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Episode 34: Second Wife, Second Life

Guest: Lore Ferguson Wilbert

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Ron: Lore, you wrote a blog for *Fathom Magazine*, FathomMag.com, entitled “Second Wife, Second Life”. Man, what does that feel like to you and what does it communicate when someone refers to you as the second wife?

Lore: I think I actually never think about it until I am referred to as “the second wife” and suddenly, I’m like, “Oh, that’s right. I *am* a second wife.” We don’t have a lot of those same markers that a lot of couples might have just with stepchildren or stepfamilies.

I think in the beginning it kind of felt like, “Oh, I’m secondhand. I’m plan B.” I think more now, as I go through life, I’m just so grateful for the story that God has given us and that it’s not exactly the story we expected and it’s not the story we planned for in any way, but it’s the story we have. I’ve found a lot of blessing in it.

Ron: From the FamilyLife® Podcast Network this is *FamilyLife Blended*. I’m Ron Deal.

This donor-supported podcast brings together timeless wisdom and practical help and hope to blended families and those who love them.

Welcome to episode number 35, “Second Wife, Second Life”. Hey, I’m starting this episode with a little of your feedback, which we love by the way, and a quick question.

Sarah says, “Before I buy any books, my boyfriend and I are looking into guidance for blending our families and stepparenting. Which of your books do you recommend that we start with first or does it really matter?”

That’s a good question, Sarah. Many people have asked us that. I appreciate you asking. Generally speaking for dating couples, I recommend that they read *Dating and the Single Parent*. This book’s going to tell you how to date well, how to consider the kids, look for red lights and green lights, and then make a decision about marriage.

The book Gary Chapman and I wrote, *Building Love Together in Blended Families*, is really helpful if you’re already engaged and becoming a family. But ultimately, my book, *The Smart Stepfamily*, is the most comprehensive book for blended families. One way or another that’s the book eventually I would suggest that you read.

By the way, I also suggest that you subscribe to this podcast. It's a constant stream of education and encouragement. There's even a podcast for dating, pre-married couples called "About to Blend". That's episode number 20.

Thanks, Sarah, for that question. We'd love to hear from others of you as well.

As a second wife or second husband, have you ever felt second best or treated as second class? How can you be first in your spouse's heart when you haven't been their only? That's the topic today on *FamilyLife Blended*.

Lore Ferguson Wilbert writes about spiritual formation, faith, culture, and theology in life. She's been published widely—*Christianity Today*, *Fathom Magazine*, *Lifeway Leaders*, *Lifeway Voices*, *The Gospel Coalition*, *Revive Our Hearts*, and more. Her most recent book is called *Handle with Care*. You can learn more about her work at her website Sayable.net.

Here's my conversation with Lore Ferguson Wilbert:

Ron: Here we are. We're still in the middle of the COVID crazies as I've come to call them. [Laughter] We're in two different places. You're at your home. That's certainly not a life we ever expected or counted on or anticipated. Yet we find ourselves living in this and trying to make the best of it. Is it that sort of an experience? Is that a good parallel for you?

Lore: Yes, I think they are the experiences that are like, "This isn't what I wanted and so I'm just going to begrudgingly find contentment in it." Then there's the surprising experiences. I think of Lewis's famous book, *Surprised by Joy*. There's just things we're not looking for, things we're not necessarily paying attention to, and suddenly God drops them in our lives and we think, "Well, that was totally unexpected but I can see God's goodness and faithfulness in it."

I think it's a little bit different than maybe COVID. I wouldn't compare it a direct comparison to what we're walking through right now. But I think there have been moments maybe spread out along our marriage where I have felt like, "Okay, this is harder or different." I think those moments get less and less as time goes on.

Ron: Okay, I'm pulling together a couple of dots there. I heard you say a little while ago you don't really think about it very much, being the second wife, until something prompts that. Then it comes up. Maybe somebody refers to you or says something from the outside that reminds you, "Oh, yes, that's true." Then I just heard you say there's moments where that just kind of resurrects.

I'm curious, is there any pattern to those moments? What are those moments about? And then what happens in you when you go, "Oh, yes, that is my life"?

