'll get to that story. He then became a preacher, an ordained pastor.

Gwen has a degree in organizational management. She gave her life to Christ in 1987. They later joined staff with CRU in 1996. They worked with young people for a while and also the campus ministry. Then in 2017, CRU announced the creation of a national role and appointed Darryl and Gwen as National Directors of Oneness and Diversity.

Here's my conversation with Darryl and Gwen Smith:

Guys, I appreciate your time today. I have to start by saying this, I was so proud of you recently. It's simply because I watched you unpack the details of your life journey and some difficult parts of your journey in front of a live audience. You did that at our *Summit on Stepfamily Ministry*.

But what I realized it took for you to be able to do that in front of a live audience, is that you first had to unpack it within your marriage, within yourselves. For our listener's benefit, your story is one of well-intentioned but immature love, betrayal, baby mamas, prison, spiritual conviction and conversion, restoration, forgiveness, learning to trust and a continual process for healing.

We're going to get to all that because I want you the listener to hear this story. But first we just got to start with how you guys ended up getting together. I just want to talk a little bit about the relationships, roles and things that you learned from your family of origin.

All of us in life carry those messages of how life works and how relationships are supposed to go and how we respond to one another in certain moments, we all carry that out of our family of origin. You guys did too. If you don't mind, let's just start there and talk a little bit about what each of you learned about relationships, about family and about love.

Gwen: For me, I grew up in a single-parent home. I grew up with my mom and my three sisters. I'm number three of four girls. My mom had gone through three failed marriages. She married my dad, had three of the daughters. I was the youngest of that for her first husband.

Then she remarried, had my youngest sister. That marriage eventually failed. Then she married a third time and that marriage failed. They didn't divorce but they just separated and that's just how they lived their lives from there. I grew up again—the way she taught us because she had girls was how we carried ourselves, how we didn't allow men to mistreat us and all of that. We didn't just sleep around with guys.

We grew up in church so we were very well churched. We knew all of the moral and the right things to do. We weren't believers but we knew how to behave and how to respect ourselves. People saw us as girls—we respected ourselves. That was my background.

We met—Darryl and I met one another and I was a junior in high school. He was a senior in high school. We became friends from there. One of the things that he told me was that he had a child. It was kind of like, "Whoa!" because he was the first guy that I had dated that had kids. It was a little weird but I did like him as we got to know one another. He was very fun, very funny and all of that.

We just started a relationship from there. But as far as my journey was, I didn't have the background of the girl that's just being out there. We were taught that we didn't do that. My mother, she just meant—she knew what—she meant what she said about not being out there and doing certain things. She was a woman who didn't play basically.

Ron: If you don't mind, let me just ask a follow-up question. On one level it sounds like you had a lot of structure. Your mom was large and in charge to some degree and gave you lots of guidance. There was a measure of Christian belief and how that influenced your behavior. At the same time there was—you've watched your mom go through three relationships.

Gwen: Yes.

Ron: There was some instability just in terms of that, and I'm wondering how you made sense of that as a young woman in terms of how you thought about men and how you thought about relationships.

Gwen: For my mom, again she was a strong, strong woman. She just didn't play. She didn't like a lot of foolishness. Now the interesting thing, and I didn't really understand this as I was growing up, but as you start piecing your life together, each one of those husbands were all alcoholics.

My mom did not drink. She never drank. But each one were alcoholics. Part of me was always wondering what about them attracted her because it wasn't that it was like, "Well, I'll just go hang out with somebody who likes to drink like me," kind of thing.

I was much younger when she and my dad divorced but what I saw in the next two marriages was when they would come in, and drunk people do what drunk people do, they act out of character. They say things, do things and all of this.

She was a no-nonsense kind of person. We would see the fighting and hear the arguing and all of that. That was one of the things I knew that I did not want in my marriage whenever I decided to get married. I knew I didn't want to go through a divorce.

I did not want to go through all of the drama that I saw her go through so I took some of that into my marriage, the no nonsense. As we go in a little bit further about it, some of that will probably come out of what I took just from what I saw growing up in my mom's marriages.

Ron: Great. I appreciate that. One last question and then we'll hear from Darryl a little bit. Your relationship with your dad, what was it like?

Gwen: They divorced when I was two or three. I think I was two when they divorced. So I never really got to know my dad because my mom is originally from Georgia. When they divorced she moved to Chattanooga.

Ron: Okay, there was a lot of distance between you and your father.

Gwen: Yes.

