

FamilyLife Blended®

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

Episode 26: Two Homes, Two Sets of Values: From a Child's Point of View

Guest: Melody Fabien
Air Date: March 30, 2020

Ron: Hey, this is Ron Deal. Real quick before we jump into the podcast, I just want to let you know that some of the things you're going to hear regarding *Blended and Blessed* may be a little bit outdated. We recorded this podcast some time ago and obviously the Coronavirus has changed some things for all of us. But the good news is *Blended and Blessed* will go on.

Those of you in the Houston area who were planning to join us and be part of the live audience, you can be converted to a livestream audience and you can still participate in this event.

You know, it occurs to me that this is an opportunity for all of us. Tell a friend about *Blended and Blessed*. Everybody's kind of cooped up in their homes right now, and they need some encouragement. Maybe something that is going to offer them some hope and energy for their family and this could very well be it.

So, *Blended and Blessed*, Saturday, April 25. We hope that you'll join us as a part of our livestream audience safe and secure from your home.

To stay up to date with the latest details, go to blendedandblessed.com. And be sure to follow us on FaceBook at FamilyLife Blended or on Instagram at FamilyLife Blended.

Now, on with the podcast.

Melody: You know I'm growing up in a family that a lot of my cousins are having sex already. It was just like, "Yes, it's just a matter of time. I'll have sex when I'm—maybe my freshman year of college," and that was really extending it.

Now I get this new biblical idea that it is the will of God to abstain. So I go, "Mom, I'm going to wait."

She's like, "Wait for what?"

I'm like, "I'm not going to have sex until I get married."

She was like, “Oh, that’s so cute. Sweetheart, you really think a man’s going to wait for you?” She just said, “Sweetheart, one in a million, one in a million, you’re going to find a man that’s going to wait for you.”

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.

Folks, I got to say it, we’re just one month out from our global one-of-a-kind livestream event called *Blended and Blessed*. It’s coming up Saturday, April 25th. Dr. Gary Chapman will be there. Bill Butterworth, Laura Petherbridge will be joining me and others.

We are so looking forward to this. We’d love for you to join us. All you’ve got to do is go to BlendedandBlessed.com and learn all about it.

Have you ever heard conflicting messages about whether you should eat butter or drink coffee? We get tied up around those little things like that, don’t we? Well, what if you’re hearing conflicting messages about moral values from two people that you really love and respect and you very much want to please. What do you do with that? When this happens to kids, and it does, what’s the emotional impact on them?

That’s the topic of this episode of *FamilyLife Blended*. My guest, Melody Fabien, is a wife and mother of two. She lives in Chicago with her family and enjoys serving at her local church and speaking at FamilyLife Weekend to Remember marriage conferences. Melody also travels the U.S. speaking and teaching about faith, love, sex, relationships and marriage.

She and her husband have a very unique story. They were committed to sexual purity before they married. That story got picked up by media, and they were featured on Fox News, CNN and a lot of other media outlets. You’ll hear more about that coming up. Here’s my conversation with Melody Fabien:

Melody, periodically on this podcast we try to help parents and stepparents understand what it’s like to be a child growing up in a blended family. I’ll just tell our listener right now, one of the agendas we have is I believe very strongly that the more you understand about the experience of children the better responses you have as a parent.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: The more empathy you have perhaps for the child’s experience, more compassion. It doesn’t necessarily mean you cater to everything your child wants. We’re not going in that direction. But I think it just helps you make informed choices and decisions.

I'll just tell our listener, if you haven't heard these podcasts, I want to encourage you to tap in. Podcast number two is called "Life in a Blender." I talked with Dave and Ann Wilson about Dave's experience growing up with divorced parents and the residue that he carried from that experience into his marriage with Ann. That was a really interesting conversation.

Podcast number fourteen is called "In Their Shoes." I talk with author Lauren Reitsema about her book by the same title, *In Their Shoes*, in which she helps parents understand how a child's experiences of divorce and living in a stepfamily impacts them and what they carry forward in life.

Melody, you too grew up in a blended family. As it turns out, the values between the two households were very different. We're going to get to that and unpack that here in a little bit. But let's just start at the beginning. Can you tell us what it was like for you before your parents' divorce? I think you were pretty young at the time but what do you remember?

Melody: I don't have that many memories from it because I was three when my parents divorced. My brother was one. I do remember distinctly when my dad left the house. I think it was snowing outside. I remember looking out the window. I remember him grabbing my face and just saying, "I love you. I'm going to be leaving. We'll still see each other but make sure you be a good girl, okay? Listen to Mommy. Be a good girl."

I just remember that like, "Be a good girl", you know. Then I do remember seeing him on weekends. Then at five my mom remarried, so I had a new stepdad.

Ron: Right, right. One change leads to other changes, lots of changes for kids. Yes, we'll come back to that in a minute.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: So at age three you don't have many memories. You have one very distinct memory.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: Do you remember how you felt when Dad left?

Melody: Yes, I do remember it being painful. I do remember—I don't know if I cried—I probably cried—but I remember thinking, "Why? Why does Daddy have to go?" Like, "Why can't he live here anymore?"