Lore: I think those moments come most frequently—my husband was married for—they were together for 12 years—living together for 10 of those years—separated for two years. I think I am most acutely aware of being a second wife in those moments where something is tender for my husband and I'm aware there's a wound there that I didn't cause and yet it's a big part of his story.

I am called to care for that wound as his wife. I'm called to be invested in the healing of that wound even though I didn't cause it, even though I—I'm devastated that it's there, just aware that it's there.

I think another way that it comes up is, in the church in particular, there are some unfortunate narratives around divorce and remarriage. I think I feel acutely aware of being a second wife depending on who I am around and what their thoughts about it are or what they suspect to be my husband's story but don't know to be true.

We don't share the specifics of his divorce with everyone even though there were biblical grounds for it. It's just a hard story and we want to be careful. But I am reminded—yes, it's an uncomfortable subject for some people so I'm reminded, "Oh, I'm not—I don't have maybe a traditional root here in the way that I got to marriage."

Ron: I want to come back to the wounds in your husband that you see. That's a good one, but let's just stay on those church narratives for a minute. Yes, conversation, the way we teach and preach, dialogue and the assumptions that people make, those are big, right? And what a bind for you to want to gently handle the circumstances around your husband's divorce. Yet people almost demand an explanation. What do you do with that?

Lore: My husband and I—he decided—it's his story primarily. I mean it's my story, too, now because I'm married to him but it's his story primarily. *He* decided early on that he wanted to comfort others with the comfort he had been given—Corinthians talks about that—so we are very, very openhanded in how we share about the story. We're very careful to, as much as we can, cover a multitude of sins and to not be specific about sins done against him.

He's very specific though about sins he committed so he leads with that. In his sharing of the narrative, he leads with his brokenness in the marriage, his failures in that marriage. We've just decided as a couple we're going to try and comfort others with the comfort we've been given and be open about that. We have taken the posture—and this isn't the posture for everyone—but we've taken the posture that nothing is off limits. If someone asks, we'll tell them.

We can't control the outcome. We can't control what's said about us. We can't control the narrative that people make up in their minds about us. We just have to be faithful to the story that God's given us to live. We have to be faithful to stewarding that story. All we can do is be honest and truthful about it and be honest and truthful about where

we've seen God's healing and where we're waiting for God's healing and where we're praying for God's healing and just walk in faith that way; which is not easy.

Ron: Right, right, right. But I so appreciate *that* because as somebody who has spent close to 30 years ministering to people in circumstances that they didn't always choose or want to be in and sometimes they did choose—it was their fault—they did bring it about—but nevertheless, it's the “How do we as a church respond to others?” and your courage and willingness to be open with the story.

In fact, this blog that you wrote is just so insightful and so revealing and just for you guys to do that publicly in writing for example and privately in conversation with people, I think that is where redemptive moments happen for others.

To the listener right now, I just want to say you may never have thought that you had a ministry, if you will. You always felt like you had to be the one ministered to but you underestimate the power of your personal story in the hands of somebody else who is also struggling and wrestling with some question and how that brings encouragement and courage to people who feel second class. It's not just the second wife thing but it's that second class thing. I think you said a little while ago, secondhand—

Lore: Yes.

Ron: —and I was struck by that. Yes, right, you feel secondhand. Almost like it's a demotion or something to be the second wife, to be—even in church circles, there's just those messages that make people shrink. I see you saying, “No, we don't have to do that. We can stand up.”

Lore: Yes, I think the whole—to me the whole point of the gospel is that we are all fractured jars, we are all broken in some way, we have all experienced brokenness in some way and God wants to make us whole. He wants to take what's been broken and He wants us to be the letter that He's written to the world. That's what Paul calls us, so how do I take what isn't what I expected and choose to be the letter that God is using for my life to the world to preach the gospel.

Also, it's just a good reminder to me of the gospel that our marriage is not any more special to God than their marriage was. God was for their marriage. He was in their marriage. Even though sin fractured it to the point of divorce, God was still for them in that marriage. God is in our marriage and He's for our marriage and He's working through our marriage. I don't have to compare our marriages to one another.

