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want to let you know that some of the things you’re going to hear regarding Blended and Blessed may be a little bit outdated.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.

Sandi: Even coming, to be real honest, even coming into this interview and chat with you today, I’ve found that in just the few moments I’ve had to just stop and say, “Just pick up the story. Don’t pick up the shame. If I don’t believe that God has forgiven me in this, I don’t believe He forgives.”

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, you may know that my newest book, Building Love Together in Blended Families, coauthored with New York Times best-selling author, Dr. Gary Chapman, is now available. You can go online and you can register and watch on your smartphone, your laptop. You can get together with some other couples. Your church
can host the event. It’s very inexpensive. You can learn all about it at BlendedandBlessed.com.

By the way, if this is your first podcast by chance, we have dozens more on a variety of blended family topics. I’m thinking, for example of episode number nine, my conversation about step parenting with author, Gayla Grace or number 14, called *In Their Shoes* with Lauren Reitsema. That’s our conversation about what it’s like to be stepparented from the kid’s point of view.

You can subscribe right now to get all our previous podcasts and future ones, or you can listen online and at the same time get access to articles and online videos and conference information. Do all that at FamilyLife.com/podcasts.

By the way, if you’d like to follow us on social media, that’s a great way to get daily tips and tools. You can do that at FamilyLife Blended on Facebook and Instagram.

You know, if we’re honest, I think we all feel unworthy sometimes. Unworthy of being loved. Unworthy of finding happiness. Unworthy of God’s grace and experiencing His blessing on our life. That is familiar territory to my guests on this episode of FamilyLife Blended. What they share about their journey is inspiration for all of us.

Sandi Patty and Don Peslis have been married for almost 20 years and have a blended family of eight children. As one of the most highly acclaimed performers of our time with five Grammy Awards, four Billboard Music Awards, three Platinum Records, five Gold Records, and eleven million units sold, Sandi Patty is simply known as “The Voice.”

With 40 Dove Awards, Sandi is the most awarded female vocalist in contemporary gospel music history and is a member of the Gospel Music Hall of Fame. In addition to her musical career, she’s the author of eight books including her autobiography, simply called *The Voice.*

Her book about her journey in a blended family is entitled *Life in the Blender.* Sandy’s husband Don Peslis serves at Crossings Community Church in Oklahoma City, as a pastor of chapel worship. He’s actively involved in community outreach programs.

Here’s my conversation with Sandi Patty and Don Peslis:

Don, Sandi, this isn’t true for everyone in a blended family by any means but sometimes folks in a blended family, their family came about because of less than ideal circumstances. Sometimes it was an unhealthy or unwise choice, sometimes it was a sinful choice, but we believe and we know that there is hope in Christ. There is forgiveness in Christ and like all sin, there is redemption beyond our worst moments. Now having said that, you guys got started off on the wrong foot. Is that fair to say?
Sandi: Yes, I mean, definitely. We’ve often said, blended families are all born out of loss. Whether it’s the death of a spouse and remarriage or death of the marriage and a remarriage. But it’s always born out of loss.

For our situation, it was also born out of brokenness. We have reasons but there’s no blame that lays with anyone but the two of us. As we were traveling on the road together and just developed a friendship, that friendship became much more than it should be outside of marriage.

There was so much that I loved watching Don with kids, and he just loved on my kids as we traveled. There was just so much respect. I didn’t understand boundaries like I do now, and we just found ourselves in situation that we just never thought we would find ourselves in. As our marriages, other marriages, were ending, we overlapped the process. I don’t smirk at that lightly. I’m just—it’s—these are hard words to say—

Ron: Yes.

Sandi: —for both of us. But I think that Don and I want to share pieces of our story that can encourage, not excuse other people or give them an easy out, but to encourage them that in their brokenness, they’re not alone and there are people who have walked ahead of them and can offer some words of advice.

Ron: Yes.

Sandi: A friend of mine once said, “If you’re going to make a mistake, at least make a new one.” Learn from ours.

Ron: Yes, learn from other people. For our listener, that’s just not familiar with your story, although it is public in some ways and, Sandi, you’ve written about this in a couple of books that are available for people to pick up, you were both married at the time that your relationship started.

That was part of—I don’t know the whole picture, but certainly there was a relationship that formed when it shouldn’t have and that contributed to—tell me if that’s not fair—contributed to the ending of those previous relationships. Then that’s the beginning of how your blended family came to be. Even now, Sandi, you were telling me, 25 years you guys have been married.