Ron: Even a long distance relationship, by phone or anything?

Gwen: No, he—I think once they divorced—of course that was back in the sixties so I guess long-distance calls cost. I don't know why he didn't really make the effort of just connecting. But the interesting thing is we connected with my Granddad, which is his dad.

My grandmother had passed years prior to even before I was born. She always kept us in relationship with him and all of that. But for whatever reason, whenever I remember going to visit my granddad, my uncles, aunts, different ones would come and hang out. He didn't. I don't know why that was. I just never remember meeting him at any time.

Ron: It sounds like if we could sum that up that your experience of men and / or a father was, you don't know if they're going to be here or not. What words would you put on that?

Gwen: Yes, I don't know how I would sum it up for men. I don't know if it was just kind of a men in general or these particular men, because my mom's brother and then her sister who were both married, their marriages lasted and we were all very close. I saw some stability. It wasn't in my home but I did. I did see stability in my family. So it wasn't that I just got a bad view of men altogether because I saw some stable men.

I don't really know how I viewed men. It was just how I viewed him at the time. I didn't know him so it was just what it was for me.

Ron: That's good and it's a good illustration of how important community is. Because it may not be in your home, but if you do have people around you that model healthier relationships than what you're even experiencing in your own home, that's really important for children in particular.

Darryl, by the time you come into the picture and meet Gwen, you've already got a child.

Darryl: Yes, I had a child. I was a good athlete in school. You become popular because of sports. You start dating and you grow up in a community. I grew up in government housing. If there was I'm going to say 450 to 500 units, mean there was families, out of those 500 units, I can only recall five dads being in the house.

Ron: Wow.

Darryl: I lived in that community from the day I was born until I was 18, until I joined the military, so really 19. You didn't see a lot of father figures. You saw mothers who was dating men but it wasn't a biological father. I like to say you could be in a community or in a situation every Christmas there's a new Santa Claus, for lack of better words, the new men in the relationship.

So I didn't see a lot of commitment. The older guys, and I hung out with older guys—I was a good athlete, so when I say older, if I'm fifteen, I'm probably hanging out with guys that was 20, 25 in my community who talked about women, sexual intimacy with women. Really it defines your manhood.

I'm in a home where I'm not seeing commitment and I'm in a community where you don't see commitment. I like to say where the Scripture teach that we ought to have commitment, in my community we taught, "It's okay to have company". That's the language that we use. Like, "My momma can't come to the phone right now. She have company," or, "My mom can't come to the door. She have company."

I grew up where I wanted to define manhood. Manhood was important in my community, that you're not soft, you're not gay, you're not weak. The way you prove that is by how many girls you sleep with. It was the normal behavior. Anytime I dated a girl, she said she liked me, I said I like her, one of the things you do, you have sexual intercourse with that woman.

I would say the first dad I knew was me when I became a teen father, when I had my child as a teenager. It wasn't shame. It wasn't guilt. It wasn't a bad thing because that was kind of the normal.

Ron: Yes, in that culture, in that context that you grew up in, was that a feather in your cap to father a child?

Darryl: When I think back on it, yes, it could be a feather because it proves your manhood. It defines you. Honestly even today the friends I hang with, it probably wouldn't be politically correct, we still say, we call each other soft. "Oh, I'm not soft." It was something about proving that you was a man and the way you prove it was through sexual intercourse with a young lady.

Ron: Yes, so commitment was not the conversation. Conquering was the conversation.

Darryl: Yes.

Ron: Manhood was defined by how many of those you could accomplish and how you carried yourself and how you proved yourself to others.

Darryl: Yes.

Ron: Yes. So you had a child, and now you meet Gwen. I'm wondering if she was different or was this another conquest opportunity for you?

Darryl: Yes, probably was. [Laughter] I don't think I'd have been thinking any different.

Ron: Right, right.

Darryl: I can imagine it happened in my thought patterns.

Ron: Right, right.

Darryl: I met Gwen. We laughed. We talked. I would say I probably started out, wasn't even thinking about being committed. It was a girl, using your language, the feather in that cap. I can get another feather but she wasn't going there. She was saying things like, "I want to save myself for marriage. I'm keeping myself. I want to go to college." I'm thinking, "Wow, that don't make a lot of sense." But it was a functioning conversation but it sounded like a dysfunctional conversation based on my construct in my mind.

I thought she was dysfunctional and crazy and all kind of stuff. But for some reason I was attracted to that. Maybe I was attracted to, "I'm going to conquer her." It just didn't happen. Then I started liking her and starting caring about her. Then you get emotionally connected, and now you're going into the military and you asked her to marry you.

