

FamilyLife Blended®

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Episode 28: Growing Up in a Blender

Guests: David Bowden and Ryan Guinee

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Ron: Hey, this is Ron Deal. Just real quick before we jump into the podcast, I wanted to let you know that some of the things you're going to hear regarding *Blended and Blessed*® may be a little bit outdated.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 Corona Virus 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 that 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.

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's going to offer them some hope and some energy for their family. This could very well be it.

Blended and Blessed, Saturday, April 25th. 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. Be sure to follow us on Facebook at FamilyLife Blended or on Instagram at FamilyLife Blended.

Now, on with the podcast.

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. 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: 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.

If you're wondering how the transitions that you and your children have faced are impacting your kids, stay with us today. If you have a strained or estranged relationship with a parent or a child and you're hoping that someday that's going to change, stay with us.

On this edition of *FamilyLife Blended*, we're jumping into the shoes of and listening to now-adult stepchildren to hear their experience so you can better understand your child or your stepchild.

We do this from time to time by the way. You can listen to other podcasts like episode two, it's called "Life in a Blender". If you like this one go back and listen to that one. They're very insightful.

My guests are Ryan Guinee and David Bowden. David is a spoken-word poet, an author and a preacher from Oklahoma City. He's the author of *When God Isn't There* and *Rewire Your Heart*. David is the founder of Spoken Gospel, a nonprofit dedicated to creating videos that help people encounter the Gospel in every corner of Scripture.

He and his wife, Megan, live with their son Ezra in Oklahoma City. You can learn more about his ministry at SpokenGospel.com.

Ryan Guinee lives here in Little Rock and works on the content team here at FamilyLife. He's married to Bethany and has two children under the age of five.

Now both of my guests came from homes where their parents divorced and one or both of their parents married again. Since it's my goal to help you understand the inner experience of children who find themselves in blended-family situations, I started our conversation by asking David what life was like for him before his parents divorced.

Guys, you both came from homes where your parents divorced and one or both of your parents then married again. We are not here to bash or blame. We *are* here to help our listeners understand the inner experience of children who find themselves living in a blended family.

With that, I'm wondering—let's back up a little bit—David, let me start with you. Tell me what life was like for you before your parents split?

David: My parents ended up splitting when I was in eighth grade. Life before that is kind of what it is for every younger kid in elementary school and middle school. You are oblivious to most things, especially the dynamics of your parents, unless it's just very demonstrative and a harmful environment, then you can't help but notice it. But that's definitely not the environment I grew up in. It was way more of a hidden secret that there was something wrong.

So whenever my dad sat us down and told us he'd be leaving my mom, it was a complete shock to me. My older sister, she had seen the cracks form since before I was born. But for me, I was completely blindsided. Life for me was like, "Oh yeah, Dad's out of the house a lot." That was whenever he was working at the church. He would just inundated himself with work because he didn't want to deal with problems at home and the stuff he shared with me. He's been really honest about that kind of stuff.

Mom was the caretaker. She was the one who was always around and was always there for us. That was what I thought growing up in a family looked like, was Dad works a lot and you spend most of your time with Mom. I didn't realize how much—how many tell-tale signs I should've been seeing there. But obviously as a pre eighth grader, I wasn't equipped to see those things.

Ron: You used the word “oblivious.” You were blissfully ignorant—

David: Yes, definitely.

Ron: —to what was going on? That then, I would think, just deepened the sudden impact of this announcement that you didn't see coming.

David: Yes, it completely caught me off guard. I had no clue what was going on. I was taken aback when all of this came out.

Ron: Must have been shocking. What do you do with that shock as an eighth grader? Where does that go?

David: Yes, for me it took me two places. The first place I went was the Bible because my Dad was a youth pastor. We grew up Baptist and we grew up like, we believe the Word of God and we do as it says. As soon as my dad told me that he was going to be getting a divorce, I ran to my room and opened my Bible, flipped to the back to the index and looked under “D” for “divorce” and read all of the verses on divorce.

It was like, “God abhors divorce,” “I do not permit a man to get a divorce,” all of these things I was reading and I was like, “Oh whew, my dad can't get a divorce now because God said so.”

I ran out of my room, took my Bible to my dad and I was like, “Dad, look you can't get a divorce because God says so.” I remember him saying, “Well, I believe that it is God's will that I *do* get a divorce.”

That kind of fractured my faith, in a sense, because it was my earthly father figure and my heavenly Father figure disagreeing on what truth was.

Ron: How confusing was that?

David: Oh, it was super confusing, crazy confusing. Not only was my family fracturing, but my faith was fracturing. That led me into really leaning into friends for the first time to try to fill some of those gaps that family and faith used to fill. I ran to friends and hung out with a very different crowd for about a year and a half or so.

Ron: So the foundations of your life: your family, your parent's marriage, your faith, all of that started crumbling?

David: Yes, it really did. As an eighth grader you're not really equipped to know what to do in that situation. You don't know how to handle trauma and negotiate complex relationships and be a go-between between two adults who have a long history of a broken relationship.

Ron: By the way, really creative looking up divorce in the back of the Bible and reading the Scriptures and going to your dad with all of that. That was awesome. It also tells me your heart was desperate to prevent this from happening.

David: Definitely.

Ron: I'm wondering how else you tried to prevent it.

David: Yes, we tried a lot of different things to prevent it. I tried talking to my dad and trying to convince him to come home. Trying to tell him how much Mom missed him. I tried the empathetic card. I remember trying the hate card. Just being like, "Dad, I don't respect you anymore. If you don't fix this, this relationship's over."

I tried the ignore card. Where it was like, "Well, I just don't hang out with you. I won't talk to you." Anything to be like, "If you want a relationship with me, you need to have a relationship with Mom," kind of thing. None of them worked. It took years and years and years to heal because of that.

Ron: Yes, I bet it did. We're going to get to the healing part because I know there has been a tremendous story in your life. I want our listener to hang on for that. I've just got to keep diving—if you don't mind—because you're talking about, here's all these things you tried to do to regain some sense of control over your life: the hate card, the empathy card, the ignore card, the coaching your father card.