Sandi: Twenty-five.

Ron: Yes, it’s still difficult talking about that season of your life. Don, is it still hard for you?
Don: It is hard because it’s always hard. When the kids were little we talked about when you mess up, fess up. That’s a great thing. It's so hard because the enemy wants us, when we mess up to keep us away from redemption.

Ron: Yes.

Don: Really the Lord is saying, “Hey, come here and let’s....” He’s the author of making things and taking broken relationships and broken things and making something beautiful come out of that.

Absolutely, Ron, we could’ve, hindsight—I don’t know—I wish I had said it—but hindsight’s always 20/20. It’s really great when things can have a proper ending and new things can have a proper beginning but sometimes it doesn’t work out that way.

Absolutely, as we look back and if couples out there listening find themselves in this, as we did, you know the last thing we want you to do is stay away from the church or the Lord, because He wants us to bring ourselves and our process and He can help sift through, with love, all of that. That’s really at the heart, if we can, Ron, our story.

Unlike Joseph, I liken my pitfalls—I’ve made a lot of the mistakes that we made, unlike things happening to Joseph, but I look back on Joseph’s story and it’s so—God was with us every step of the way. He never pulled back His unfailing love from us, never. Wooed us, if you will, the Lord, to figure it out to sift it out.

Yes, it is difficult. But yet, Ron, it’s not because God wasn’t there in the midst of it. He was there and redeeming even through the roughest of times. Does that make sense?

Ron: It makes a lot of sense and really that is so important for people to remember. One of the things I really appreciate about you guys and your willingness to talk about this is because I often find—well everybody who’s honest looks in the rearview mirror and says, “Man, I have blown it so many times. There is so many sins, I could see the consequences, and sometimes the ripples just keep going from the sin and choices that we’ve made in the past.”

If we’re honest and if we’re humble before God, which is always the posture that we should have, not just when we come in faith, but to walk in faith every single day, we have to own that about ourselves. The point is in owning that, we also submit ourselves to the redemptive work of Jesus.

Don: Absolutely.

Ron: Yet, we can hold shame over ourselves. We can beat ourselves up. We can live in a place where we cannot celebrate who we are today in Christ. I think that’s really unfortunate. I love that we’re talking about you guys 25 years later, faithful, loving, committed to one another.
Moving forward, both deeply involved in ministry and the circles God has put you. Your children are involved in ministry. All kinds of things are happening with them now as adults. You can hold your head up.

**Sandi:** Yes, I’m going to say, yes, question mark.

**Ron:** Okay.

**Sandi:** Because it’s, it’s, it’s so easy to pull that shame back out from the foot of the cross. How do we pull the story that can encourage without pulling the shame that keeps us down?

There are just things that I wish I—we both wish, and not just in this situation but other—I wish I could’ve said something differently just this week to one of my kids. I just, I said something that was not meant *at all* to be insensitive. Yet the minute I said it, it was like, I wish I could take that back. I can’t take that back.

All I can do, and I think this was what Don and I have really tried to do, is when God really finally got our attention and said, we need to take care of some stuff first if we’re even going to move on. That was to walk through along with our church body in Indiana a Biblical steps of restoration. The *recognition*, first you have to own it. Just go, “Yes, I recognize….”

Then you have to *repent*. That doesn’t mean just saying, “I’m sorry.” It means changing; turn around.

Then there’s *restitution*. I think a lot of times we forget about restitution. Going to people. Saying the words that you’ve *got* to say. We had quite a list of people, separately and individually together, we went to.

Then *reconnecting*, reconnecting with a group of people who are going to hold you accountable, who are going to walk with you. Walking with someone doesn’t always mean you agree with everything they’ve done. It means you’re going to stand with them; you’re going to encourage them to just do the next right thing.

Then the fifth one is *restoration closure*. That’s the hard one for me because there does come a time when you’ve done all that to leave it at the foot of the cross. I think that’s what I was talking about. It’s, when do we pick the story up without picking the shame up? Sometimes that’s a very deliberate picture image in my mind especially when I’m tired or I’ve been on the road or those get really sticky together.

Even coming, to be real honest, even coming into this interview and chat with you today, I’ve found that just the few moments I’ve had to just stop and say, “Just pick up
the story. Don’t pick up the shame. If I don’t believe that God has forgiven me in this I don’t believe He forgives.”