Ron: Yes, and that's so good. Why compare? It's okay to say, “Of course, God was for that marriage,” like He's for your marriage.

Lore: Yes. That was actually—I will say that is one of *the most freeing* concepts that I've had in our marriage. I think when we were just newly together, I had questions

about his past. I had questions about his sexual past, questions about his conflicts that they might have had or specifics in their marriage. I found somewhat of a reticence in him to talking about some of those things. At first, I thought “Well, I’m going to be your wife. Why won’t you talk to me about these things?”

But the more time went on, the more I thought, “If I’m walking into covenant, if I’m in covenant with this man, that means that our marriage is precious in the eyes of God and is to be protected by God and it’s wrong of me to assume that I’m allowed to know everything that happened in *their* covenant that was protected by God.”

That freed me up to just say, “You know what, I’m going to trust that if my husband needs to tell me something, he’s going to.” But if I don’t need to know something or it’s not my business, I don’t need to know it. I can be free to just say, “God was in that.”

Ron: Let’s drill down on that. It’s not your business like, if you had another couple come up to you right now, it wouldn’t be your business to be probing into parts of their relationship that they’re not opening to you. Is it that same sort of thing?

Lore: I think there’s moments when we need to probe in our friends lives and ask specific questions.

Ron: Yes, good point.

Lore: But I think that when I’m—if my motivations in probing are to feel better about myself or to compete with a previous marriage in any way or to put down someone else or to excuse my sin in the way that it might be wounding my husband and to sort of put that on her, that’s not a good motivation.

I think when I’m probing with a couple, if my motivation is just to dig up dirt, that’s not a good motivation. But if my motivation is to care for and shepherd, that’s a good motivation so I want to probe in those moments. I hope that’s a helpful distinction.

Ron: It is. It’s a very good distinction. I appreciate that wisdom.

Let me dial down. We’ve used the word *competition* a couple of times. I think it’s great you saying, “Hey, from God’s point of view, He was for the first marriage; He’s for this marriage.” Let’s look at it from your point of view for a minute. Let’s just get earthly about this. Doesn’t every woman want to be first in her husband’s heart and what do you do with that thought that you’re second?

Lore: Yes, I think it’s—so I’m just going to be clear—we don’t have children—I think that if there were a lot more ties to his previous marriage, I might feel that differently, but this is my story. Yes, I feel that. What helps me is to know that *I am* my husband’s first right now. He has chosen me. He is not thinking about her and we have open conversations about these things.

But there have been times where—we moved away from the city where we lived for a while because there were just some bitter memories for him here because of their previous marriage, and then we had to move back a few years later.

That was really, really difficult for him to just imagine being on the same streets, around the same grocery stores, and all those things. He had to really dial down and wrestle with the Lord over “Am I going to honor and please and love my current wife or am I going to be continuing to think about my previous wife?”

He chose to come back here. He chose to come back to the city because he knew it would be better for me. This was where our community was. In that choice, I was able to see how he laid down his life for me, and he does that every day, lays down his life for me so I don't feel that sense of competition.

I think there are times when I—you know we don't have pictures of her around our house but there have been times where I've seen a picture or they had a, I would say, a less like Christ-centered marriage and they spent a lot of money on vacations and big houses and renovations and things like that, so there are times where I can think, “Why are we living the life that we....”—we live much more frugally and carefully and Christ is more the center of our marriage.

Yes, there are times where I'm like, “I want to go to Europe and I want to go to Scotland.” Then I just remember my husband is a different person than he was when he was married previously. He has different priorities. Our money goes to, I think, better things than expensive vacations and our time goes to better things than partying and—

Ron: That's so interesting because you're processing your life in light of his old life even where you live and the reminders for him. I'm hearing the “wounds” comment you made earlier that places and circumstances bring up wounds and difficulties. All of which remind you—that old romantic notion of “You're the one and only” —all of this reminds you that that's *not* your narrative. Yet you are first in his heart at this point in time and you really latch onto that.