Now wait a minute, you're an eighth grader. It's not the eighth grader's job to parent the parents but that's what happens when kids feel that crumbling of their life and are desperate to find some—if there's a parent or a stepparent who's listening to this conversation right now and they're going, "Oh, I've seen that ignore card. I've seen that hate card." What do they need to know as they try to deal with that coming from a kid who's just really confused?

David: I think the one thing you would need to know is none of those cards are the actual feeling that your kid is feeling. Like, 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, right? 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. Those are the things that I wanted. I wanted healing where there was brokenness, especially me being the fixer and the consummate guy who loves conflict. I was willing to run into this broken relationship and try to fix it.

But none of those things were meant to convey how I actually felt toward my dad. But looking back on them, I thought they were. I thought, “Boy, I hate him.” I thought, “I just don’t want to talk to him.” Looking back at it, I’m like, no, I just wanted my dad back and these were tools that I was trying to use to achieve that goal.

Ron: If I could summarize—which this is dangerous because it’s life and life is not easily summarized—but if I could summarize what I’m hearing you say, *before* Dad announced that he was leaving your mom, you were blissfully ignorant, happy, life was okay. You didn’t really realize that there were some cracks in the foundation. Your sister did but you didn’t see that.

Then, all of a sudden everything is crumbling. You don’t know what to hold on to. Your faith is crumbling. Your family’s crumbling. Your relationships are crumbling. Your relationship with your father has changed dramatically. Now you’re his coach rather than being his child. Your mom is crying and you’re desperately trying to care for her by fixing *them* to make things better for everybody, and you’re kind of lost, looking to friends now for somebody to make sense of your life.

David: That’s a good summary. Yes.

Ron: We’ll come back to pick up that story in a little bit.

Ryan, let me turn to you. First of all, I’m curious, I know children’s experiences are different in families. Even though there was a divorce story for your parents. It doesn’t mean your experience was anything like David’s. But I’m curious, was there anything in there you could relate to and what’s different for you?

Ryan: Playing the cards.

Ron: Playing the cards?

Ryan: Yes, I did that with both my parents. Caught often and I had more time as a younger kid, more emotional immaturity—if you will—to play all of them. I can definitely relate to that, David.

Ron: Yes. Wow. Let’s step back. How did it start? What was life like for you before the split?

Ryan: Yes, life before my parents' divorce was really good. It was amicable, like you shared David. I was younger when my parents divorced. I was seven so from what I can remember, things were good. Like me and my dad would go on scouting trips and we would have dinner together. We would ride around in the car together. We would go to church together. There's a strong sense of togetherness. If I had to summarize it in one word what it was like before and all that went away after.

Ron: Yes. Did it go away rapidly? Was it just this moment or change or was it a slow drift?

Ryan: Being as young as I was, all I can really remember now are really harsh memories or really good ones. It's kind of hard to know what the day-to-day was. But there was a significant moment where I think the feeling of being a family was definitely severed.

I was around six or seven. I had a younger sister at the time. She was two. I was about six or seven. In this moment, my dad had already moved out of the house. My mom was just angry at him. I mean furious most of the times anytime he came around. I just didn't understand.

Very similar to you David, I just wanted my dad to be back home. I can really vividly remember this moment—it was an evening and me and my sister are sitting on the staircase. We had a staircase that faced the front door of the home. We had a window, kind of an arched window, above the door where I could see him standing there. He was just banging on the door. Banging, "Please let me in! Please let me in!"

He wanted to see us and my mom wouldn't let him. I found out later in life, she had a restraining order on him. I found out some of the reasons why they separated. I can, looking back, empathize and understand why she did what she did and how it all went down.

Ron: But at the time, you only had the eyes of a six or seven year old.

Ryan: Yes.

Ron: And the understanding of a little kid so it didn't make sense. I'm sure.

Ryan: No, not at all.

Ron: Do you mind if I ask where you put that blame for that moment? Was that on Mom? Was that on Dad?

Ryan: Oh yes, I blamed my mom almost my entire life for the divorce. She was the instigator. She was the one who filed. I didn't understand what was going on in the dynamics of their relationship that would've led to that.

My dad, before I was born—I'm the firstborn child—but before I was born, he had really bad alcoholism. When I was born he quit. I don't know where all of his emotional output went. Drinking was that. He had temper issues. One thing led to another and he would be verbally abusive, emotionally abusive and, at times, physically abusive with my mom.

Finding that out later in life, it changed a lot. At the time when I found out, it's not like all of a sudden I could blame my dad because I knew my dad as hero, friend, victim of a divorce. To find that out later in life and try to compare notes of what my mom said and what I've seen growing up, it was difficult.

Ron: You keep saying you found that out later in life, when later in life? What I'm wondering about here is how old were you? Again that put you in a position of now having to deal with, adjust to, think about, grieve—if I could use that word—everything that happened when you were six or seven. How old were you when that began to come out?

Ryan: It's been pretty recent actually. I would say within the last two, three years.

Ron: Okay, you're a grown man now. You've got a wife. You've got two kids of your own.

Ryan: Yes.

Ron: Here you are again in your adulthood having to re-grieve, yes?

Ryan: Yes.

Ron: That's one of the things we know about kids who have lived through traumatic family experiences, whether the death of a parent or divorce, is that grief is developmental. It walks with us through our life.

Grief is a journey not a destination, you've heard me say that on this podcast before. Here's a good example of that. With adult understanding and adult eyes you still have to look back. It's a strange combination of, it's the seven year old in you and the adult in you who have to deal with information you now have about something that happened back then. "How do I make sense of this?" "How do I make space for this in my heart?" "What are the implications then for my life and relationships with my parents?"

Give me an example of how finding out now as an adult stuff that happened then, how does that impact your relationship with your mom, with your dad or other family members?

Ryan: I think you put something in a way that is very similar to what I've been reading in a book. I've been reading this book, *Changes That Heal*. The way that Dr. Cloud puts it

is, there's a part of us that, if there's trauma or a bad experience, part of us gets buried in time.

I love the way that you put, there's this seven year old and then now this twenty-eight year old dealing with the same facts at the same time. I have all the hurt and angst and frustration of that seven year old but all the reason and rationale and empathy of who I am today.

The grieving process that you talk about, that it's developmental. It happens over time. I'm entering into this now with, I think, greater emotional maturity than I've ever had before. It's almost like, I get to grieve the way that I want to grieve now.