It’s just, it’s as simple as that. That doesn’t mean it’s easy. Especially when I just had this really stupid thing of mine happen with one of the kids, it’s just so easy to grab that shame and just throw it all over me. Even as we’re talking now, I’m reminding myself of some of those good redemptive things, just to be real honest.

Don: You know, it’s not only us putting on the shame. I was in full-time ministry at the time and really took a time from ’92 to 2012, until my current senior pastor Marty Grubbs and I sat down. I was on the 35th floor of the Petroleum Club; had come to Oklahoma City for an entirely different vocation, but God was a part of all of that process, that redemptive 20 years really.

I likened it to putting on a letter jacket with a big “A” on it. The enemy, the enemy stood there every day saying, “Here’s your letter jacket.” As you’re getting ready to go to work, “Now let’s put our jacket on, our jacket of shame.” Because he can keep us down.

Ron: Yes.

Don: If we don’t tell our story, if we don’t share with others, that’s the only place God’s redemptive, miraculous grace can be seen. If the enemy—do the math—if the enemy keeps us from sharing and keeps us from talking and keeps us with the jacket of shame on, nobody hears currently about all of us that are broken, what God has done for all of us to redeem us.

It took Marty Grubbs to say to me in 2012, “Hey, Don, why don’t you stop putting on that jacket?”

We grade sin.

Ron: Yes.

Don: We’ll say, “Well, that’s an A+ sin. Oh well, that’s a B-. We’re going to give him a C+ on that.” Any missing of the mark is a missing of the mark. If the enemy can keep us—I’m not minimizing here—but I’m saying the light is better. The light is good. Let’s walk in the light as He is in the light.

Ron: That’s right.

Don: Then the blood of Christ can cleanse us, you see.

Sandi: Yes.
**Ron:** At the end of the day, what you’re talking about is what everybody listening has to do, day in and day out, about whatever our sin narrative is.

**Don:** Oh, every one of us, Ron.

**Ron:** Whether it was one of the A+ sins or a C- sin. [Laughter]

**Sandi:** Right, exactly.

**Don:** I mean, Major Prophets and Minor Prophets.

**Ron:** Yes. Now sometimes the shaking, the shame, shaking the consequences of our sin.

**Sandi:** —the consequences.

**Don:** Oh, but there are always consequences, Ron.

**Ron:** Exactly.

**Don:** That’s exactly right.

**Ron:** Exactly.

**Don:** Always.

**Ron:** But shaking the shame depends on whether it was an A+ or a C- sin. It does. Different things carry a different amount of—

**Don:** Sure.

**Sandi:** Yes.

**Ron:** —baggage with it.

**Don:** That’s exactly right. That’s exactly right.

**Ron:** But I am just sitting here so grateful that you’re doing what you’re doing, even as we’re talking. I just have to say, the secular world of neuroscience in the last ten years has studied shame a lot. What all the experts have come down to is exactly what you guys have just said and demonstrated for us right now.

They talk about, you tell your story, right? You guys said you have to recognize and you have to take responsibility for it. You have to verbally tell the narrative. That’s called *confession*. You have to recognize what’s there and the pain that it brings you. You
can’t run away from it. You got to own it. You got to deal with it. You got to repent. You got to change your heart. You got to make restitution. You got to reconnect to a community.

Community is so important to helping alleviate shame when others are coming along and affirming us, like your pastor saying, “Take off your coat. It’s time. You can do this. It’s all right. We’re with you. You’re worthwhile. You’re valuable.” All of that stuff is so important. Then one of the biggest pieces they talk about is just practicing putting down the shame.

Sandi: Yes.

Don: Yes.

Ron: I just watched Sandi do that. She just said, “I have to remind myself even now—”

Don: That’s right.

Ron: “—that I can leave it there and it’s not mine to pick up.” Everything God has told us is exactly what we need to do to wrestle with what we feel is leftover from the past.

Don: Ron, one thing I would add, as you were recounting that, is to have the courage to go back—get this—and face the pain that brought us into the situation in the first place. Because there’s pain. The brokenness before is what brought us into that, both of us.

Sandi: Yes.

Don: Sandi alluded to boundaries. I’m adopted from adoption and have dealt with abandonment my whole life. The brokenness prior—that you’ve got to go back—I don’t mean to be depressing to our listeners out there—that there’s always work to do—but you’ve got to go back to those, some of those things that you brought into it with. That even makes things even more crystal clear, if you will. But it takes courage to go back even before that.