Ron: "What's going on?"

Melody: Yes, "What's happening?" But I don't remember having those conversations with my mom until as a teenager.

Ron: Yes. One of the things that's true about all of us, human nature is in the absence of some sort of explanation of what's going on in our lives, we will make up our own story to try to put the pieces together.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: Parents need to know, parents who are listening need to know, your kids do that, too. My guess is as you were growing up through your childhood, teenage years and even now as an adult, looking back on that experience at age three, dad walking out, you've probably filled the gaps with some narrative that helps you make sense of it. Do you remember how you felt? Do you remember, what have you inserted into the story to try to help make sense of it?

Melody: Yes, my mom did give a story. She did say, "Mommy and Daddy, things were not working out and we had to divorce. Then I met your new dad. He's a great dad and everything's just going to be fine. It's a beautiful new life that we have."

It was just like, "Oh, okay, one thing and then this happened and then this happened."
Yes.

Ron: Mom told you a story and you didn't know any different and you kind of received it as such, is that right?

Melody: Yes.

Ron: Okay, at some point you found out the story was different.

Melody: Yes, as a teenager, you start to piece things and I'm like, "But when did you meet Dad?" and "When did you meet my stepdad?" and "How did this happen?" I had to probe my mom to get more details.

It's interesting because I was just very curious at 12. But I feel like, I don't know, my brother didn't probe, so he didn't know things and details until about 17. He didn't know that it was my mom's choice, and he thought it was my dad's choice.

So there was a little bit of a bitterness and a grudge my brother had with my dad. Then at 17, when he finds out, no, this was Mom's choice, he was like, "What?!" He had a real time of repentance with my dad, my biological dad, because he kind of had an offense for no reason.

Ron: Yes.

Melody: That was really painful. It was a lot of healing that was needed.

Ron: My guess is his anger shifted toward your mom.

Melody: It did at first at age 17, yes, for sure. Then it started, “Hey, you know what, those are their choices long ago. I’m not going to be mad at Mom. I’m not going to be mad at Dad.”

But it was weird because it was. “For so long I’ve acted this way.” Now they have a great relationship. But I remember that year, him really processing a lot of hard emotions.

Ron: At age 12, you get some facts he doesn't have. He goes another seven years before he finds all this out. I’m even wondering from a sibling standpoint, you and he have different understandings of the story and therefore different relationships with each parent, stepparent, so on.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: Did that put the two of you at odds in some way?

Melody: No, I feel like I always wondered why I was just a lot closer to our biological dad at first. Then as I got older, I’m just like, “You’re close to Dad but you're not as close as I am.” I didn’t know what his emotions, I didn’t know what he was processing. Yes.

Ron: Yes. One of the things, if I’m listening to this program right now, you may be wondering, “Wow, so the truth is important for kids to hear.”

Melody: Yes. [Laughter]

Ron: Would you “Amen” that?

Melody: Yes, I feel like it has to be age-appropriate obviously.

Ron: Good.

Melody: I think my mom did the best that she could. But there needed to be a point where she did say, “It’s time you guys know what happened.” I feel like that 11 to 12 age is a good age and you do need to allow your kids to be upset.

Ron: Yes.

Melody: I think every kid is different. I have a daughter. She’s nine. She really processes very well things, so maybe even nine could work but I think that’s important.

My mom did the best that she could. As she's gotten older, she's like, "I probably would've done some things differently."

Because right away she had us call our stepdad *Dad*, *Papi*, and my father did not like that. I did not know that until later. I was like, "Yeah, I don't know if I would've done that right at the beginning, you know." It was kind of like we're creating this new life and we have a home here and you have a home there and we just need to coexist."

Ron: Yes.

Melody: I was a kid so I performed. But I do remember being like, "Wow, did I choose to call him *Dad* or did Mom make me call him *Dad*?"

Ron: Okay, go inside that for me for a minute. What—obviously that caused you some angst.

Melody: Yes, there was a point where I'm like, "Mom, did I choose—?"

"Well, you've been calling him *Dad* since you were a kid. Why are you asking these questions now?"

I'm like, "Well, I'm just thinking about Dad, my dad, my biological dad. How does it affect him?"

She was like, "You have a great stepdad." I'm like, "I know that. I know I have a great stepdad, but...."

I think as parents you kind of need to let your kids vent and let them feel and not gloss over, like, "It's fine. You have a great stepdad. Let's move on."

No, you know what, that was hard. I probably should've got your thoughts on that but we were five. We were so little so we just roll with it. That's *Dad* which is biological and then my stepdad's *Papi*. Those are my names.

I did, I did, I have a great stepdad. He was the one that said, "There's no steps except the steps in the front of the house." He had two daughters previous to my mom so I had two sisters that I would see on the weekends sometimes and Christmas and holidays. We had a big blended family. Then eventually my dad got married and then had two more, three more kids. So I have a lot of siblings.

Ron: Yes, you do.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: That's a very common experience for kids.