Really I don't even know—I didn't understand marriage because I didn't see a lot of married families. I did, but even the ones I knew, I knew that there was infidelity. People talked about it.

The word "commitment" probably was a word that I would see on a spelling test and I just needed to make sure I could spell it, but it wasn't a word that I was trying to apply to my life.

I think I had to come to the realization, "I don't know how to be committed. I don't even know where to start. Lord, if you want me to be committed to Gwen and to my kids, You're going to have to teach me. You're going to have to show me. You're going to have to bring men in my life who think totally different than me. Lord, I desire this but I don't know how to pull this off."

I would say when I became a believer, I thought everything would just be fixed and what I underestimated, that God forgives sins, He forgives the past but there are scars and wounds and pain that come with that. The easiest thing to do with pain and scars is to run from them. Commitment said, "No, you stay the course."

I am convinced I would not be doing this radio interview without Christ overcoming me and having to just go to my knees and say, "Lord, I'm tired. Gwen is strong. I don't know if I want to do this."

God always remind me, "Darryl, you are this. You are that. But I haven't given up on you."

Even, "God, help me to love Gwen the way You want me to love her. Not the way I want to love her. How do I love her outside of the bedroom? How do I love in the living room? How do I love her when we are traveling and in the small things?"

Honestly, I still connect with my community because that's my foundation, my friendship, my families. I still don't see a lot of commitment and I don't hear conversations about commitment. I have to stay the course and be willing to speak into my friends' lives, guys who I grew up with and talk about Gwen and my relationship.

I would sum it up like this. I think in my marriage I'm not trying to fight through struggle to be committed. I'm trying to die daily and let Christ overcome me and He empowers me to love Gwen, love the kids, stay committed, stay faithful. How do I be committed to Christ, and then I could be committed to Gwen.

Gwen: I like that, because I was going to say as Darryl was talking is I think a lot of my commitment—I am more committed to Christ than I am to Darryl because when it gets hard and I get frustrated and I want to quit and leave, then I have to go back to what Christ called me in that, "I am committed to doing this for You because You've called me to this marriage, you've called me to this man and I have to endure."

I would say my commitment is probably more to Christ than it is to Darryl, although I am committed to Darryl, and that's what sustains me. Because being in a relationship and not just with Darryl, but anybody, even Darryl in the relationship with me, it gets hard. We want to give up. But because of our commitment to Christ, we stick it out.

Ron: Clearly for the listener, the take aways are commitment to Christ is what ultimately put you into a place where He can teach you, who you have to be in order to love well and love beyond what you were taught when you were a kid, love beyond what was modeled for you.

At the same time, I'm also hearing you guys say pain is an impetus sometimes for hearing the message that—not that anybody wants pain—we don't welcome that—but allowing pain to teach you what you need to learn. Speaking of pain, you guys began to experience some of that. You did get married. You went into military life for a season, right, Darryl?

Darryl: Yes, that's correct.

Ron: Then came back out of military life and felt like you had to make some money in order to figure out a way to move your family forward. What did that lead to?

Darryl: Again, when you're talking about origin and you're talking about foundations, things you build your life on, I grew up in, and when I use the word "poverty" I need to be careful because I've been around the world, but I was American poor. [Laughter]

Ron: Yes, got you. Yes.

Darryl: Not only do you hear about the American dream; you cut on your TV, you see the American dream you believe nice cars, nice clothes, nice stuff—

Ron: —brings happiness.

Darryl: Yes. —will fix everything and bring happiness. Was intrigued by that. I didn't see a lot of people going off to college. I didn't see a lot of people with the kind of jobs that would bring that. But I did see a lot of drug dealers who had the American dream using that language.

I decided here was a way for Gwen and I to get out of financial bondage, financial poverty. I chose that lifestyle as a drug dealer and I began to sell crack cocaine, destroying people lives. When I say they lives, I didn't murder anybody, kill anybody, but I killed their dreams, their goals, whatever was going on, by selling them drugs.

I was selfish and I didn't care. Not only was I selfish in my marriage but I was selfish in everything that I did. It was about me and it was about my happiness. Now I'm not happy in my marriage so I'm finding happiness in the streets. At least, I would say I didn't even found happiness. I was having fun, and fun run out. Every morning you got to get up and try to find some more fun.

Ron: Yes.