Sandi: Yes, it does, indeed, and when Paul says, “Putting the past behind and looking towards what is ahead,” I really think that he’s not meaning just forget it, minimize it, bury it because we bury it alive, if we do that. But to put it in its proper place, understand it. We can give you a lot of reasons, I can give you a lot of reasons that I was not able to make healthy, good choices. They’re still not excuses.

Don: No, no.

Sandi: We have to understand, though, why, so we don’t do them again. Putting our past behind so we can move ahead.
Ron: I had a thought a minute ago as you were talking. I think regret is different than feeling like God can't love you. But sometimes those get confusing to us. Like we can have regrets over something we did, something we said in the past. It’s different when we say that mistake makes it impossible for God to love us.

Sandi: Yes. My dear friend, Sheila Walsh, she said something really powerful and it’s about guilt and shame. Says, "**Guilt** tells us we've done something wrong. **Shame** says we *are* the something wrong." I think that’s kind of what you’re saying, Ron, is there is normal conviction of the Holy Spirit of that uneasiness when we know we’ve hurt someone, that we’ve got to have a conversation and then there’s that, “I am just **unworthy** to even be in the conversation about what it means to be loved”.

Ron: Right. That’s what we put on ourselves. That’s the enemy—

Sandi: Yes.

Ron: —talking to us, where we’re now doubting God’s ability to love in spite of us. We’re now doubting God’s ability to forgive based on our past. We’re listening more to what others are saying and what the enemy is saying to us than we’re listening to what God has promised to do. It’s so easy to do that.

I think every one of us can relate to that, especially people who are trying to walk in the light, like you really are wanting to do what’s right. The minute you cross that line into, “I’m now unworthy. I’m unforgivable,” we’ve lost sight really of Christ’s sacrifice.

Sandi: Somebody asks—I get asked a lot in interviews—“What would make my life richer?” It’s always the same answer, “That I really, really believe when God’s Word says, 'I love you with an everlasting love,' that He just means that, period."

If I really woke up every day, how would I live my day out differently if I really believed He was not going to stop loving me?

Ron: Yes, yes.

Sandi: I think I’m closer to that than I used to be but I’m still not there.

Don: You know, that’s good San, and furthermore it’s A and B, is we are the plan A to give that love, to live that love, to model that love, to take that depth of unending everlasting love and pass it on to those around us. How would I live if I believed that and I knew that love was the plan A to change this planet, how would I live different? That’s a good thought.

Ron: Let me ask you another question. Let’s turn the corner a little bit. Yes, wrestling with your shame, practice putting it away, setting it down saying, “You know what? I don’t have to pick that up.”
Don: Don’t put it on.

Ron: “I don’t have to put it on. Christ has done that for me. The work is done. All I have to do is just trust in that and move forward.”

Yet, I think what God wants to do in us is full redemption, if I could use that term. Redemption is, “Okay, I’m forgiven.” Full redemption is, “I can now feel good about my life. I can now celebrate the blessings He’s given me. When there’s a grace on my life today, even though on some level I feel like I don’t deserve it, I can enjoy the moment.”

You guys been married for 25 years. There’s good stuff because of those 25 years. Kids have had blessings. There’s good stuff because of those 25 years. Talk to me about receiving that full redemption and resting in, “It’s okay, and we can even celebrate what God is doing with us.”

Sandi: We came out to Oklahoma City from Indiana about 10 years ago. Like Don was saying, it was for a whole different reason why we came out here but we ended up at our church. Don ended up on staff. Now that I’m kind of semi-retired, I’m also on staff. He’s one of the pastors, and I get to be artist in residence. I think there’s, at least in me, and I think sometimes in Don, although he’s much more of an optimist—I say I’m not a pessimist, I’m a realist. [Laughter]

I still marvel in a very, very grateful way that we are able to serve together in a church family that takes us just like we are and wants just like we are. Our scars and the healing of those seem to be much more important to them than looking closely to see if we have any or not. Does that make sense?

Ron: Yes.

Sandi: To just feel genuinely loved and accepted within these sanctuary walls—as an allegory, but obviously there’s the sanctuary involved—just continues to fill my heart with unbelievable gratitude and that we actually get to serve together is pretty great. I don’t know that that would’ve happened. I don’t know. I don’t know if it would’ve or not. I can’t say. But it has happened out here and for that we are grateful.