Okay, I want to connect some dots for our listeners because there's a lot in what you're sharing with us. I can hear this attitude that your mom had where she needed the past to be in the past in your heart.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: Needed the new family to be embraced and accepted in your heart including your stepdad as *Papi*. The story, how did all of this come down? She needed you to be over that.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: That's what I call "blendering" by the way.

Melody: "Blendering"

Ron: Yes, that's when adults start trying to force kids into embracing the new without any connection to the past. It really is often driven by the parent's anxiety that their kids are not completely accepting of the new stepparents, stepsiblings, whatever.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: That somehow the kids are not quite on board with the decisions that the adults have made so they very much need you to get over.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: There came this point in time where you're like, "Wait a minute. I need to process this and how it's affecting my dad. I need to understand more of the details of what happened when I was three." She kept pushing you past that.

Melody: Yes, I think that was partly to how my mom was raised. She was raised in a home that was very—you could not feel. It's kind of like, "Life is hard. We've got to move on." I remember even in my home if we were kind of mopey, she'd be like, "What's wrong? Go fix your face."

Ron: Get over it.

Melody: "Go to your room. Get over it". Which did teach us to be pretty resilient, but then it taught us not to—

Ron: —to stuff.

Melody: —yes, to stuff. There was a lot of processing with my biological dad. I did get to process a lot with him. He did allow me to feel. He did allow me to cry. He did allow—and again I think my mom would have done that if she knew how. I don't think she knew how. Now we're processing even as adults. I'm like, "Mom, it is okay to cry." She's like, "I know. This is so hard." A lot of it had to do with how she was raised.

Ron: Got you. That created a real contrast for you.

Melody: Oh yes.

Ron: In one home, Mom's home, the rules are no emotions, move past the past.

Melody: It'll be alright.

Ron: "Be alright," "Get into the present," "Accept, "Get on board with the new stepfamily, new stepdad," all that kind of stuff. Then Dad's house was different. Tell us a little bit about that from your experience.

Melody: Yes, with my dad I remember him being a lot more emotionally sensitive. He'd process his emotions. I could cry. I could be angry. I could be upset. I do remember feeling like his kids, which are my siblings on my dad's side, were too expressive and could share too many emotions and they don't respect you. [Laughter]

Now I see like, oh, he was just letting them vent. He was letting them express themselves. I do feel like more as an adult, you know there were some healthier things there where I was like, "Oh, they can express themselves. They can share how they feel." It is interesting. There was just different ways of expressing emotion.

Ron: Yes.

Melody: Yes, for sure.

Ron: Is that confusing to you having very different climates, very different emotional rules about how we do life between your two households?

Melody: Yes, I remember knowing that things were very different in many ways. Emotions are different. How you express yourself is different. Then I get saved at around 12-13, and my dad gets saved when I'm 14. Then it was *real* different. [Laughter]

My mom was serving the Lord at first, and then she stepped away. That was really hard because I was just going to church by myself. I had this interest in God, which was totally God that I had this interest in Him at such a young age. I went to church thinking, "I don't know if I'm doing this church thing anymore."

Thank God for praying youth pastors. This youth pastor comes to me, Chris, and he says, “Melody, I’ve been praying for you, and I got this vision of you running a race and everyone around you stopped running but you didn’t. I just want to encourage you to keep running,”

I’m like, “Oh my goodness, that’s exactly what I’m going through.” I was the only one in my house going to church.

He’s like, “Melody, God has called you for the ministry.”

I was like, “Wow, that’s so cool! What is that?” Because I have no clue. We were not raised in church. This was all new.

Mom picks me up from church, “How’s church?”

I’m like, “So great, Mom! I’m going to be a missionary.”

She’s like, “Who told you that?”

I’m like, “Pastor Chris.”

She’s like, “You don’t want to be a missionary. They don’t make any money.”

I was like, “Oh, I don’t want to be a missionary.”

That was my life. I’d get one message at home, one message at church. Then Dad gets saved and he’s like, “I found the truth. It’s Jesus.” And he goes off into all these fatherhood books. He’s like, “I’ve got to win my child’s heart.” Now he’s having this one-on-one time with us, discipling us, opening the Word.

This is difficult now because in Mom’s house there were rules. Education is very important but we could—I could have a boyfriend at 12 and 13 as long it’s the boy visits me in my house supervised kind of a thing.

My dad is having a heart attack, like, “How can your mother let you date? You’re only 13!”

I’m like, “Well, Dad, Mom says I can.”

Ron: I love that attitude coming out in your voice. “Well, Dad,…”

Melody: Yes, I was pretty sassy. I’m like, “Dad, Mom thinks it’s fine.” [Laughter]

He knew, “Oh my goodness! I have no control of what is happening in my daughter’s house, so I’m going to have to up my prayer game and I have to go into more of a mentoring / influencer type relationship with my children.

That really helped. He went into this mentor type role with me. Would ask me very probing questions that I just don’t think my mom and my stepdad knew how to do. They weren’t serving the Lord so we did not have that common ground.

That was another source of pain because now Mom sees me really getting close to my dad. She’s like, “What is this? All of a sudden you’re so close to your dad.” It started feeling like a competition.