Ron: Good.

Ryan: I couldn't really do that growing up. I pressed into friendships that I shouldn't have pressed into. When I got into college, I pressed into a lifestyle that wasn't even my own. I abandoned my faith. I took up habits that I hated that my mom and my dad took up. That was me grieving as an emotionally immature adolescent.

Now pressing into this and asking questions and getting all the facts and just being able to respond knowing what I know now and feeling what I feel now has been—it might just be that I'm a control freak, right? [Laughter] It might just be like, "Okay, I need to get my bearings on all these feelings." But it feels healthier than it's ever felt before."

Ron: That's great. I think that's a wonderful illustration of God's redemptive work in your heart. His grace for you is that you do get as, an adult, to look back and deal with it as an adult. You do get to tell that child in you things it didn't know and where to put the different emotions and experiences that you had at that point in your life.

Ryan: Yes. The component of faith and my relationship with God is especially interesting. I can remember a night where me and Bethany were—my wife Bethany—we were talking about all of this in my past and how I'm dealing with it now.

Even that illustration of me, the 28 year old and then the seven year old dealing with each other's experiences and viewing them in different ways, I never really looked at it as God can enter into that equation.

I had this moment, and it brought me to tears, I had this moment where Bethany just asked me, "Is God timeless?" If that's true, He can change a lot of your perspectives and feelings about what happened. Thinking about things in that way is really helping me grow.

Ron: That's really great. I think one of the things that all of us have to do in spite of whatever our childhood was, intact family, divorced family, whatever the case may be,

part of growing up and maturing in Christ is taking ownership for who we are and what we've done and what we've experienced in our lives.

You're on that same journey, just as I am. Trying to figure out who I'm called to be in Christ and what do I do with those pieces of me that are leftover *residue*—I like to call it—residue on my heart from the past. What do I do with that? Where do I put it? How do I respond to that *now* as a disciple of Jesus; not be a victim of those experiences anymore but to be responsible for who I am.

I think every parent listening right now, we've all got residue on our heart. We're talking about, perhaps, the residue on your children's heart because of what they have experienced in your family context. You have to deal with *your* residue and then be sensitive to and aware of and understanding of what going on with your children's residue.

I think when you move toward them with greater understanding of yourself then they can see that genuineness and honesty. I think it creates a safer environment for them to process who they are at this season of their life. It invites them to grow as you are growing.

David, let me shift back to you a little bit. Let's deal with the next season of your family's experience and what that narrative was for you. Once the divorce has taken place, what happen—single parent years—one parent marries again? What's the story there?

David: Yes, my dad moved out while the divorce was being litigated and moved into a classic single-guy apartment and bought an Xbox so I had a reason to go over and hang out with him. [Laughter] He did that for a season.

The divorce was finalized within a year, I think. Through that whole time, I just remember my sister was older—I think it was hitting her in a different place. She was kind of checked out and angry. I was—I remember my mom crying herself to sleep while I was there, trying to tell her everything was okay.

Once the divorce was finalized, that's when all the cards started to be played. That's whenever I would go through long seasons of ignoring my dad or guilt-tripping my dad.

To my dad's credit, he was really good at going out of his way to be there for me in these very limited spaces that I allowed him to be. Once a week, he figured out that if he came and picked me up from high school for lunch and took me out and let me bring a couple friends, I would be cool with that because it got me off campus and my friends liked to go out to eat.

That was his way of having at least 40 minutes with his son every week, was he'd pick me up from school. To his credit, he was faithful to do that. I'm sure it really disrupted his work schedule. I'm sure that wasn't easy but he did that.

My mom, she did some really interesting things through this time. She would take a little electric candle and put it in the window sill at the front of our house. From the street you would see this little small light on.

She let my dad know that that candle meant that he was welcome. That as long as the light was on, she wanted him back. She wanted to restore the marriage because she fought the divorce tooth and nail.

We come to find out much later, just a few years ago, my dad told me, “Man, I hated that candle.” [Laughter] He was like, “I feel like it really made you guys feel like I was the enemy, that I was the one who was willfully staying out of the house. I feel like it really pitted me and your mom against the each other.”

It definitely did. I don’t know if I’m mad at the candle. I think it was brilliant. I still kind of like it but my dad didn’t like it.

Ron: Yes, because your heart was similar to your mom’s heart for restoration—

David: Yes.

Ron: —and reconciliation of the family, of course it was.

David: Yes.

Ron: By the way, I’ve just got to grab that for a second. Because what she did with great intentionality, to try to restore the marriage, inadvertently became antagonistic to her relationship with her husband and put you in the middle.

David: Yes, inadvertently, it really did become antagonistic. But I have a hard time believing that she was so innocent in that knowing that it wouldn’t drive him crazy. It seems like it would be pretty obvious that would drive him crazy. But it is interesting the things that we do to try to bring restoration that, whenever someone does not want that, how much it can create animosity in them.

Ron: Yes, she’s trying to create reconciliation. That’s what you want and that’s what all children want, by the way, so it puts you in the middle of Dad’s agenda versus Mom’s agenda. I’m wondering, besides that, were there other times that you felt like you were in the middle?

David: Yes, I think both my parents did a really, really good job, almost to a fault, of not putting us kids in the middle. They never gave us go-between messages like, “Tell your dad....” or, “Make sure your mom knows....” or anything like that. They did a really good job of keeping us out of the middle. The problem is, that is where we exist.

Ron: Yes.

David: We cannot exist anywhere else but the middle. It was almost the opposite effect happened. Instead of it being a healthy “We don’t want to put you guys in the middle of this”, it became this unspoken thing where it was like we’re in the middle and no one is owning the fact that we’re in the middle or equipping us with how to be in the middle because you just want to act like we’re not in the middle.

It ended up being this strange thing where neither parent really talked about the other one because they didn’t want us to feel awkward about relaying messages or how one parent’s feeling about the other. It just became years and years and years of *buried* conversation that never took place. It just left us going, “I don’t know how to be in the middle even though this is where I have inescapably found myself.”

Ron: Do you wish somebody would have made it overt and said something? “Hey look, David, I know you’re stuck in the middle. Let’s talk about that.”