Darryl: That was my journey and that life. At the same time, I'm destroying people dreams, goals, and desires, stealing their happiness and their joy, but I'm doing it to Gwen, too. Not only am I doing it in the streets, I'm coming back home, and now Gwen goes into being a family, having a husband and kids, and I'm abandoning her. I'm physically in the house but I'm emotionally disconnected.

Ron: Gwen, did you guys have a couple of kids in this process? Did you know what was going on with the drug selling? What kind of feelings did that bring to you about the marriage?

Gwen: Yes, we did. We had two kids. Our first child was born in the military while we were still in Texas. After Darryl got out of the military, we moved back home to Chattanooga and eventually became pregnant with our second child. In the meantime, I had just received Christ and had started on my spiritual journey of trying to understand what that meant.

On that journey, I start suspecting something. There were some behaviors and patterns of Darryl that started making me a little bit suspicious about what was going on. Because I've never really been in the streets to really see people sell drugs and to know exactly all of that, but I grew up in the hood so I was familiar with knowing that it was

there. To live in the house with someone doing it, there were just some habits and people calling and Darryl leaving, "Oh, I'll be back," and all of that.

I just started trying to do my own investigation. I suspected it but I just wasn't sure that that's what was going on.

Ron: Once it became clear, what did you do?

Gwen: Once it became clear when—I just came out and asked him because I was trying to figure it out. I asked him, I was like, "Are you selling drugs?" Of course, he didn't just come out and say, "Yes."

I was like, "Look, I'm going to let you know that if that is what you're doing, if I ever find out that you have drugs in my house or around my kids,—" because I had just had my son probably two weeks prior, "—I am going to—I will call the police myself." I was not going to go to jail for this.

Then it just went back to my background. I just wasn't brought up like that. That's just not what I was taught to do. I had a fear of, "They're going to take me to jail, too, if I just let you do it." That was what I told him, that I would call the police myself if I find that this is true.

Ron: Somewhere in there the police did get involved. Darryl you ended up going to jail.

Darryl: Yes, I did. Ron. In between that Gwen find out, she don't want to be a part of it. I get angry, I'm upset, I move out, move in the house in the projects with my mom, continue to live that lifestyle selling drugs. Gwen and I, we eventually legally divorce.

Then while we was divorced I went to Atlanta, hour and a half from Chattanooga. I was stopped on the interstate with a lot of cocaine and weapons and cash and was facing 30 years in the Georgia State Prison, took a plea bargain and was sentenced to 10 years to serve four. That's when I had an encounter with the true and living God through the person of Jesus Christ when I was in prison.

Ron: And it made a difference for your life.

Darryl: Oh, it made a difference, Ron. I fell in love with Jesus. I fell in love with the Word. Every day I went from playing basketball, doing stuff, to just sitting in the corner reading the Scripture, meditating on God's Word. I always say, "I didn't know any Hebrew. I didn't know any Greek. I didn't know dispensation, predestination or election. But what I knew, 'Yes, Jesus loved me, this I know, for the Bible tell me so.'"

I fell in love with somebody who loved me. God began to speak to me about it was never His intent for Gwen and I to divorce and He would have us to reconcile. That was His will for our life. I want to say to the listeners, maybe that's not your situation, you're

remarried, don't feel bad about that or guilt. That's what God called Gwen and I to. I'm not saying that God call everybody to that but that's what He was calling us to.

I reached out to Gwen and shared that with her from a prison cell, a prison phone. Gwen rejected it.

Ron: I was going to say, "Let me guess, she was like, 'Yes, sure, I'll take you back after all of that betrayal.'" [Laughter] It didn't work that way. Did it Gwen?

Gwen: Not quite, not quite.

Ron: You were hesitant and apprehensive. Of course, you were. I mean you had all this stuff that had happened and had broken your trust.

Gwen: Yes, most definitely it was a lot of trust broken and a lot of fear. When he call me and tell me he was, a Christian the first thing came to my mind is, you know, jailhouse religion. Everybody gets saved in prison. Then when they get out, they just kind of go back to the same life that they had before they went back.

Yes, I was definitely apprehensive and there was still a lot of hurt and pain and anger and bitterness that I hadn't dealt with in my own heart. So when he called me and said that, I told him, "Well, if you're a Christian, I'll see you in heaven. You got me once you won't get me again." That came from a painful place when we were dealing with that.

Ron: Yes, one of the things I know our listeners relate to is pain from the past lingers in the present, whether it's the same person or a different person. If it's the same person in your case, it's about how do we reconcile?