I’m like, “Mom, I don’t want this to be a competition. I love Dad, I love you.”

“But you’re so close to him.”

I’m like, “I know, because we’re connected spiritually.” That was pretty painful from age 15 until about 17. I do remember that.

Ron: Painful between you and your mom.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: I’m also wondering if it affected your relationship with your stepdad.

Melody: You know, my stepdad, he’s, he’s a great guy. He kind of stays away from drama. [Laughter] He’s like, “Love your mom. Love your dad. Everybody’s fine.” Maybe it did but he just never told me if it phased him. He thought it was great I was going to church. He kind of would look at my mom like, “What are you upset about? She’s going to church. Leave her alone.”

At 16, I get this message that God created sex and sex is for marriage and I’m like, “What?!” [Laughter] It’s revolutionary. I’m growing up in a family that a lot of my cousins are having sex already. Like, “Yes, it’s just a matter of time. I’ll have sex when I’m— maybe my freshman year of college,” and that was really extending it.

Now I get this new biblical idea that it is the will of God to abstain. I go, “Mom, I’m going to wait.”

She’s like, “Wait for what?”

I’m like, “I’m not going to have sex until I get married.

She was like, “Oh, that’s so cute.” Like, “Sweetheart, you really think a man’s going to wait for you?”

Ron: Oh, wow!

Melody: I was crushed.

Ron: Wow!

Melody: That was not what I was expecting. I'm 16 years old. Thought Mom was going to clap, jump for joy. She just said, "Sweetheart, one in a million, one in a million, you're going to find a man that's going to wait for you."

I remember going into my room, start crying and praying and saying, "I don't get it. I thought she would be happy." But I do remember learning about spiritual warfare early on and knowing, "I don't think this is my mom. I think this is spiritual warfare and I have to fight in prayer." I do remember that.

It was a whole month that we had teachings on purity and relationships and dating. Then at the end of the month we were going to get a ring and we were going to make a commitment to save sex until marriage. My mom is like, "Is this a cult?" Like, "What. Is. This?!" [Laughter]

Ron: Okay, we're laughing right now because it's kind of funny and looking back you—but I've just got to pause and say, you must have been terribly confused. You must have—it must have been pulling you in two.

Melody: Absolutely, absolutely.

Ron: Because there's a part of you that's deeply passionate about pursuing purity and obedience and listening to God and responding to Him. Your dad is in your corner. He's with you and encouraging and you're celebrating that together.

But with your mother it was condescending and the message came through, "That's not a priority" or "That's not a value you should even hold."

You're going, "I know what my belief system is but in order to please my mom and have a relationship with her, I kind of need to let go of my own belief system." Yes?

Melody: Yes.

Ron: That is being torn in two.

Melody: I want to say it was one of the most painful months of my life. Now there's restoration and my mom has apologized profusely for that season. She didn't get it. She didn't understand. She's just like, "What is this? This commitment?"

She grew up Catholic and there was this sort of like, “You don’t make promises to God because you’re going to break them so we just don’t promise anything to God.” For a whole month she just made fun of me, “Sweetheart, this is dumb. What if you get married and your sex life sucks?”

I’m like, “That would be terrible.” You know what I mean? I was just like, “Well, wait, so then I’m supposed to try it? I don’t get it.”

Ron: She was casting doubt into the middle of your trust.

Melody: Sure. What kind of broke it all was we went shopping to get a—we had to wear a white summer dress or a light beige outfit representing purity. She’s just like, “What is this? This is so weird? You have to wear white. Is this a cult?” and all this stuff. She bought the dress.

It’s like my mom didn’t support it but she did go along with me. She’s like, “Fine, fine, we’ll get this dress. We’ll get this ring. I’ll go. I don’t really want to go but I’ll go to the ceremony.” We get home and I can’t find the dress.

I’m like, “Mom, can I get the car keys? I think I left the dress in the car.” She’s like, “Okay.” I cannot find it anywhere.

I’m like, “The devil stole my dress!” [Laughter] I’m like 16, like, “Everything is against me!” There was such warfare around me making this decision. Now as an adult I understand because my calling was attached to that decision. But I remember going inside, she was there with my aunt, which is my stepdad’s sister. I said, “Mom, I cannot find this dress.”

She’s like, “What?! Did you leave it at the store?”

I’m like, “I don’t know,” and start crying.

My aunt is like, “What is this dress for?”

She’s like, “Oh, my daughter’s marrying God.”

I’m like, “I’m not marrying God,” and start crying.

Mom doesn’t want to see me cry. Now she’s seeing me cry and she’s like, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

I’m like, “Do you just want me to have sex?”

She’s like “No, no, that’s not what I’m saying.” She’s like, “Melody, not everyone is going to believe what you believe.”

I said, "I know that. I just want you to be happy for me."

She's like, "Well, I didn't wait so I don't know what makes you think you can."

I felt like that was it. That was the big lie she was holding in her right hand. By the grace of God, I said, "Mom, I have a relationship with Jesus and He is going to help me do this." It's almost like it shut the argument down.