David: Yes, that would have been very helpful. I think that, as Ryan was sharing in his story, that’s what I just can’t help but latch onto, as well, because over the last four years or so the whole story has been coming out of how the divorce happened and learning the ugly truths behind those moments, like your dad pounding on the door and what was really going on.

It’s kind of the opposite of what happened is it confirmed all my biases and it flipped his on his head. I grew up thinking it was all my dad’s fault. Then the more I learned the story, it was. It was kind of the opposite with Ryan.

I bring that up to say, whether it’s talking about being in the middle or why the divorce is happening or what’s going on, at least in my experience, I’ve just not been able to heal or move past this until we start naming a spade a spade and *knowing* what was going on. Knowing the history and the past of what happened behind the scenes that I didn’t see growing up has helped me be able to see my dad clearly.

I—the way I pictured it to my dad the night he finally walked me through the whole story—I was like, “Dad, there are like 15 different panes of glass between us and they have varying opacities. Some I can see you pretty clearly through but some are like 90 percent opaque. It’s like frosted glass. You stack all of those up and I have a very dim silhouetted picture of who you are. Therefore it’s really hard to have a relationship with you.”

I was like, “Over the years you’ve busted a few of those glasses and I’ve gotten to see more and more clearly and our relationship has gotten closer.” I was like, “I really—there’s this one 90 percent opaque glass that I need you to shatter for me so we can move to the next level in our relationship.” I was like, “You’ve got to tell me the story

behind the divorce and I need all the details that you can give me.” He did and, man, it brought us closer.

For me, I don’t know if this is right for every kid, for every parent, but for me information was freeing. Knowing the story and naming things and being open has really helped propel, not only me and my dad’s relationship, but even the blended family at large, which is fractious to the uttermost, has even started to put some of those pieces together.

Ron: Now, that’s really interesting. Let me connect a number of dots for our listener. There’s so much embedded in that. There’s the need for confirmation of your experience as a child.

I think that’s one of the things I want our listener to catch. Kids need confirmation and they need someone to validate what their experience was. If they didn’t make sense of it well, they didn’t put all the pieces together right, but they need somebody to focus on them.

Inevitably what happens in divorce is—and I hate to even say this because I know it’s not 100 percent of the time, but I just want to ask our listener to maybe ask if it happened in your case—divorce refocuses parent’s attention away from their children and onto themselves. It’s kind of like you go into navel gazing rather than being parental.

It’s just so easy to be caught up in the trauma of your marriage coming to an end and all that’s involved with that. Now you’ve got to provide and now you’ve got to deal with attorneys and legal issues and now you—and you stop focusing on your kid. It’s your story versus the other adult’s story. Nobody’s listening to the kid’s experience.

At some point they need somebody to confirm, validate, listen and say, “Yes, that’s what you went through and I hear you.” I don’t care how old you are—the two of you being good examples of as adults—you still get benefit out of that conversation taking place. I think that’s really significant.

Ryan, you’ve already talked about how that happened for you. I’m wondering—let’s just jump into your experience post-divorce: adjustments, blended families. What happened there?

Ryan: Sure. For a long time both my parents dated. That’s an interesting dynamic.

Ron: Other people or each other?

Ryan: Other people.

Ron: Okay, other people just to be clear.

Ryan: They're not dating each other. That would be weird. [Laughter]

For a long time my parents dated other people. It took my dad longer to start dating and my mom pretty much started dating immediately. That was kind of bizarre but it fit in what my narrative that I had been told. My mom was the instigator of the divorce. She wanted to be out, probably felt the freedom to start dating again sooner.

Ron: That seemed to be evidence that the story was right. Mom was the instigator.

Ryan: Yes.

Ron: How did you feel about the guys she dated?

Ryan: Hated them all.

Ron: Yes.

Ryan: They're all bad.

Ron: You could just see that one coming, right?

Ryan: Of course.

Ron: Mom's to blame for the family break up. Now Mom's moving on and there's no way any guy she brings in can be good or decent.

Ryan: Right, no one ever had a chance.

Ron: Yes. [Laughter]

Ryan: But at the time, I couldn't help but disagree with all of it anyway. Her lifestyle choices, I wouldn't call them admirable. She had a drinking habit as well. What that would lead to is me as a 10-year-old at times, I'd be at home watching my sister and she'd be out and that's where she would meet these guys. All of them were just lazy, kind of sleazy. I didn't approve of any of them.

Ron: You couldn't move toward them. You couldn't trust them.

Ryan: No, not at all.

Ron: How did that affect your relationship with your mom?

Ryan: It was alienating, I think, especially as a male.

Ron: Yes, you're moving away from her.

Ryan: Yes. It was weird. I tended to respond in a very vacillating way. I would just—I would exert all of my frustration and anger at her. I would be very disobedient. I did terrible in school. I hung around people who were not a good influence.

I did that pretty much all late elementary, middle school, and junior high. When I got to high school, I just sort of got tired. She'd stopped drinking. We're talking like a decade of time across. In high school I wanted to be my own person. I took off the foot on the gas on being a jerk to my mom. She was still dating. She'd been, by the time I got to high school, she'd been married three times—married and divorced three times.

Ron: Dating, married, divorced. Dating, married, divorced.

Ryan: All over the map.

Ron: Revolving door?

Ryan: Yes, I was just fatigued at that point.

Ron: I would think so.

Ryan: It didn't really matter. I think what I ended up realizing was like, "Okay, I can be mad. I can be angry. I can be sad. I can be whatever I want to feel and it's not going to change who she dates, who she marries."

Ron: You were fatigued and defeated. All of your strategies to try to fix Mom weren't working.

Ryan: Right.

Ron: By the way, for the listener, I wanted you to see, this is not what Ryan was *wanting* to do. This is not him being a bad kid. This is him *desperately* trying to restore some stability in his world and his mom's life. Ironically, he's got to make poor choices for himself to try to help Mom get better. That's one of those functions where things get upside down when parents stop being parents.

Ryan: Good point.

Ron: Yes. That left you in a hard place. I'm curious about your dad. What was your relationship like with him?

Ryan: Because I was with my mom, she had custody full time. I would get visitation rights or my dad would get visitation rights for me and my sister. We would see him every other week, sometimes on the weekends. Never for an extended period of time.

Summers, holidays and things like that we would occasionally be there for three days, four days.