Lore: Yes, I think part of being first to him, part of being his covenantal wife right now, is deciding to actually *not* overlook those wounds when they come up, but to step into those places. For instance, if we drive past a location that has a specific bitter memory attached to it for him and he gets quiet, instead of just letting that happen, stepping in and saying, “I am the wife that he has now. I am the partner with him and with God in helping to heal these wounds.”

So I'm going to step into that and say, “Hey, what's going through your mind right now as we pass that place? What are you thinking about? How can I love you through that?” The more time goes on and the more talking that we do about it, the more God heals those places so he can drive past places that he couldn't drive past even three years

ago without a bitter memory coming or just a memory coming that's no longer a bitter memory. It's just a memory that he has of a life that he lived.

Ron: I got to say, I really appreciate that attitude because I could see somebody listening going, "Yes, but when my husband drives by that old place and it reminds him of that thing and then he has a bad attitude and it brings up bitterness and resentment in him, then I'm bitter that he's bitter and I have to deal with the fact that she hurt him in that way."

Yes, but you're saying "No, I've been given an opportunity as his wife to help minister to those wounds rather than be resentful of them." Does that ever get complicated in your head or your heart?

Lore: It doesn't for me but I can see how it would for many people. I think part of that is probably just my personality. I lean toward just passivity and peacemaking. I generally am postured toward that. Also, that's not always a good thing. I think that can sound good but it can also lead to passivity, which is not a good thing, to letting things probably fester for too long, both in him and in myself.

I think I echo my husband though as we echo Paul and just say, "I want to comfort others with the comfort I've been given." I think if the gospel has *truly* changed our lives and if the Spirit of God *truly* lives inside of us, we're going to be bearing the fruit of the Spirit and our first thoughts in moments like that aren't going to be about our self, they're going to be about the other.

I see the way that my husband chooses me so it makes it a lot easier to choose him in those moments. I know that that's not the case for everyone though so I can see how it would be really, really difficult in that moment to not make it about him but to make it about myself.

Ron: I'm hearing you talk about identity. I mean my identity is in Christ, number one. Number two, my identity is, "I'm his wife." In fact, in your blog that I've referenced, you actually say these words, "I am fully his wife, his only wife today, his one wife." That's such an identity statement. Like, "Yes, somebody else proceeded, but no, they're not here now. It's me."

Resting in that identity obviously empowers you to then be grace filled towards him with his difficulties.

Lore: —as he is to mine to my difficulties. I don't want to be the—

Ron: Fair enough.

Lore: —that he is full of grace toward me as well.

Ron: One of the things I've wondered about "second wife" reflecting on your blog is that your husband has to maybe unlearn some patterns and some rhythms of the past. You talk a little bit about sleeping on a different side of the bed when you guys got married and foods you like versus foods they ate together and you like going out and she likes staying in, so clearly you're different people and your husband has to adapt to that.

That's a part of creating your marriage in a way that it needs to go. Have there ever been some ripples in there where you go, "Okay, this is a leftover from the past," and again, is this just an adjustment or what's your attitude around those things?

Lore: I think again the more time goes on the fewer those ripples are. I think in the beginning it was around things—I actually prefer to stay in—she preferred to go out—it was around things like that. I'm just much more of a homebody than she was and it took changing. He ate—he drank a lot of soda and ate a lot of sugar [Laughter] before we got married. I was like, "I can't live like that. I don't have her body. I have a different body. I can't eat those things and keep the body that I have." It took a change of diet and just saying, "I'm not—we are different people."

Now she bears the image of God. She has intrinsic value and intrinsic identity given to her by God. I have a different identity and different value given to me by God. That doesn't make her less than me or me more than her. It just makes us different.

We have to figure out how to navigate those differences in marriage. I am a night person and she wasn't a night person so bedtime and wakeup time has been an area where we've just had to learn to adjust to one another over the past.

Ron: There's something else you reference in your blog. It was a description but I think it's a prescription. Let me just give you your words and have you comment on them. You said, "Walk with patience, endurance, and lose the expectations that lead mostly to resentments."

Have there been any expectations you had to lose?

Lore: I think everyone comes to every marriage with expectations.