Ron: It does speak to the power of community and how important that is in our lives. Unfortunately one of the things shame makes us do is pull back and withdraw from the place where others could speak into our hearts and reaffirm and remind us who we really are in Christ, not who we fear that we have become.

I wrote down two words as you were talking. “Grateful” and you “marvel”. Yes, gratitude is part of receiving the gift.

Sandi: Absolutely.
**Ron:** It’s a part of walking in that understanding and resting in it. “Marvel” was a great word just because it represents, “Yes, this is how big Christ’s work in my life is.”

**Don:** You mention something and it took me to a K-LOVE song I listen to every morning as I’m getting ready, just K-LOVE is just one of my routines.

[Reciting *I Am They*]

It’s a song, popular, *I Am They*. It’s current.

[Continuing to recite *I Am They*]

This ten-year decade in Oklahoma City has really been a chance for Sandi and I, even though you’d say we were 15 years into the marriage, to go to a new level of shared ministry and partnership together.

That’s been one of the surprises. Now I’m looking back at a decade. Yes, I’m doing something totally different than what brought us out here. Yes, we’re empty nesters. You take what else did we learn in this decade but we really found, Don and Sandi in a whole new deeper way.

That’s something that just I think, Ron, for those folks listening that are in a blended relationship beginning or in the middle or—it just takes some time to sort out. You know cream, it rises to the top. There’s no other way around it or under it. You just have to move through it together. Does that make sense?

**Ron:** Oh, wow, that really does make sense. You’ve got to trust the process and the journey.

**Don:** Absolutely.

**Ron:** You know, you just shared that song, it brought a thought to my mind. One last question about all of this and I want to talk some about your kids and some of the other things that are going on now at this season of your life.

You’re both in music, right? You guys have spent a lot of time singing, sometimes performing, leading worship.

I had an experience that I will never forget. I was at a church. I was a guest speaking over the weekend. It was one of those churches, they had three services on Sunday morning and after the second worship service the same worship team had been leading. They’ve now heard my sermon twice. I’ve heard them twice.
I’m having small talk with one of the worship leaders in between worship number two and going into number three and turns out she’s in a blended family. We started talking around that a little bit. I started saying, “Yes, well that’s pretty neat.” She’s like “Well, yes,” she was backpedaling, backpedaling, backpedaling. So I started asking, “Well, tell me what that’s about.”

The story came out. She didn’t feel good about some of the decisions she made early in her life and in her first marriage and that led to a divorce. Now she’s married to husband number two. She still doesn’t quite feel like they can celebrate their us-ness.

When I pressed a little bit it came down to this matter of shame. I was struck that this woman who was so amazing to lead all of us with songs of grace into the throne room of God to sing about it, didn’t believe it herself.

I’m wondering what songs you sing or lead that you have a hard time believing.

**Sandi:** For me—and then I want to follow up with something that I did with each of my kids out of that very heart that you’re talking about the one of the worship leaders—I always gravitate to the songs that say, “I am chosen, not forsaken. I am who you say I am.” Sometimes I will sing those lyrics out of inspiration because I can readily recall how they have been true in my life.

More than often than not, I sing out of aspiration because I want them to be true in my life. The point being those are true. It’s true, whether on any particular day I feel it or not, I can proclaim that it is true. “I am chosen, not forsaken. I am who You say I am. You are for me, not against me. I am who you say I am.” Those kinds of songs, I just want to proclaim them. Again, sometimes it’s inspiration sometimes it’s aspiration but it’s still true.

It’s a very interesting, and maybe this will speak to some blended families that are listening, I so get your story and the lady sharing with you, because for a long time I wouldn’t pat Don on the arm or give him a little kiss in front of the kids because I never wanted the kids to think that us celebrating our marriage, that I’ve forgotten what it cost them.

As the kids began to get older and the kids began to get out of the house, I started hearing stories of some of my friends who were empty nesters. They really lost touch with their spouse and those things that can happen. I thought, “I don’t want that to be us, because while the blended family story is very real this is my husband.”

**Ron:** Right.

**Sandi:** If I don’t celebrate him, somebody’s going to. I wanted that. That had to be me. I think you know, there’s a lot more pitfalls when you’ve walked through them. I tried to think, “God, what is the next right thing for me to do here?”
It really just came to my heart that I wanted to speak to each and every one of my kids in person, with no time constraint and face to face, and say to them what I just said to you.