My mom was kind of clingy with us nonetheless. That bothered me. Anytime we got to spend time with our dad it was great. He had a pool. [Laughter] He was a lot cooler.

Ron: David's dad had an Xbox. Your dad had a pool.

Ryan: Yes, yes.

Ron: That stuff does work on kids, right? [Laughter]

Ryan: Yes, it does. No matter how shallow it is.

David: I saw through it but I accepted it. I think that, Ryan, did you do the same thing? "I know what you're doing here but I'm okay with it."

Ryan: Yes, I was totally okay with it. I think some of those things were his amenities and we got to enjoy them. The Xbox is very explicitly, "I'm trying to connect with my kid." My dad had a surround-sound system at his house. Generally speaking he did better in life, I think. He had a better job, more amenities, bigger house, all the snacks we could ever dream for but we were only there every now and then.

Ron: If you go above the surface there's toys at Dad's house. If you go below the surface, there's, Dad's a victim.

Ryan: Yes.

Ron: That just even adds even more movement toward him I would think. Mom's to blame. Mom's clingy. I don't like that. I don't want her getting her cake and eating it too. There's that little rebellious place in your heart so, "I'm moving towards Dad."

Ryan: Yes.

Ron: I can imagine their experience. They may have made sense of it totally different than all of that. But that's what was stirring inside of you. Did you feel safe and comfortable with your dad or was it just pretty on the outside?

Ryan: For the most part, I felt safe and comfortable. Certainly as I got older and we would butt heads over different things, I began to see that anger. That became more real to me. It created pause and I was like, "Why is he acting that way? What I did wasn't that bad to deserve being chewed out for two hours. Where's that coming from?" That began to unravel a little bit of the narrative that I'd been putting together.

Ron: Your dad married again.

Ryan: Yes, he married in 2004. That would've been right around the time that I was starting high school. He dated my stepmother for a few years before they got married. I'd grown up with my stepmom, pretty much from young adolescence to today. They're still together.

Ron: Let me ask both of you, I know our listeners are asking. "Wow, step parenting! All right, there it is. How did you guys respond to the stepparent walking into your world?"

David: Mine was probably a little different than most—maybe definitely different than Ryan's because you got to see them date and meet and courtship and then get married. For us it was like this assumed, "I'm pretty sure this is the woman who is responsible for the divorce behind the scenes." Because they got married quick and never dated. She was definitely more of an enemy from an early age. I was like, "You ruined my family."

Ron: Yes, right.

David: So I wanted nothing to do with my stepmom for a loooong time. That was my reaction right away, was I just didn't want anything to do with her. She—it was all her fault kind of thing.

Ron: Ryan?

Ryan: Because my parents were dating and remarrying and we saw the whole process, it was a lot more like when-you-date-the-parent, you-date-the-kids kind of situation. We're all trying this out. It never really feels like though, in those situations as a kid, like I can actually influence what's going to happen here. This is all about compatibility. Well, my kids are only going to be here like every other week. Let's just make sure there's no major red flags.

My stepmom, pretty early on we had a good relationship. She had three children. Her eldest at the time was in college so we never really saw much of her. Then she had two other boys. One was close in age to me. The other was close in age to my sister.

With the two younger ones, we connected immediately. Whenever my dad and my stepmom started dating they would come over and we would spend time together. Anytime where we were all together had really strong bonding, really positive emotional feelings in the midst of that—all the sense of together. It was like "Oh, wait. There's the possibility for an intact family here." It was extremely attractive.

Of course, their upbringing and their cultures and traditions were completely different from me and my sister's. They grew up with a very abusive father. My stepmom left that situation. They got out of there. But it definitely impacted them and how they responded to the whole thing. They acted out a lot more than me and my sister did, getting into drugs and drinking and all kinds of stuff from a very young age. I didn't do that.

We'd be spending time together around the times we were all together. For the most part, we would just play board games and video games and watch movies and things like that. But then in the late evenings, we'd get to talking about, "What is life like for you whenever you're with your dad?" They would tell me and it was just bad.

I felt terrible for them. Being here in Little Rock, I got to go to pretty good schools. They went to public schools and had to deal with seeing kids get beat up and seeing a lot of drugs passed back and forth.

Ron: They just had a different life experience than you had.

Ryan: Very different.

Ron: You liked each other. You were drawn to them. But then there was some angst around who they were. I imagine how that rippled into the family.

Ryan: Yes, all of the differences didn't really come to a head until all her kids actually moved to Little Rock. We really tried the, "We're all going to live together in the house." They lived there with my dad and stepmom full time. Then we would go and visit and it's like they would try to live the same way that they lived at their old house with their dad, now with my stepmom and my dad. That just didn't fly.

Ron: Yes.

Ryan: Especially with my dad. He's not diagnosed but very compulsive about how the house is structured.

Ron: Okay.

Ryan: He's very clean and ordered dude.

Ron: They didn't play by those rules.

Ryan: They didn't play by those rules at all obviously. Their loyalties were my stepmom. She's sort of like, "It's fine. You need to chill." They'd get into all kinds of arguments about how to actually run the house.

Ron: That's confusing for you as a kid because your primary loyalty is to your dad. You want to see him feeling good about life. Then you see him all tied up in knots with his marriage a little bit conflict over this and with his stepkids. Even though you're friends with your step siblings you're still kind of caught in the middle. Your loyalty's to Dad. "I want him to be happy." Yes?

Ryan: Yes, I'd say that's pretty accurate. I still felt this compassion though for my stepbrothers.

Ron: They've been through a lot.

Ryan: They have really been through a lot. Coming into a completely different environment where safety could be expected; order could be expected. I don't know if they just didn't know how to deal with it. I haven't processed this with them much either. But it just—it didn't work.

Ron: As I am listening to you guys and reflecting on your stories, I'm reminded of the Hebrew word in the Bible for *life* carries the idea of movement. We've talked about this before on this podcast. It carries the idea of movement. When you're living you get going. You're not in just one spot. You do things. But it also carries the idea of movement toward other people in relationships. When I move toward you emotionally, literally I'm giving life to you and to our us-ness, whatever that relationship is.

The Hebrew word for *death* carries the idea of going away, of stepping away, of withdrawing. Fundamentally that's what death is, they're going away. In relationships when we withdraw from somebody, when we fracture something, it's bringing a little death to that relationship.