Ron: Even if you didn't know you had them. [Laughter]

Lore: Yes.

Ron: Life teaches you, "Oh, I guess I just expected that that would happen."

Lore: Yes, I think life is a series of learning whether we're married, whether we're single, whether we're a second wife or a second husband. I think life is a series of learning to put our expectations back on the Lord. Yes, I had expectations.

My husband made a lot of money when we got married. I just expected, “Oh, we are going to be able to take vacations to Europe,” because I thought “Well, that’s what he did with previous wife.” What I’ve learned is that my husband is a different man, that God disciplined him through that divorce and he does not value the same things that he valued before. He does not want to spend his money in the same way that he spent money before.

That has been such a good thing for me to just realize if I wanted the husband who was making these decisions with a different heart before, that’s the husband that was not a good husband and not obedient and submissive to the Lord in the way that he needed to be. Instead I have a husband who makes different decisions with his money and yet honors the Lord and loves me and cherishes me. I’m going to take that second—I’m going to take this husband.

Ron: Which of those two qualities is worth more: how he spends his money or how he honors his God? That fills a different bank account, doesn’t it? Right, each one of those goes in a different direction. You’re right. You’re better off with the man that you have.

Let me ask a question out of the blue. What’s your relationship with his first wife? And what I mean by that is, even if it’s just your internal dialogue, how do you posture yourself in your mind? Maybe you’ve never met her, never had a conversation, but there’s still a relationship there. How would you describe that?

Lore: I think that again has changed over time. I think in the beginning I felt more insecure in relation to her. She was a bigger personality. She was—would go out more, more extroverted, enjoyed different things than I enjoyed. I felt inferior to her, insecure. I think the more time has gone on, my heart has just become more broken for the choices that she made and the damage that happened there and the way that she placed other gods before God in her life. I just lament that.

Now I’m in a place where I—I’m careful to make sure that—I don’t think that Nate necessarily, my husband, needs to be praying for her and thinking of her often, but I’ve just taken the posture that whenever she comes to mind—which sometimes in some seasons is often and then in other seasons is not at all—whenever she comes to mind, I just try to pray for her and just ask the Lord to be near to her because I think there is something broken in her that needs to be healed, that the Lord wants to heal so I’m just going to pray for that.

I think for me my posture has come from just an insecurity to now I’m able to pray for her with more open hands. But I don’t—again we don’t have children and I think that adds an element to marriage and second marriages that I think complicates things in some really beautiful ways and some really difficult ways. She’s not in my life in the sense that she’s there. But yes, I hear what you say about we still do have a relationship in a sense.

I just want to make sure that relationship is honoring the Lord and honoring my husband. We do not disparage her or speak badly of her in our home to one another. I'm really careful to make sure I don't pit her against me in conflicts that we might be having or throw something in his face about their marriage because that is not caring for him. That might make me feel better for a minute—

Ron: Right, right.

Lore: —but that isn't ultimately caring for him or honoring to God.

Ron: One of the things—I want to talk to the listener for a minute who maybe does have stepchildren and is in a complex situation where kids are moving between homes and you do have interaction on a regular basis with the other household, your spouse's former spouse. It's easy to have a relationship there that's parental but then crosses over into the "what was" and "what happened" and "what's ongoing" because of how the other person acts or behaves or what they bring to the equation through the children, that sort of stuff.

There's always there a relationship, meaning, just as Lore has talked about, whether it's real or imagined you have this internal dialogue with that other person. Checking your dialogue, I think, is really important because if your dialogue to yourself about them are things like, "Oh, they are such a horrible person," and you just throw them into that category constantly or "They're the competition," or somehow not helpful to the children, the enemy, whatever, that just makes it really difficult for you to pray for them, to honor them in front of the children.

You just might find yourself slipping down those roads where you're bringing up old negative stuff and saying negative things. That just supports that internal dialogue. I would say as Lore has done, try to check that and keep that in a place where if what you're thinking in your head was said out loud and the other person were to hear it, that you would not be horribly embarrassed by what they just heard.