For some people listening it's, "I have to be a co-parent with this person. We're still having children between our homes and I still have pain from our relationship. How do I get past pain to deal with parenting stuff?"

For other people, it's the past pain with a different person but here I am in love with a new person and how do I not let the pain of the past influence how much I love in the present.

For you guys, I know, it was a journey. It was. Darryl, you were persistent and you stayed with it. You kept putting it in front of Gwen. I don't remember the timing of, you were finally out of prison, but eventually you guys began to give it a chance. I'm curious, Darryl, from your part, what did you have to do with all the pain you had caused her?

Gwen, from your part, what did you have to do to move beyond the doubts?

Darryl: Yes, Ron, I think one of the things was not only was it the pain that I caused to her when we was married, but when we divorced I ended up dating another woman and had another child.

Ron: So there was another betrayal on top of all of what had already happened.

Darryl: In my mind, it wasn't betrayal because we wasn't married. I have another child. You know, that's what people do. I don't think I'm going to remarry Gwen. That's not in the game plan so *she* felt the betrayal. I didn't feel the betrayal. I think I was able to justify at least in my mind, "Yes, but we wasn't together so what's the big deal?" But it was a big deal. I began to compartmentalize the pain that I caused her because it was causing me pain to know that I had caused her pain.

The easiest way is to address it is not to address it. That's kind of how I would say we entered into our new reconciliation, knowing that God had called us to it. Without a shadow of a doubt, I think we both would say we know God called us to remarry. But what I underestimated is the pain. Walking in the will of God don't minimize or remove pain.

Ron: Gwen, how did you move past the doubt?

Gwen: It took a lot of, it took a lot of Jesus because I find out that he has another child before he gets locked up. But at the time, it was painful because I already had two of his kids that he really wasn't pouring his life into or whatever, then I find out that there was another child. Although we weren't together, that was painful.

When he first started talking about reconciling, one of the things in my mind was, no, I did not want to go on the journey. I didn't want to go on the baby mama journey. I had walked into the journey willingly the first time. Now here I have to take someone who starts out with a child that I was willing to deal with then he goes to prison. He walks out on me. Then he's locked up. He goes to prison. He has another child. It was like, this person has all of this baggage and drama.

Now a part of me, again it was some self-righteousness in there where it was like, "I don't deserve this." I felt like, "God, I have done what You have called me to do. I've tried to keep myself. I've tried to be the mother You've called me to be, the wife You've called me to be. I wasn't out, even in between during our breakup, I wasn't just out dating and laying around with guys or whatever."

Now this time it wasn't just because of I was scared because my momma was going to get me. It was because I was a believer and I was walking with the Lord. I just didn't want to do the drama and the baggage that came along with it.

But in there God began to deal with the self-righteous part of me. Yes, it didn't change that Darryl did have the baggage. But I think it was a part of it was a pride thing too.

That in so many words, I'm-better-than-you kind of attitude. God began to deal with me in that.

As far as the marriage being broken and torn apart, what God began to show me, He would say, "Gwen, yes, you have all of these things that you talk about that Darryl did in the marriage and there are big things that people can see. When they see or they hear about these things it's kind of like, 'Whoa, he's a horrible person.'" He was like, "But you don't talk about the times that you either disrespect him or talk down to him or things that you felt in your heart and all of those things, the heart issues."

I didn't want to acknowledge and I didn't want his sins and my sins to be equal because in my eyes they weren't equal. It was like, "Lord, I'm not as bad as him. I've never walked out on anybody. I didn't—I haven't had kids and bringing all—I just haven't done all of this."

What God had to continue to show me is, "Gwen, it's not the behavior of what you all did but it's the attitude of the heart." That was a battle that God really had to work on me with that. When he was finally released, well even before he was released, God began to build our friendship just where we could even talk.

Because before I didn't even want to talk. I was so hurt, still hurt, angry and bitter that he would call. It was like, "You can talk to the kids but I don't have anything to say to you." But God began to build a relationship where we could just have a decent adult relationship about the kids, what was going on.

Ron: It sounds like that God was softening your heart through the challenge of your pride. That then opened the door to the friendship which then, I think, allowed you to eventually progress into more of a romantic relationship again.

Gwen: Yes, most definitely. It didn't get romantic until after he got out. But while he was still in prison it was still just rebuilding that relationship again. Then he was still in prison when he started talking about marriage. But I think for while I even shut down to that because it was, "No, I'm too good for you." I didn't say that, but that's basically what the attitude was.