I went to my room and I felt the Holy Spirit say, "You just go get any dress in your closet. It is not about your dress. It is about your heart."

I had my little minty blue dress that next day. My mom went, reluctantly. The pastor said, "You know we've been talking to your kids this whole month. Today I want to talk to the parents." He said, "You should be so proud of your kids." And he goes on and on about why the parents should be so happy.

It was great. Statistically—he gave statistics. He was just going for it. Then he said, "You know, I really sense—I would like the parents to put the rings on their children." I go to the front altar with my ring. My dad at this point—

Ron: Yes, I was going to say, how does that work? Because mom and dad clearly are in two different camps. You have stepparents there. How did you orchestrate that?

Melody: You know that wasn't part of the program that the parent was going to put the ring on. It was just in the moment the pastor decided to do that. My dad decided, "She needs to do it." In wisdom, he said, "No, Judy, you go ahead. Go ahead."

I don't know who's going to come. I'm in front. I don't know what's going on behind me. I'm like, "Oh, my goodness! My parents—is it my mom? Is it my dad?" Then my mom comes and I'm like, "Aw."

At this point my tears are starting to come down. My mom has been making fun of me for the whole month and now she has to put my ring on me. She's standing next to me and he says, "Parents, please come in front of your children. Look them in the eye and tell them how proud you are of them."

Ron: Oh, my goodness. [Laughter]

Melody: I'm laughing now, but I was bawling. I am bawling. My mom is the sweetest short little Puerto Rican lady. She's like, "Stop crying. Stop."

Ron: No emotion, you're breaking that rule.

Melody: Yes, everybody's like happy, "Purity!"

I was [makes crying sounds].

She's just like, "Stop crying." I'm like holding it in.

Ron, I saw a miracle. She looked at me and then she took a step back as if this veil came off of her. She looked at me again and she said, "I'm so proud of you. I don't even know why I was saying those things." That's when I knew I felt like it was very spiritual. It felt like a demonic attack that she's just like, "Why did I say those things to you? This is great!"

Ron: I would say she stopped seeing herself and she started seeing you for the first time.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: That's part of what God gave her.

Melody: Yes, it was beautiful. She said, "I didn't have this when I was your age. I wish I did. I'm so proud of you." At that point I lost it. I'm like [makes crying sounds], "That's what I've been trying to say." It was tough.

Ron: You know, obviously this is quite a testimony that you have and the listener should know it goes beyond this because you eventually met a man and you guys committed yourself to purity and did not even kiss until you got married, the day of your wedding.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: That caught regional and national news and you were interviewed all over the place. You walked it out, right. That's the ultimate path of this story. But what I want us to focus on, is that experience you had of being caught between those people you love.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: When one side clearly is against what you're trying to live, it makes it really, really difficult to find that faith, to walk that out and to believe it.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: Here's an interesting question. I don't know if anybody's ever asked you this before but if I was sitting here with your dad right now, talking to your biological father about this season of your life and all he was trying to do—you talked about how he went into a mentoring mode, a discipling mode with you. It was very intentional about that—and I were to say to him, "Man, obviously you stepped up your game and you were really being intentional with your daughter. Yet you knew there was a competing

message in the other home. How did you cope with that?" What do you think your dad would say?

Melody: You know, I know he would say he had to enter a huge place of faith for his kids. People would say, "James, you can't control what's happening over there. Your kids are just going to do what they're going to do."

He just refused. He's like, "No, no. I'm going to pray for them. I'm going to teach them. I believe that God's word doesn't return void. I'm going to fight for this." He had this real tenacity to believe God.

It wasn't like he was calling my mom, like, "You better stop." He had a very like, "I'm going to pray." I mean he would pray and my boyfriends would move to Florida.

[Laughter]

I would be like, "Are you praying that my boyfriends move?"

He'd slap his knee and say, "Yep." [Laughter] I would be so mad at him, like, "You're ruining my love life!"

Ron: Clearly he took his agenda out with God in the spiritual realm and with you, but he didn't go directly and combat the other home, your mom?

Melody: No.

Ron: Good, that's a good thing.

Melody: I think—I don't know what that was like earlier because they kept their drama very apart. I don't know their drama but I remember there being a point where he just, "I'm not going to fight your mom." He's just be, "Oh my goodness, I can't believe it." But wouldn't say much.

There was a very like, "You tell your dad..." which I don't think is healthy. Parents, talk it all out. Don't let your kids be your messenger. But we were often, "Tell your dad..." "Tell your mom..." which was not easy.

Ron: Yes, do you mind unpacking that just a little bit, just emotionally. Where did that leave you when one side made you the messenger to the other side?

Melody: Yes, it wasn't easy because I'd have to be like, "Oh, mom says this," or, "My dad said this." I'd just see their emotion, like, "Really? Are you serious? Your dad...fine!" Or, "Hey, mom says why?" "Fine!"

I think for sure for big decisions like graduation, college, they would talk very quickly on the phone. But my mom kind of grew up too like, “Divorce was kind of taboo so let’s just...” She didn’t like when there were movies when the divorced families are all eating dinner. She was like, “What? No, that is so weird.”