Lore: I think too—I so agree with that and I think—so I just want for the listener who might not know, I am the child of divorce. It was a very, very messy, very long, drawn out—lawyers on both sides said, "This is one of the messiest divorces we've ever walked through."

Ron: I'm glad you brought this up. This was actually my next question was to ask you about this because I could tell from your blog that there were things that you see in your husband, because of his divorce, that reminded you of something out of your family.

Lore: Yes, I think I was 20 when my parents' divorce began. I have a large family and so younger siblings who were caught in that custody battle for about 12 years. I mean it was nasty, nasty, nasty across the state lines.

I had to navigate that as an adult watching my younger siblings be torn back and forth between these my warring parents. I had to watch that as an adult sort of interacting with both of my parents as adults and learning to verbalize, “Hey, that’s painful when you do that,” or “That’s not helpful,” or just as an adult like, “Let’s be mature around this.”

It started out giving me a lot of anger toward divorce. I had a lot of, I would say a lot of baggage around divorce. I think the more time went on, the more empathy rose up in me, not just for my own parents but I think for any adult who has to walk through the pain of divorce. I think by the time I met my husband when I was 34, I had more empathy just for him and for his story than I think I would have had as a 20, 25 year old still caught in the middle of these warring parties.

Ron: You say in your blog you hate divorce. What happened to your family obviously was detrimental and difficult for you. A 12-year custody battle. You had siblings and they were caught in the middle of all of that and you saw—it sounds like you saw the worst come out.

Lore: It was—I mean I don’t want to overstate it and I want to not be hyperbolic, but it was—and I’ve walked through some really difficult things in life—it was probably one of the hardest things I’ve ever walked through. I know that divorce doesn’t have to be like that. I know that if you’ve got two people who are endeavoring to honor one another in that process, it can look really different. But it didn’t look that way for my family.

It was, I would say it was one of the most formative things for my life, forming me in how I saw the Lord and how I saw marriage. I mean I was terrified of marriage. I was terrified that marriage was going to be abusive and dishonoring and full of fights and anger. The Lord in His grace did not give me a marriage like that, but I carried that terror around for years.

Ron: I’m thankful that He didn’t bring that into your life in this new marriage. I’m wondering if you had any hesitations though when you met your husband and started dating and you knew his story at some point. Did you have any black and white, “Well, I can’t be with you then?”

Lore: I didn’t. I think it’s okay if someone does have those feelings and needs to work through them with the Lord and with good leadership around them. I didn’t because I knew many of his close friends. I knew the pastors and elders he had walked through his divorce with from our church. I was very close to those people so I knew that his character was what it is. But I knew that because other people vouched for his character.

Ron: That’s very helpful. That’s a wise thing to do.

Lore: I think it's necessary in these things. I think it's necessary no matter who you marry. I think it should be a part of that process of getting to know someone. But yes, I'm just really grateful that I didn't have those concerns kind of coming along as baggage.

Ron: Lore, I want to go back to something we were talking about earlier. We were talking about the wounds that your husband has from his previous relationship. You say in your blog, "The wounds of a former spouse can be deep and raw and a mere misstep of the second spouse"—that would be you—"can be wildly more painful than we knew." Tell me about a time when you inadvertently stepped on something raw and painful, and what did you learn from it?

Lore: Yes! I'll give you an example from this morning, if I can.

Ron: Hey, relevant to today. That's great.

Lore: Yes. We're navigating life in this pandemic season and we're just trying to figure out some new rhythms in our home and some new normal. He's not normally here in the morning but he's been here the past seven weeks. He's been here. That's a new thing for me. I usually work from home and I'm by myself so we are trying to figure out a new morning prayer rhythm.

Like I said, he's a morning person. I am not. I take a little bit longer to wake up. This morning he's trying to implement some family prayer for us. He mentioned it last week and I said, "Go for it." Like, "Please you lead that. I'm still groggy and waking up in the morning, but if you want to take the reins on that—"

So he was and he's been doing that the past couple of days. It was confusing—a part of it was confusing to me. This morning he said, "Well, why don't you take leadership on this."

I was like "No, I want you to do it.