God just dealt with me in that. When God won that battle, it was, "Okay, Darryl, we can be friends. We can have a great relationship for the sake of the kids."

Then he was eventually released from prison. I was good with, "Let us just be friends from that." I was still in church. He came and he started going to the church I was attending. He was sharing what he felt that God was calling him to do, restoration and all of that stuff. My pastor would talk to me about it, and I'm just totally against it.

But we eventually got to a place where it became a conversation on that. Then we both began to sit down with our pastor. I shared my thoughts, my doubts, my fears and all of that with him.

That would have been kind of pre-marriage counseling but it wasn't official that we were getting married yet. I think for me, I was just trying to figure out how do I have a good relationship with him because he still has this other baggage that I still didn't want a part of.

Ron: Yes, one of the things I really respect about this journey for you is how meticulous you were and cautious you were, and rightfully so. It wasn't just this huge leap of faith and you went in with your eyes closed. No, you slowly but surely, conversations with other people just began to help you to see Darryl in a little bit different way and to think of yourself in a different way before God. Ultimately, it softened your heart enough. The friendship progressed a little bit further and further into the relationship.

Darryl, when I heard you guys talk to an audience about your journey and unpack all this, one of the things you talked about was the box. That's where you compartmentalized, as you said a minute ago. That's where you put all the pain you caused Gwen. You just tried to put it away and set it off to the side.

Here you guys are now, getting back together. Eventually you do marry one another again. You're starting over, so to speak. You still have two biological children and other mothers, so there's blended family complexity and stuff going on.

But the whole time, you've got this box. If I remember right it's just sitting off to the side and you're afraid to touch it, I think in part because, "If I go into that, I'm going to feel all the weight of my guilt, but I'm also afraid that's going to awaken in Gwen her doubt and distrust in me."

Darryl: Yes, I seen the pain and honestly I would say when God spoke to me about remarrying Gwen, God was gracious not to allow me to see the pain in its fullness. I think if I'd have saw it in its fullness, I don't know if I would've remarried Gwen.

Ron: You think guilt would have gotten the best of you at that point?

Darryl: Yes, not because of her, but in my mind it would have been simpler—now you got kids. Even if you meet again, here's the pattern, a man from community might have three, four kids. He have a new woman and they all see the kids. That's more the norm.

Getting married, getting divorced, remarry, end up kids in between, I just didn't see a lot of that so I didn't even know how to enter into that. But when Gwen and I would have a conversation, I could hear the pain and I didn't even know how to say I could empathize with her because I wasn't in her shoes.

Gwen kept herself pure. She didn't go date and had another child was. There not another man. I just didn't know how to process that. Instead of resolving the conflict and getting counseling, which wasn't big coming out of my community, I just put it in a box, compartmentalized it and say, "If you don't deal with, it it'll go away."

Ron: Did it go away?

Darryl: No, it didn't go away. [Laughter]

Ron: The reason I ask that is because that's the lie. Somebody listening right now, who goes, "Yes, I've got some shame in my life over who I was or what I did, whether it's this marriage or a previous one." It's so easy to just tell ourselves that that doesn't matter, we can just pack it away over here. But it doesn't go away. It does stay with you. To really find the courage to begin to unpack that, that's even been something pretty recent for you guys on your continuing journey.

Darryl: Yes, I don't know if it's truly unpacked. I think the shame and guilt, the enemy tell you, "Put it in a box and put it aside." But he tells you on a regular basis. "You've messed up everybody life. Not that you just hurt Gwen but you got your own biological kids, all of them are my biological kids, by Gwen who don't know they siblings. They siblings don't know they siblings. Everything that you're trying to remove and protect that the enemy tell you is bringing more guilt and shame.

You start looking at yourself, "Maybe my kids are not married because the way that I dealt with my other kids." All kind of stuff go through your mind and heart. What you're trying to set aside in a box and just hope you can minimize the pain end up causing more pain and discomfort.

Ron: I think if I remember right, you guys, in a fun sort of way, blamed me a little bit for having to unpack the box. [Laughter]

Gwen: Well, not unpacked it, open it. It's still stuffed down in there but it is open.

Ron: Just so the listener has a sense of what you mean by that, in our conversation with one another, getting to know each other and me hearing your story, just asking a few questions, it seemed—and then I said, "Hey, I want to throw you in front of an audience and I'd love for you to talk around this."

Sometimes God uses life and circumstances in just simple little conversations with friends to make us go, "You know, it's time we take another step in our healing journey." How long have you been remarried now?