I do remember that. I do remember her being, “We will not be that kind of family.”

I would kind of look at her like, “What do you think, Mom?” In these movies that would promote that you know.

Ron: Right?

Melody: She’s just like, “No. I—that’s just weird to me.”

I’d be, “Okay, that’s the way it is.” So we did not have birthdays together. We did not have holidays together.

Ron: It would’ve been okay with you?

Melody: I think so. I probably would’ve felt super weird but—

Ron: —having stepparents in the room.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: Yes.

Melody: The time that that had to happen was my wedding. That’s when it went down.

Ron: Yes. [Laughter] Did it go down well?

Melody: It did. There were some tense moments. I’ll share one.

My dad—it’s like he had amnesia or something because I’m like, “Dad, I have a great stepfather, and I do want to acknowledge him at my wedding, so I would like to dance with both of you. I would like *you* to walk me down the aisle, but I would like my stepfather to be in the front so that he’s also present with my mom.” He didn’t like that idea at first.

Ron: Yes.

Melody: I was taken aback. I was like, “Are you serious?”

He’s just, “But why?”

I was like, "He raised me since I was five!" I just, I was not expecting that. That was really painful for me.

Thank God for my husband and his wisdom. He had got a word from a pastor that said, "Don't let no man, not even her father, hurt your wife. Make sure you guard your wife's heart."

He had met my dad for coffee. He said listen, "I know this is very painful even though it's 23 years ago, but don't make Melody pay for you guys' decision. This is our big day. She wants to honor both."

He was like, "I know he's a good man but I've got to share again?" It's just that reopening of the wound, right?

Ron: Right.

Melody: "He's got to get honored too." He's like, "Yes."

Ron: There's a message for our listener. A separated family, you walk it out day after day after day. Children walk it out every single day.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: It is never in the past. Okay, let's just move on, embrace the new family, put the past behind us. You can't do that.

Melody: You can't

Ron: Because the implications just continue to ripple out through life. Wow, kudos to your husband for finding the courage to have that hard conversation with his future father-in-law.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: That was a good move on his part.

Melody: Yes, my dad received it. After that conversation he said, "Okay." It's almost like a reminder, "Here we go again. Why am I going to fight? Why am I going to make this a big deal that is going to be painful for my daughter?" I'm thankful that I was able to honor both at my wedding.

My husband, too, like when he asked my parents for the blessing to marry me, he met with my dad separately, then he met with my stepdad separately, man to man. My stepdad got very emotional and said, "You know, I love my stepdaughters but I didn't

feel the same kind of man asking for the blessing the way you have. I really feel honor and I want to thank you for doing that.”

Ron: Melody, let me ask you something. I’m imagining the listener right now who is the person like your dad who is trying to raise their children to know the Lord and to walk in His ways and to trust Him with their lives, and they’re feeling thwarted by something that’s happening in the other home.

The values are different. There’s competing values, right? Now one of the things that I’ve noticed about you in your story is you were pretty strong with your values with your mother. You were able to stand up and say, “No, Mom, this is what matters to me and this is what I want.”

Yes, you were confused by her condescending tone and making fun of it, and sometimes that made you rethink, “Should I be doing this?” I’m not saying you didn’t ever go through periods of doubt or confusion. But you were pretty strong to speak up, right?

Melody: Yes.

Ron: Let’s talk to that parent right now who has a son or a daughter who is not able to do that for whatever reason. When they go to the other home they don’t speak up for what is right. They don’t carry Jesus with them. They end up being a chameleon basically. They’re in the other home and they just go along with the values of the other home, whatever those are, and engage in whatever behaviors seem right in that home. Talk to the parent who’s *desperately* wanting to help their child. That’s delicate, right?

Melody: It is, yes.

Ron: Do you have any thoughts on how they can help their child without overburdening them too much?

Melody: Yes, I would say to that parent, always honor your ex-spouse, keeping them in a positive light. Like, “Hey, I know your dad or your mom does not believe what I believe in this home. I know you feel conflicted.”

Acknowledge the child’s emotions. “I know you feel like you’re stuck between the two. But courage is standing up alone for what’s right. I can’t make you believe anything. I can’t make you tell your mom or your dad what to believe but this is how we’re raising you in this home. I would hope that you would own this, that you would love Jesus, that you would have a relationship with Him.

“Though you’re—the other parent doesn’t see it that way, it’s important for them to see your faith lived out loud. Although that’s going to cause a lot of pain and tension, Jesus

said, 'I will bring a sword,' and this is your time to really stand up for your faith in that house. I want to encourage you to do that."

I feel like it's not a one-time conversation. Because I did have that. I did have, "I want to go to Moody Bible Institute." That was *another* big fight. Dad's like, "Fantastic! Yes, you're called to the ministry." My mom's like, "What the heck?"

Ron: Yes, yes.

Melody: "What? You're going to go to a Bible school? How are you going to make any money? How are you going to survive?" She was so happy that I was going to college, but she was so upset at the choice.