As I've listened to your stories, I hear this constant going away and coming to, going away and coming to. Kids, as you were at that age, trying to make sense of all of the going away and coming to. When the divorce happened, there was a little death. They were going away from one another. Who's to blame for that? What do I do with that? Now they're going away from me. What did I do with that?

Then the single parent years, I'm trying to move toward my parents and yet, I have this angst toward some; blame, hurt towards some; pain in there. They're moving on with their lives and doing other things and they seem to have less of themselves to give to me. Why aren't they moving toward me? Where'd that go? What's that mean?

Now they're bringing new people into my life and they're expecting me to move toward stepmom or stepparent, and I'm not sure I want to. To what degree do I do that? But then it feels like I'm moving away from my parent if I'm not fulfilling their expectation that I move towards the step parent.

You're constantly trying to deal with these mechanisms in your world, make sense of it, respond to it. Having said all that, looking back, what observations would you make about yourself and maybe for parents who are trying to make sense of all this for their kid?

Ryan: I feel like that explanation, that illustration you just gave right there, explains so much of the reason why my bonding to others is just weird.

Ron: As an adult, your bonding—

Ryan: As an adult, my bonding right now is just kind of weird.

Ron: What do you mean by that?

Ryan: When we were at the summit, I had this mic drop moment where I was talking about getting married to my wife. I had this feeling as I was standing at the altar and she was coming down that she just didn't realize I had this huge label on my forehead that said "some assembly required".

That's kind of how I feel with bonding. Like every relationship I get to, it's just like, "I'm just like I'm a lot of person to understand, like there's more going on under the surface than you probably want to know, that I may even realize." Being able to explain the ebb and flow of life, relationships coming in, relationships going out. It really well summarizes my feelings with relating with others.

Ron: How do I trust them?

Ryan: Yes, how can I establish a bond here? Is it worth it to establish a bond here?

Ron: Yes, are you going to stay?

Ryan: Yes, yes, even when I first met my wife, I was just meeting her as a friend. I never thought I'd see her again. I blew her off. Now we're married. That's a funny story for us but that's also the way I bond.

Ron: Yes, life taught you that.

Ryan: Yes.

Ron: I mean it did. The circumstances of your childhood taught you, "People are not forever. Relationships come and go. You can move towards somebody and then be desperately hurt by that. What's predictable? What's not predictable? Is this about me? Is this about you? How do I know that I'm good enough?" I mean, there's a thousand questions I would think wrapped up in that for you.

Ryan: Yes.

Ron: David?

David: Yes, I think because I experienced a lot less of the revolving door and much more of a fracture. Then that fracture stuck. It was my dad left and married my stepmom. Then my mom dated a little bit but never really super seriously and just

remained single. She valued her singleness and kind of made it as like a covenant to the Lord kind of thing.

I don't have the trust issue, bonding issue. For me, I think being in the middle and being the one who somehow learned how to mature in that conflict and be the go-between that no one would name as the go-between until now. It's the last couple of years, I've been the arbiter of healing in our family. I think what that did for me is it did the exact opposite. There's not much under the surface. I'm just like, "It's all on my sleeve. Let's talk about it. Let's go for it."

Ron: You know we've got to dive into that. I promised the listener we were going to get to the reconciliation part of your story. I want to lead with this: you started giving life to your relationship with your dad by moving toward him and by insisting that you get more information and hear the story. Yes?

David: Yes, that's right.

Ron: Tell us about it.

David: Yes, it's such a crazy story. Still it's so fresh. You have to have a little bit of background. My mom and dad never were in the same place after the divorce. They didn't talk, text. If I was in a show—I did musical theater all throughout high school and college—if I did a show, one would come to the matinee and one would come to the evening. They would *never* be in the same place.

As my wife and I got closer and closer to having a kid, we were like, "Hey guys, there's one delivery room." [Laughter] "There's one waiting room at the hospital. You guys are going to have to learn how to be around each other without it being painfully awkward to be around."

Ron: Okay, quick pause. You had to deal with *their* inability to be in the same room for a really long time.

David: A *very* long time.

Ron: It's a constant accommodation on your part. It's frustrating.

David: Yes.

Ron: It's challenging to life. Then you finally got to a place where you were like, "Hey, I'm not doing this anymore."

David: I'm done with it, yes. We had to think about seating, timing. If my dad was going to be at a place and they had to be there at the same time, "Hey, Mom, make sure you

bring a friend or sit with us or enter through this door.” It was painstaking how much we had to think about.

Ron: What I’m hearing is you figured out ways to accommodate to their little inability to be in the same room.

David: One hundred percent.

Ron: Again, child is coaching parent on how to do life.

David: Right. We got to this point, I was like, “We’re done with this guys. You’re going to have to learn to heal and at least be around each other.”

My dad had asked me in that same discussion I talked about earlier, where I was like, “Dad, there’s these panes of glass between us and I really need you to break some of those down for me so I can know you.” That’s when he spent about three hours walking me through the whole story of how my parents met, what was hard in the first year, all the way through the end of the marriage. That was so helpful.

What led to that discussion was my dad asking me, “Is there anything I can do or that can be done to heal or satiate some of the relational awkwardness between me and your mom?”

I was like, “I don’t know.” Back then I just said, “I have no idea but you can work on this. Me and you, we can work on this.”

He was like, “There’s relational awkwardness between us?”

I was like, “Yes, a *ton*. Can you not see it?” He couldn’t but it was all coming from my direction. That’s where the panes of glass metaphor came in and we talked through it.

Ron: Yes.

David: Fast forward then to about a year later, I landed from a speaking gig and got back home. On my drive home my wife was going to be doing something else, so the Holy Spirit was like, “Hey, call your mom and make steak and hang out.”

I was like, “Okay.” So I called my mom and she came over and we talked—three hours of talk. It was awesome.

I finally felt like it was open enough for me to ask her the question that my dad had asked me about a year ago. “Hey, Mom, is there anything that can be done to satiate the relational awkwardness between you and Dad?”

She said, "I've been waiting years for you to ask me that question. I have an answer for you." Because from my perspective, you have to understand, from my perspective, she was the wounded sheep. She was the helpless little sheep who everything bad happened to and I was the shoulder that she cried on. I was her protector. I thought all the problems were hers, that she just hadn't healed enough yet and she hadn't moved passed it yet. That she was still this little wounded lamb, right?