“It's a new season for us and I want to celebrate my marriage. I want my husband to feel that his wife celebrates him. But I don't ever for one second want you to think that that is because we've forgotten what it has cost you. That is always there in our minds, always. But in this new season I just want you to know and I just want your blessing on that.”

It took me about a year to get around to each of the kids, where I had that private moment. I just asked God to provide the opportunity. There were different reactions. There were, "We know that." There were, "We appreciate you saying that." There was, “Mom, if you don't move on, how do you expect us to?”

It really honestly provided, not only a necessary point in time for me in our marriage, but it also provided good conversation with the kids and it's a very hard thing to do. But that was one of those tangible steps like laying it at the foot of the cross of saying, “Okay, how do we celebrate this?”

Well, you know what, you address, you just said, “There's an elephant in the room. I'm just going to say that there is. Let's just talk about it”. Maybe that can be an encouragement to someone like the gal you mentioned and anybody else that's listening.

**Ron:** Absolutely, I think the very powerful takeaway there is, if you are maybe singing songs of grace with aspiration, you want it to be true, you start acting as if it’s true. What would I do? I would celebrate my husband. No, I need to clear the air with the kids. I need to, “Let’s go ahead and talk this through and talk about the elephant.” But that's going to help us move toward a place where we can start acting as if we are chosen, not forsaken.

**Sandi:** Yes, absolutely.

**Ron:** That's great. Took you a year. You got a lot of kids?

**Sandi:** Eight, yes, quite a few. [Laughter] Some are introverts. Some are extroverts. Yes.

**Ron:** Tell us about your kids.

**Sandi:** Go ahead, Don.
**Don:** They were ages, when we blended, began the blending, was eleven, seven, seven, seven, six, five and three.

**Ron:** Seven, seven, seven. Wow!

**Don:** Yes.

**Sandi:** I had twins.

**Don:** And I—my oldest Donnie was—so it was like triplets.

**Ron:** Wow.

**Don:** Six months in, six months into the blended life in the blender, if you will, we adopted Sam. Sam found us, so we added a brand new, four-day old baby, six months into the mix.

**Ron:** And today what are their ages?

**Don:** Thirty-five down to twenty-three.

**Ron:** Wow, man.

**Sandi:** We have four grandkids.

**Don:** Yes.

**Ron:** See that’s the grace that comes out of the walking this thing out.

**Sandi:** Yes, yes. We had a medical situation come up a couple of weeks ago and everything’s fine—

**Ron:** Good.

**Sandi:** —but it allowed the kids to say some really sweet things to us. That it was like, “I didn’t know you felt that way!”

**Ron:** Please, please share. You can brag. I’m giving you permission.

**Sandi:** Yes. Well it—Don had a little test and we had a little cancer scare and everything is fine. As we kind of tried to casually share the information with the kids, it was very sweet, their deeply emotional reaction. It’s like, “Oh, wow, we had no idea.” You sometimes feel as parents you only hear how you don’t get it right.

**Ron:** Yes, yes.
Sandi: We make that up a lot in our head. But it was just one of those opportunities that allowed the kids to really deeply express whether it was his biological kids or whether it was my kids to say, “Look, you’re the dad of this family.” That was just sweet.

Don: I’m not going to interrupt you, but I guess I am to say, we’ve never, Ron, put down our previous spouses in front of the kids. You try to do things early on and there are bullet points we could walk through as some things but I think that’s one of those reasons that we did that.

We honored as much as—not only going to the kids but we went to—I went to John. I went to my former wife, Michelle. We went—Sandi did the same thing—you in that restitution, going and talking and seeking forgiveness.

I think because we handled those things as best as we could, as well as we could, this was another marker 25 years out to say, “Yes, I’m an extra dad to her kids but it’s pretty special. Sandi’s an extra mom to my kids but, Buddy, it’s pretty special.” I felt like I always knew in my heart of hearts, Ron, that these kids would love each other.

If you ask me the proof. You say, “Don, okay what’s the proof in the pudding?” The proof in the pudding is that these kids, this bunch of [Laughter] broken mess, they love each other and they love being together. They’re a family unit. They love each other. That to me is the sign. There’s the secret sauce.

Ron: Yes.

Sandi: We’ve often said we’re going to have the job long before we have the title.

Ron: Yes.

Sandi: I think that sometimes in blended families we want that title so bad. We want, “You need to call me Mom.” “You’ve need to call me Dad.”

Don: Yes, they got to let that go.

Sandi: We asked the kids, “You call us whatever you want. We don’t care.”