My dad said, "Respect your mom and keep appealing." He taught me, honor your authority and appeal to your authority and pray. Appeal and pray. He kind of just taught me, "You're going to have to pray for your mom. You're going to have to pray."

Ron: Let me just say. I think that is an excellent answer. At the same time, that brings some tension for a child. We'd said earlier, in fact, you said earlier, "Don't make kids messengers to the other home." Well, in a way this is doing that very thing. You're encouraging the child to take the message of Jesus with them to the other home. You have to know as a parent that puts your kids in the middle.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: I don't think there's any way around this. I have thought about this so many times from so many different points of view. One of the big rules we tell co-parents is, "Don't make your kids messengers to the other home. Don't make them spies to tattle on the other home. Don't ask them to carry your agenda or to be your little pawn in your battles." Right? That's all true. Yet, when it comes to the ultimate values of life, in your situation, you had to.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: That meant over and over again you had to face your mother in courage, right?

Melody: Yes.

Ron: Turns out that's not a bad thing. That is part of the Christian walk.

Melody: Right.

Ron: Some kids can just do that more easily than others. It's one thing if you're 15 trying to do that. It's another thing if you're eight trying to do that.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: There's so many different layers to this that make it challenging. I appreciate the way you worded that and the way your dad handled that it sounds like. He encouraged you. He also said honor, honor, honor your mom. Everything was tempered with respect and honor. I think that's the important piece as you're trying to encourage your child to walk into, essentially, walk into the world—

Melody: Right.

Ron: —with this value system.

Melody: Yes, I think honor's a huge thing. Being patient with your kids. Like, if you're kid's like, "Oh, I watched this movie," and you're like, "What? You know you shouldn't be watching that movie."

I think you've got, at that point, call the other parent and just say, "Hey, can we not watch those movies with our kids?" Because for them, if they're eight or nine, they're not going to be like, "I can't watch this." You know what I mean?

Ron: Yes.

Melody: I mean, some kids do. They're pretty strong, but it's really hard to put your kid in that predicament.

Ron: Yes, so again this is delicate. I want to say to the listener there's no clear black and white rules around how to handle this situation.

Melody: No.

Ron: Sometimes I think you're right, it would be appropriate to go to the other parent and try to talk to them as the co-parent and have that conversation. Although, even as I say that, some people listening going, "Oh, that's World War III. That's a disaster. There's no—" And it could be that there's no good options here.

Melody: Right.

Ron: You can't make your child do it. You can't talk to the other parent and have them receive it. You may just end up left going, "I don't know what to do. We're just going to keep praying and pouring into our child and have a little grace for this moment and the decision they made to watch that movie. But we're going to keep building into them without laying on heavy guilt trips in the process."

Melody: Yes. I do remember at around 15, being bold enough to start saying things. We had family movie time with my mom, my stepdad. I knew it wasn't a good movie, as

far as my Christian values. I was like, “I’m not going to watch TV. I’m going to go upstairs.”

They’re like, “Why?” You know, it was never about my dad. My dad, he would never make it about him and his religion. It was, “You and your relationship with God. You and your relationship with God.”

I was like, “I don’t feel comfortable watching this kind of movie because of my faith.”

They were like, “Oh my!” Then I’d just go upstairs. I kind of learned, “Blessed are the persecuted.”

Ron: Yes, yes. Okay Melody, I’ve got to ask. Sometimes with sibling groups there’s one kid who can do what you did and there’s another child or two that has a real problem doing that. I’m curious, was it different for your brother?

Melody: Big time, yes. He did not own his faith the way I did. He still doesn’t. I’m praying that his faith grows. He believes in God. He’ll read the Bible occasionally, but he’s still not quite where I’m at at all.

Ron: So you went upstairs and chose not to watch the TV with them and your brother stayed.

Melody: Yes, for sure, yes.

Ron: The reason I point that out in our conversation is because I want our listeners to know that’s very common. It’s almost like there’s a dynamic that when one child is stepping into that space with courage, the other siblings are going, “Boy, I’m not doing that because I see the tension that it brings. I see how mom reacts. I don’t want to face that in mom so I’m not speaking up. Plus I want to watch the TV show.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: “All my friends are watching it.” That’s a common thing. Again that weighs on a parent’s heart. You want all your children to walk in the light. You can have seasons where you feel really good about what’s happening with one or two kids and not great at all about what’s happening with others.

I’ve said this before. It’s part of the reality when you’re parenting between households. You have, at the end of the day, you have less parental influence than you would if you were still married and parenting together. It doesn’t mean you don’t stop trying. You do keep going.

Melody: Yes.

Ron: You do keep going.

Melody: Big time.

Ron: And you trust in the Lord to fill gaps you can't control. But it's common to have the differences being lived out with your children.

Melody: Yes, definitely.

Ron: Well, Melody, I'm encouraged because of our conversation. I hope that our listeners have been encouraged by all that you've shared. Thank you for taking us inside the emotions and the experience of a child wrestling with the values that differ between their households. I'm curious, is there a final thought or encouragement that you would give to our listeners?

You've been listening to my conversation with Melody Fabien. I'm Ron Deal and this is *FamilyLife Blended*.