Darryl: We married in '84. Divorced five years later, '89. Then we remarried in '92, on the same date. So '92, remarried will be—

Gwen: —almost 30 years.

Darryl: —almost 30 years.

Ron: —almost 30 years again. Yes, so here it is 30 years in and there's another step to take. I just—I am so proud of you guys. The courage it takes to go, "It's time to open the box." That is just not easy for any of us in life. I think we all have it. We all have our box. We all have our thing. We all have our shame, whatever it is. We all have the piece of ourselves we're unhappy with.

To just say, "But my journey with the Lord is not over. He's seen us through thus far." He's seen you guys through *so much*. It's kind of like if you stop and you think about it, "Why would He not see us through this?" Well, of course He will. But yet, once again, you've got to find courage and take another step and move into a place that's just uncomfortable. Is that the way it feels?

Gwen: Yes, Ron, for me of course, if you lay the story out and you look at it, even when you ask a part of me, I kind of feel bad for Darryl because I come out looking good in this story. I mean you know it's like that.

But I know for him, when you all reached out and asked us about doing it, of course I wasn't going to sit back and say, "Oh yeah, I can do it," because I had to consider what is he going to go through and how is he going to feel to go through that. It was pretty much all in his court to do that. But as far as the pain and all of that in dealing with it, I've always wanted to deal with it.

I think anytime a person has been wounded by another person, there are just questions or however you want answers to. You want to deal with the pain. I had mentioned several times in. "Let's get counseling. Let's talk through this. Let's try to figure this out." Because I'm still dealing with some things that I couldn't even quite understand what I was dealing with.

Darryl's way of fixing it was, "Okay, here's what we'll do. I have this nice box over here. I have a key. I have a lock. We're just going to slide it in the corner so that whatever it is that you're feeling you don't have to feel anymore."

He thought that he was fixing the problem, but the problem was never fixed because you still have the issues of the holidays where he wants to do right by a child and go see them for Christmas or whatever, but it takes away from me and my family. I feel some type of way with that now. I don't want to feel that but I never dealt with it to understand why I feel that. But he never really wanted to do that.

I've asked about the box. Honestly, as we've kind of had conversations since the time we spoke about the box, in his mind it's like, "Yes, I want to go ahead and open the box and deal with it." But I think he still wants to deal with it on his terms. "You suck it up.

You just pretend that we've dealt with it and you just go in and become the stepmom or the step grandma. You just be what you need to be but let's not really deal with it." But I don't think he still realizes that there are some issues that I haven't dealt with yet.

Ron: Yes it's scary. It's scary to open up a box. It is, because you never really know what the implications are going to be. Like, "Where's this going to ripple into our relationship, our family? How's this going to—is this going to create distrust or hurt?" In particular if you're feeling the weight of responsibility for causing some hurt, last thing you want to do is open that up and have it happen again, right?

It does seem like stuffing it in the corner in the box is the safest way of dealing with it. But as you guys have experienced, it just means you prolong. Sometimes things just end up being more unclear and you're—it just creates other difficulties.

Gwen: The pain, again we try to just cover up the pain. I appreciate Darryl trying to protect me from the pain, but we have to go through the pain to get through the healing.

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

We'll hear one last thought from them in just a minute. As I reflect on their story, in particular Darryl's story, I'm reminded how powerful example is. You know whether you come from a disadvantaged home and community or a wealthy advantaged community, if you have poor family role models, you don't know how to live any differently than that.

But when the Spirit of God and the loving example of a mature Christian, someone in a church community, comes alongside somebody and shows them another way to live, to love and to care for one another, families change for the better. Let's all be reminded that it doesn't take much to share a better path with someone. Don't just sit back and judge. Step in with love and lead.

Hey, teaching and leading is one of the reasons we put on a livestream event each spring called *Blended and Blessed*. It's something your church can host and you can help other people find a better path.

The next one will be Saturday, April 25th, 2020, live from Houston. If you live within driving distance, please come and join me and Dr. Gary Chapman and others for the event. We'd love to have you experience the event with us. If you're not in the Houston area you can watch it on your smartphone or share it with a small group in your home on your laptop.

Even better, you can share it with a room full of people at your church. It's extremely affordable and designed specifically for blended family couples. Learn about it, signup, register today, BlendedandBlessed.com, Saturday, April 25th.

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

Don't forget to subscribe to this podcast. You can do so on Apple podcast, Stitcher, or wherever you get your podcast. Don't forget to rate the podcast and leave us a review.