Don: Yes.

Sandi: We do tell people, “You’re going to have the job /long/ before you have the title.”

Ron: That’s what we recommend here at FamilyLife Blended, that you let the kids pick something, as long as it’s respectful. We do have that little caveat.

Don: Most days. [Laughter] Most days, yes.
Sandi: Right.

Ron: Exactly. No, that’s wise because you’re respecting where they are and their boundaries. Love has to be something we choose. It can’t be something that’s forced—

Don: Exactly.

Ron: —on us. But I love the rewards that you’re talking about. That’s the other thing we talk a lot about around here is, hold on for the rewards. They don’t come immediately for most families. You get little rewards. But the bigger rewards come as a result of the longer journey.

In your case, you guys are tasting some of that at the 25-year mark. I regret that a medical situation was what forced it to the surface. But boy is it nice when you’ve got it. I can tell, the smiles on your faces as I talk to you, I know how sweet that was.

Sandi: Even when we moved to Oklahoma ten years ago, thinking, “The kids are out of the house. They’re in college. Where we move isn’t going to matter.” It’s like, “Wait, you left us!” [Laughter]

It’s like, “We didn’t even know you cared.” You know what I mean. It’s just when moments like that come, it is very sweet to be reminded.

Don: Right.

Ron: Yes, that’s great.

I’m going to go back to something, Sandi, you said towards the beginning of our conversation. You were just alluding to, sometimes first marriages don’t come to a proper ending. It occurs to me that even if it doesn’t come to a “proper ending” and you find yourself now living in a situation as a result of unwise, poor, sinful choices, you could still bring about a proper ending.

I’ve worked with people where we created a little ritual where they went back and said, “I need to finish well. Even though we are long past the way it should have been, I’m still going to implement something that should have happened back then.”

Sandi: Yes.

Ron: When you guys went to your former spouses and talked about those moments in the past and the regrets that you have had those conversations. I think that was a proper ending.

Sandi: Yes.
Ron: You were facilitating something there. You may be listening to us right now and going, “Yes, but, Ron, you don’t know what I did.” You know what, maybe it’s time for a funeral—

Sandi: Yes, right.

Ron: —a funeral of who you were.

Sandi: Yes.

Ron: —a funeral of who you were, dead to that person and now alive in Christ. Hold on. Now your trust is in Him, not in who you are or in who you were, but it’s—that person’s gone. Because that is the language of the New Testament. “The old is gone, the new is here.”

Again, at the end of the day, it comes down to, “Do I rest in that? Can I rest in that?”

You cannot change your past but you can change the story you tell about your past. The new story is one of God’s work of redemption in your life.

Let me invite you guys, if you had a closing thought, if you were sitting down with somebody and you’re looking at somebody who’s living right now what you were living 25 years ago, what would you tell them?

You’ve been listening to my conversation with Sandi Patty and Don Peslis. I’m Ron Deal and this is FamilyLife Blended.

We’ll hear Don and Sandi’s response to that question in just a minute. Real quick, do me a favor, review this podcast, maybe leave a comment. This helps others find the podcast and find help and hope. It encourages our team here at FamilyLife.

One person took the time to write this:

The Smart Stepfamily book was recommended to us by our premarital counselor and I just recently discovered this podcast. I listen on my commute to and from work. It has helped in incredible ways. The Lord is changing my heart through this podcast. I also learned about the Weekend-to-Remember and signed up. If you are in a blended family, whether it’s going good or bad, you need this podcast in your life. It’s encouraged me to want to start a stepfamily ministry at our church and I’m excited to see what the Lord does with our story. There are not many resources out there for stepfamilies, and I was beginning to feel defeated so thank you for all you do for our community. Your wisdom is priceless.

Wow, thank you so much for taking the time to share that with us.
If you like those resources, I think you’re going to love my newest book with Dr. Gary Chapman, called *Building Love Together in Blended Families*. By the way, it’s out and available wherever books are sold, and it’s the theme of our upcoming event *Blended and Blessed*. That’s a livestream event from Houston, Texas on Saturday, April 25th, 2020. That’s just a couple of weeks away. It’s not too late to register. Just go to BlendedandBlessed.com.

You know, if you’re in a similar situation as Don and Sandi and you’re struggling with the past, I want to encourage you to find a church and a pastor that will walk you through a repentance and healing process, kind of like what they went through.