What happened was she just said, "Your dad needs to repent." I was like, of course he does.

Ron: Yes.

David: I've spent eight years getting my theology degrees and I forgot about Matthew 18. Of course he has to repent. Of course there just needs to be the admission of sin and restoration. This is simple Christian relationship stuff.

I was like, I repented to her right away. I was like, "Mom, I can't believe I didn't think of that. I'm so sorry. Here's how I've been viewing you. I have to apologize for that."

The next day I called my dad. I was like, "Hey, Dad, come over and help me build my son's crib." He came over and we ended up having this conversation. He said, "Man, when I was driving over, I knew you were going to ask me something hard about your mom tonight."

I was like, "Okay, so the Holy Spirit's preparing you." I told him, I said, "Dad, you just need to repent to Mom. That's what will fix this." We looked at the Bible. Here's why. Here's what it does. Here's what repentance is.

Come to find out he had not had an accountability partner his whole life. He'd never confessed sin in a Gospel-centered way where he took the worst hidden parts of himself that you want to keep in the darkness, brought it out into the light because he was so compelled by the fact that it would be forgiven.

That's what the Gospel does, it drags our darkness into light and we get to see that it's not too bad for God's grace. My dad hadn't experienced that part of the Gospel yet, especially with this fine-china of his life. The next day him and my mom are getting coffee, for the first time since the divorce they are hanging out by themselves.

Ron: Wow.

David: They talk for an hour and a half. He confesses everything, repents, says it's all his fault, takes the rap for it. Then they have normal conversations about kids and grandkids. Not everything's *kum-ba-yah* but we can invite them to the same party finally.

Ron: Yes, your dad's still married to somebody. They haven't reconciled their relationship but they have—but they can all be in one room—

David: Yes.

Ron: —because they got it out.

David: Yes.

Ron: Let the light shine on it. How has that made a difference for you?

David: Oh my goodness, for me it's been good on multiple levels. The one level, as the kid, it's been great to see some of that relational awkwardness dissolve because it's a remnant of my past that's a constant reminder of the pain I went through. I have to relive that pain. The pain is still there. It's like a wound that didn't close.

It's like finally starting to get stitches and suture and heal. The other side of it is the pastor side of me, which is like, "Oh, my dad's experiencing the Gospel!" [Laughter] That's the best part is my dad is finally seeing to see what it's like to know grace.

He's reading all these books I read six, seven years ago. He's discovering grace and discovering the Gospel. He'll text me and be like, "Did you know that...?!" and he'll preach the Gospel to me.

I'm like, "I know! It's really good news, isn't it?"

When you talk about death and life, that's what it reminded me of. These little parts go to die and we're trying to find life in it. If we try to solve that through anything other than the Gospel where Jesus died and rose for us to bring life into our death, we're going to spin our wheels for eternity no matter how much philosophy we throw at it.

Ron: Ryan, as you've listened to his story. Has any of that happened in your life? Is there some things that you would like to see happen?

Ryan: Yes, we just didn't really have that situation, David, with the hard, harsh separation with one parent and looking at them as, "You ruined everything and I can't even forgive you." I would have that question with you, when did you forgive your dad?

David: I forgave my dad when I finally believed the Gospel myself. It was around maybe like 10th or 11th grade. I realized how messed up I was and how much I needed grace. Once that happens, you learn to forgive others because the Gospel has so changed your heart.

It didn't heal the pain, right? And it didn't fix the trauma. It didn't get rid of the relational awkwardness but it changed my default disposition towards my dad. Once I accepted

the Gospel for myself and realized that bled into all of life, that's whenever I was able to forgive my dad.

Ryan: My parents just by getting a divorce and even despite the reasons why it happened, I could tell that within five years they had a good relationship. It wasn't awkward between two of them. We could go to parties and things like that or graduations and it wasn't that big of an issue. I can even remember a moment where one of my mom's boyfriends went haywire. She dumped him. He started stalking our family for a period of time, ended up being put in jail.

Ron: Wow.

Ryan: Really messed up. But anyway during that time my mom was so afraid and we were unsure of what was happening that we moved back in with my dad for probably four months with no expectation that they would get back together or anything like that. Still very much, I think they saw one another as we are good friends and we are protectors of our children.

Ron: It was amicable.

Ryan: Totally.

Ron: They were able to cooperate on some things.

Ryan: Yes.

Ron: Which made, I'm sure, a better climate for you. That's something that we advise co-parents to try to do.

Ryan: Yes, yes. That was a huge signal to me. I think I was around 12 or 13 at the time when this happened. Seeing them do that for me and my sister was huge and it took away all of the skepticism and confusion about whether or not *they* were good.

There were certainly still issues between me and my mom and me and my dad. Sometimes they would disagree about how to raise us but it was never really severe. I don't have any acute memories since then of like, they just can't get along, they can't talk. We've had two kids now and they've been both very involved in their lives. They were there for the delivery. It's been really good.

Ron: Good.

Ryan: They're both able to co-parent and be our parents even if they're not better together.

Ron: Guys, I'm going to give you a chance to have a final word here to a parent, stepparent, family member, somebody who's listening to this podcast. What advice would you give them about caring well for their kids? Your best tip. Your final thought.

Before you do that I'm going to just summarize a couple things that I've heard that are takeaways I want our listener to catch. Number One: Co-parenting matters. When you create a climate where you can be in the same room with your former spouse, you bless your kids. That is a better scenario than if there's a lot of hostility and they're constantly caught in the middle. They are *still* in the middle, but at least it's a tolerable environment for them. The more cooperation you have, the more it blesses them.

The other takeaway is: if you're in a situation like David's parents where there's great division and there's harm or hurt or you did something at some point in the story that has created a rift between you and somebody else in the family, one of your kids, former spouse, I want to encourage you to give life to your family by moving toward what needs to happen.

Maybe that's an apology, maybe that's repentance, maybe that's a really hard honest conversation, but don't just let it linger. Take that step and move toward them.

You've been listening to my conversation with David Bowden and Ryan Guinee. I'm Ron Deal and this is *FamilyLife Blended*.