One person said, "This podcast has been a major blessing. As a stepmom to three kids under the age of ten trying to navigate something I never imagined I'd be a part of, this resource is invaluable and gives me hope." I appreciate that feedback. Thank you for that.

Hey, if you don't mind, tell a friend or a family member about this podcast and about FamilyLife Blended. People are looking for help and hope. Maybe together we can give them some. Just point them to FamilyLife.com/Blended.

Now before we're done, here's a final thought from Darryl Smith:

Ron: Darryl, it seems like you guys still are in the process of working through this. Is that fair to say?

Darryl: Yes, honestly I'm just afraid to go there because I don't want the pain. Honestly I have learned how to live not just my life but my Christian life, which is sad, well I know, and I teach at the foot of the cross there's forgiveness. You can experience God's love and forgiveness, there's no judgement, there's no condemnation.

But I'm afraid to take this box, open it and trust God at the foot of the cross with the pain that I know, once stuff start coming out the box, not only is it going to be hurtful for Gwen, but I'm going to get probably mad because she don't understand. I know it's time to open the box but I'm afraid. I know the box, we both have to open the box together.

I probably ask Gwen say, "I have the key to the box," and I keep thinking about her, the hurt, the pain and, Ron, I really believe God would do something supernatural to bring us closer together. Even what He helps us next in ministry He want the healing to come so when we go into whatever next that could be true healing work for us. To live out His purpose and call, I really need somebody to help me open the box. I don't even know where to start to be honest.

Ron: Yes.

Darryl: Who do we call? What counseling do we go to? I just don't know where to start.

Ron: Let me just address that for a minute because I think, I know, you're not the only people wrestling with that. Our listeners have or are or perhaps will at some point in their life. Really I think you ask some trusted friends. I think you need to find somebody.

I would encourage you guys to find somebody to help be your guide as you open this box and unpack it. Having a guide helps you not let what comes out of the box just immediately get the best of you. There's so many sides to this to consider. Bringing somebody who will just help manage the process for you, I think, is a very wise thing to do.

Now who is that person? I don't know. Sometimes that's a trusted friend, somebody you both feel really comfortable and safe with, but also somebody who has some skills, not just somebody who's a friend but somebody who can actually mentor or guide you in that.

But sometimes it's a pastor. This is difficult because if it's a colleague, that kind of affects your relationship in other ways. It might need to be somebody you're not terribly close to but again somebody who has some pastoral skills or it could be a professional. People can go to professional Christian counselors and get lots of help. You've got to talk around that a little bit, "Who is it that we trust?"

Nan and I have been in that situation many times in our life. We have had multiple conversations around it, "This season in our life, who's that person that we feel like can be our guide in this particular moment?"

I think that's just a wise thing to do. Because you're right. There's lots of emotions that will bubble up once you open up that box. Having somebody sitting there with you offering a little perspective and guiding the process is a really wise thing to do.

I want to just close our time by making this point, everybody in our journey as a Christian, as a believer, I mean finding Christ for both of you radically changed your lives, in particular, Darryl, your life. There's no doubt about that. But as you guys said, just because we find Jesus and find hope for the future doesn't mean that the past is fixed and that we are completely revolutionized people.

That is a journey of discipleship. Different moments of our life, there's different parts of our past and what's happening in our relationships. Now we have to deal with something. I've said before on this podcast, I think we're always working on our marriage. We're always working on how we live because God is always using our marriages to work on us.

He's shaving off the rough edges. He's peeling the onion so that we're getting to something deeper inside. Yes, we shouldn't be surprised that you find yourself in a moment where you're going, "It's time. For us, it's the box."

For the listener it could be something. It's just the next step in your journey. Don't be surprised by that. Recognize that this is a good thing, and yes, there will be pain in it. Doesn't mean it's easy but it's a good thing. If we could just trust the Lord, as He has in the past helped us over other difficulties, He will help in this one as well.

You know we've been telling you about this event *Blended and Blessed* coming up April 25th, 2020, with Dr. Gary Chapman. Well, next time we're going to hear from Dr. Chapman about how he developed the five love languages in the first place and why the world needs a book about the love languages just for blended families.

Gary: Let's say that you discover that your stepson or your stepdaughter, that their primary language is physical touch so you move out and you try to hug them and they push you away.

Ron: That's Dr. Gary Chapman 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. Our mastering engineer is Justin Adams. Theme music provided by Braden Deal.

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