Now, I wish this next statement weren’t true but it is. Not every church is equipped to help with things like this. You may have to look around a little bit. But I think finding a supportive community is very important for blended-family couples.

Now let me speak to leaders who are listening right now. We can be pretty good at church, at calling people out for sinful behavior, but we’re not so good at getting down into the trenches with them post sin and helping them find grace.

Let me encourage you to strive to be a church that walks beside people in love and calls them to recognize and admit their fault, their sin, to repent from it and then to move into restoration with God and those they’ve hurt. Then celebrate that with them as a church.

Don’s pastor essentially said, “Take off that coat of shame and get back into ministry where you belong.” That’s celebrating God’s redemptive work in people’s lives.

I’ve talked with so many people through the years, even ministers through the years, who lost their ministry because of a divorce and they thought they’d never be used by God ever again, only to discover that they could be in doing blended family ministry in their church. I must say, seeing somebody restored into ministry again, into their calling, is a real personal joy of mine.

But my point is this, churches should look for ways to restore people in due time back into ministry, whatever that looks like for them. Make sure they go through a good repentance process, but when the time comes, restore them back into ministry. Some of the most passionate and effective leaders are those who have tasted just how sweet God's grace is. Their gratitude and their humility is magnetic. We should try to steward that, steward God's work in their lives and restore them if we can.

Well, if you’d like more information about our guests, you can find it at SandiPatty.com, or just go to our show notes. You could also check it out on the *FamilyLife Blended* podcast page. That’s at FamilyLife.com/podcasts. While you’re there you might check out everything else FamilyLife has for your marriage and family. We’re an international organization providing practical, biblical help and hope for all kinds of relationship situations. Check us out, FamilyLife.com.
Please remember to subscribe to this podcast if you haven’t done so already. You can do so at Apple podcast, Stitcher or wherever you listen to your podcasts. Just search *FamilyLife Blended* with Ron Deal. Remember again to look at those show notes for additional links to more resources that can be helpful for you.

If you like what you hear, maybe you’ll do us a favor and mention this on social media or share this podcast in one way or another. Again, that’s really helpful. People trust you and you can help them find some trusted resources.

Now before we’re done, I had one more question for Don and Sandi.

If you were sitting down with somebody and you’re looking at somebody who’s living right now what you were living 25 years ago, what would you tell them?

**Sandi:** I would tell them maybe two things. I would say, “Take care and nurture your spouse relationship.” Then I think the second thing is I would say, “And just be patient with the process.” I could add a lot more words to that but that’s pretty much it. What would you say, Babe?

**Don:** I think it’s wise to find the right time, in the right time and when it makes sense, to go and make as many things right as you can. To be honest, I think I would say don’t stay away from the church. The enemy—we believe those voices and we stay away from the church and the shame and the guilt. I think the church, she’s better at walking along with us now 25 years in the—we’re much better at being honest that we’re all kind of broken. [Laughter]

**Ron:** Yes.

**Don:** And there’s room at the table for the broken so come along and don’t be afraid to journey in the church. That’s another lie of the enemy is, “Get your life worked out, then come on into church.” No you’ve got to kind of work it out together. There are folks like us that have made some pretty big doozy mistakes in front of you that you can learn from us and learn from our mistakes but I think that, I think the Holy Spirit and there’s good counselors.

There’s good wisdom in the church today to say, “Yes, you’re welcome. You’re welcome, come in here and let’s walk with you.” I think that’s one thing I would say for sure to add to that is, “Don’t stay away, come and walk within the doors of the church. She’s still the best option for us.”

**Ron:** Let me just say, I’m encouraged by your story and the way you guys have been patient with your process and the way you have walked it out in the context of the church and community and other believers and you submitted yourself to a process and full redemption is yours.
Next time we’re going to hear from Ryan Guinee and David Bowden about their different experiences growing up in their blended families.

David: I wasn’t ignoring my dad because I didn’t want him in my life. I wasn’t hating my dad because I hated him. I wasn’t trying to coach my dad because I wanted to be his coach, right? All of these are different ploys to try to fix something that I wanted fixed. It all pointed to a deeper root issue which was I just wanted my dad back in the house and I wanted my mom to stop crying.

Ron: That's Ryan Guinee and David Bowden, 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, Justin Adams. Theme music provided by Braden Deal.

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©Song: Who You Say I Am
Artist:  Hillsong Worship
Album: There is More (p) 2018 Hillsong Music Australia & Capitol Christian Music Group

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