We'll hear Melody's answer to that question in just a minute. But before then, do me a quick favor. Give us a quick review, if you would, and maybe offer a few comments. Things like that encourage us and help others find the podcast. I'd appreciate if you'd take a few minutes to do that.

I want to say a little bit more about my observation that parents sometimes push their children to embrace a new blended family. I call that, by the way, "blundering." I think parents do that for many reasons. Sometimes they feel guilty for choices they've made in the past. They think it might eliminate pain in their kids. They're trying to help the stepparent feel welcome. All those are understandable reasons.

Ultimately, they're trying to move the family forward and make the new family successful. While that need is understandable, I think pushing kids toward acceptance actually makes things harder on kids and ironically, makes the family merger move more slowly. I know it's counterintuitive but what is needed here is patience and understanding. Help your children talk through and process their feelings, their concerns, their questions about what's going on.

Now you may not like all the questions and how that puts you in the hot seat at times. But they're trying to make sense of the narrative of their life and you need to help them with that. Actually biological parents are in a really good position of helping because you're that trusted parent figure in their life. Be accessible to them. That really helps them try to make sense of things.

By the way, sometimes parents push kids because they're responding more to their own needs than their child's needs. When you begin to recognize that, you need to shift your posture to something that considers the child more fully, that cares for them. That really

makes a difference. It really helps celebrate who they are and it moves you towards their heart. That's ultimately what happened with Melody's mom. It can be the case with you as well.

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

I mentioned earlier about giving us a quick review. We appreciate that by the way. I want you to know that the feedback on the previous *Blended and Blessed* livestream events has been very positive. Overall, the rating last time was 9.27 on a 10 scale. That's not bad. Last year 97 percent of our viewers watched the entire event. They didn't want to turn it off. That ought to tell you something, right? Ninety-one percent of the host churches said that they would host it again.

Well, *again* is almost here. Saturday, April 25th, 2020, is our next *Blended and Blessed* livestream, practical presentations from leading speakers like Dr. Gary Chapman, Laura Petherbridge, Bill Butterworth, myself. Every session is designed just for blended family couples.

Join us online for the livestream for less than \$20. Learn all about this one-of-a-kind blended family couple enrichment event at BlendedandBlessed.com. You don't have much time, so make sure you go there soon. BlendedandBlessed.com

As always, you can subscribe to this podcast on Apple podcast, on Stitcher or wherever you listen to your podcast. Just search, "*FamilyLife Blended* with Ron Deal". Remember to look at those show notes for links to additional resources. I'd love for you to get in touch with some of that. Remember the largest collection of articles, videos and resources for blended families is available at FamilyLife.com/Blended.

Now, before we're done, let's hear Melody's answer to that question.

I'm curious, is there a final thought or encouragement that you would give to our listeners?

Melody: I think, for the parent who is trying to raise their child in the Lord and the other is not, you have an amazing weapon called prayer. Don't despise it. Don't think that it's small. It's not the last resort. It is the first resort. You need to pray for your kids, specifically. Pray for the other co-parent. Pray that they start to see the way you see.

Because I really, as I went to Moody, God provided, I started to see a shift in my mom. Then when I got married, I started *really* see that shift happen because it was like, "Oh my goodness, what she said happened. What she prayed came. What she said she would do in God's name, she did. He *has* provided. She's *not* starving. [Laughter] She's okay now." I think Jesus won. He won.

Also as a co-parent don't be like, "Oh, they're 18. I'm done." You're not done. I teach parents your prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until you're 26 years old, which is your decision-making part of their brain. They need you to keep speaking into their life.

My dad *continued* to speak into my life from freshman year through senior year. Just do your best as parents, even if the other parent isn't doing the best job in a certain way, to not pit them against each other. My dad's not perfect. There were things that he was not perfect in. When my mom would bring those things up, I often felt in my heart I had to choose, "Who's the better dad at this thing? When it comes to finances, this dad's better. When it comes to this, that dad's better."

I did feel that growing up. "You acknowledge that your stepdad is better at this right." And I know what she meant. I know her heart was good, but that was a lot of pain later in marriage where I'm like sifting ideas against my husband based on stuff I felt with my dads. I'm like, "Where's this coming from?" It was from that. Just do your best to not pit the dads or the moms against each other. Try your best to help you kids see the good in both.

Ron: Next time we're going to hear a very candid conversation with Grammy award winner and vocalist Sandi Patti, and her husband Don Pelsis about their blended family. A blended family that started in all the wrong ways and yet found God's grace and blessing.

Sandi: If I don't believe that God has forgiven me in this, I don't believe He forgives. That doesn't mean it's easy. Even as we're talking now, I'm reminding myself of some of those good redemptive things, just to be real honest. [Laughter]

Ron: That's Sandi Patti and Don Pelsis next time on *FamilyLife Blended*.

I'm Ron Deal. Thanks for listening. Thanks to our FamilyLife Legacy Partners for making this podcast possible. Our chief audio engineer is Keith Lynch. Bruce Goff, producer. Our mastering engineer is Justin Adams. 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 © 2020 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com