I asked David and Ryan what advice they would give parents who are trying to care well for their kids. We'll hear their response in just a minute. But before we do, would you do me a favor, right now? Would you rate the podcast and maybe write a quick review so others will listen too? This is too important to keep to yourself.

I wanted to say a little bit more about the discussion we were having about giving *life* to kids, moving *towards* someone when you have a strained relationship, especially a child, I want to talk about that for just a second. Let me coach you on how to do that well.

First thing is, you can't start by defending yourself. As parents sometimes we want to do that. But we really can't in a moment like that. If you have a strained relationship there's already so much at stake. It is a fragile relationship. By the way, defending yourself kind of implies that you're guilty. I'm not sure that helping any. But the big thing is it makes them feel unheard and it closes them off. Don't start there, rather focus on their experience.

Listen to what they're saying. Try to follow this process. Attend to their experience. This is tuning in. This is following the words. This is hearing what's underneath the words. Often there's an emotion or a set of emotions down there.

That's the second step is label the emotions you hear. "Son, what I think I'm hearing you say is that you're hurt. You're very hurt by how I treated your mom or dad." Once you've done that—see you're validating.

That's the next step: validating what you hear. You're basically saying, "Yes, I can see how you feel this way." It's critical that you do this because otherwise it comes off like you're defending or you're just pushing aside what it is that they feel or you're giving them a "Yes, but...." where you're just discounting what it is that they're saying.

You may have something to add to the conversation, but *first* you need to attend to what they are saying, label those emotions, validate what you hear and then, if appropriate, apologize. Ask for forgiveness.

If you are discovering that something happened, you can own your part of it. Something has occurred that's led to this strained relationship. If you need to apologize, I think as parents we model something really healthy in this moment, we apologize.

By the way, then and only then might you be able to do the next step, depending on how they respond, you might be able to affirm them and their value to you. Usually, what's behind a strained relationship is they want to know that they matter. The appropriate thing at this point sometimes is a hug or it's moving towards them.

Again, it's that idea of giving life by moving toward them. Maybe that's a physical hug, maybe that's another verbal hug. You can figure out what the appropriate expression is at that point if they're open to it. This is probably a good time to do that.

Now here's the last part, problem solve. Most of us, if you are like me, want to problem solve the very first step. Like, "Hey, let me figure out how to fix this thing that's between us." Nope, nope, that's the last thing to do is to try to figure out what to now do. First you've got to attend, label their emotions, validate what you hear, apologize, ask for forgiveness, maybe close that with a hug or something.

Move toward them. Affirm their value to you and then maybe, just maybe, there's a conversation to have about what do we do now. You'll figure out whether that's even appropriate to do at that point. This is not an easy process. You may have to go through it multiple times. Have this conversation over and over again. Stay the course and trust that eventually the process is going to pay off.

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

Maybe, who knows, if you like what you're hearing, you'll help us spread the word. Maybe you can think of a couple of friends, family members that you could share this

podcast with or post something on social media. It would be very, very helpful. It would help others find us and be a part.

FamilyLife Blended is the leading resource for step families around the world. If you're not familiar with us, boy, we would love to have you check us out at FamilyLife.com/blended. We have all kinds of free—yes, the key word there is *free*—content for you as well as books and resources that you can put your hands on.

If you want to use our searchable map, you can find ministries, small groups, support ministries, and conferences that just might be in your area that you can take advantage of.

Speaking of events we've got one coming up Saturday, April 25th, 2020. It's called *Blended and Blessed*. It's a livestream one-day event. I know it's coming to your area because it's a *livestream* event. If you have an internet connection you can be a part of this one-of-a-kind event designed just for blended family couples.

Our theme for this next *Blended and Blessed* is "Now You're Speaking My Language". Dr. Gary Chapman will be speaking with me and others. We'll be talking around some of the themes of our new book *Building Love Together in Blended Families*. You can learn all about this event at BlendedandBlessed.com

Now before we're done, a word to parents again from my guests Ryan and David about how to care well for your children.

David: Yes, I would say lead with the Gospel. Your kids, the thing they need the most is Jesus and the forgiveness that He offers, the freedom that His Holy Spirit gives, the healing that He brings into, not only the sin and brokenness that was created by some of the decisions *you* made, but the sin and brokenness that is created by the decisions *they've* made. We *all* need different hearts and that's only something that the Holy Spirit can do through the Gospel.

When we have kids dedicated at our church, one of the four pillars that we always talk about is, repent often. Be the chief repenter in your house. If you could model repentance, not even to say, "I was totally to blame for the divorce." That's not what I'm necessarily saying. But we all have things to repent of and teaching your kids what it's like to repent and to show them how the good news has affected you personally and how it can help them. That's what they need more than anything.

I would just say, lead with the Gospel and make it part of the conversation. Bring the Gospel into the conversation because *it* will heal more in the real world than anything else we try.

Ryan: I'll piggyback on what David said and I'll add this, understanding the timelessness of God, combining that with what you said David about information being freeing.

As I get older, I'm going to continue to ask questions. I'm going to continue to seek to understand my own upbringing so that I can better understand myself. Having all that information, if I didn't also have the timelessness of God would be really scary. Because what's happening is like this darker and darker story is either being revealed or all the facts are coming out. Even if the facts aren't bad, but it's different from what I understood, I'm now dealing with this incongruence.

But the timelessness of God being a part of this, it really does mean, like that question my wife asked me, "Is God timeless? Can He influence your past?" That's the ultimate question for me as I wrestle with all of this stuff is can God influence my past so that my present is less anxious? I can relate better with others today and going forward I can continue to grow.

Ron: In Christ, we can't change our past but we can change the story we tell about our past. In Him, we have redemption and hope.

Guys, I just want to thank you for being so candid and honest and real with your lives so that others may benefit. Thank you.

David: Of course.

Ryan: Thanks for having me.

Next time we'll hear from Andy and Heather Hetchler about the strain it puts on step relationships when the parent in the other home is missing in action.

Heather: There was a time, too, that I remember, when my youngest stepdaughter was upset with me and she said, "I think you're the reason my mom's not here." She was desperately trying to find a reason why her mom wasn't there.

Ron: That's Andy and Heather Hetchler, next time on *FamilyLife Blended*.

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

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