He was like "Well, I've been doing it the past couple of days and you fussed at me for a couple of days." I realized what's going on there is I had not explained to him that it would be helpful for me to understand the bigger picture of what he's thinking in this, the details of the morning. When he explained that, it was helpful.

But what I realized was in his previous marriage, he was very passive and he did not take leadership. He will admit that freely. He would say that *now* if he was sitting here. So when I criticize his leadership in even small ways, what that's doing is sort of tamping down that little sprouts of leadership.

Ron: Deflates whatever area you pressed in and now it's just kind of pushed out, yes.

Lore: Yes. He really is a good leader. I mean he's such a good leader at work and in the church and in our marriage. But in those moments where I've specifically said, "Hey, would you take leadership in this?" and then I come in and say, "Well, why aren't we doing it this way?" I'm aware that that thing right there, because of how poorly he led, how much she criticized and wounded him for his leadership in their marriage, that that is a really tender, tender thing.

So I have to be so careful—not to handle him with kid gloves—he's a grown man in his 40's—he can—he knows he's loved by God, but I have to remember in those moments God is bringing something to life and I need to be careful around how I speak about it. I need to water it and give it sunshine instead of crush it under sort of a deluge of whatever I'm thinking at the moment.

Ron: I think this is a great example. To the listener I would say, this is a great example of, in any marriage relationship, for men to venture out and try to lead their wives in a spiritual direction in a way that enhances and encourages the marriage and the us-ness of the couple and then to have that criticized, that's really deflating for men. We really don't want to be a failure or inadequate. That's a huge Achilles for us.

In any relationship, that's deflating. When that may have been a real source of contention in a previous marriage relationship, you're right, there's an added depth to a bruise there that is so tender and easily pressed. For you to be aware of that, to recognize, "Wow! I've really got to put some self-control on when it comes to these moments." It's an ongoing learning experience, right?

Lore: Yes.

Ron: I mean you've stepped on this before and it happened again today, right?

Lore: Yes.

Ron: I mean that's life. We recognize and we work on it. We recognize and we work on it.

Lore: I think that's so good. I'm so glad you said that because you know we have a big blowup about something. We have conflict around something and it gets ironed out and worked through, and we think, "Okay, now, we get it. We're never going to have to deal with that again." [Laughter]

Ron: I wish.

Lore: That's just not the way that humans work.

Ron: Yes.

Lore: We have to come again and again and again to the same things and make sure that we're repenting often and naming our sin often, our specific sin against another often, and not being general. It's just an ongoing process. It's like peeling an onion in a lot of ways. You're just constantly peeling back those layers again and again to get to the root of what God wants to heal.

Ron: It does get easier. I mean the more we invite the Spirit in and the more discipline we apply to ourselves, with time, we do shift those patterns and behaviors and it does get easier. But even from a neurological standpoint, literally, you've got to rewire your brain sometimes and that just takes time so cut yourself a break.

Lore: Yes, it does take time and it also, it takes another person to help rewire our brains. We can't just do that by ourselves. If we're with someone with whom that conflict just keeps coming up again and again and again and we're not able to seek healing or have a good conversation about it, it might be time to bring in a third person who is going to help sort of do the work of rewiring brain networks and neural pathways and all those things.

Ron: That might be a counselor or a coach or a pastor, somebody who's really—and depending on the depth of the problem—somebody who's really trained—a therapist—to lead you through that.

Well, Lore, I want to come full circle to some of the themes that we started with and just wrap it up by again, giving back to you some of the words in this really insightful blog that you wrote called "Second Wife, Second Life".

You say that even though you are his second wife—in the blog you say this is still his and your first life. Yes, you're the second wife but this is your first life. Your first and only life, you said, and that your one aim is to be found faithful within it. How does being found faithful help when you feel second?

Lore: Well, I think remembering I am not second to God. I'm not an afterthought to God. Rooting my identity in the Lord, knowing that I was perfectly formed by Him for this life. That includes, for me, 34 years of singleness and now 5 years of marriage with my husband and whatever the future might hold. I don't know what the future holds. The Lord has only given me one life. The Lord has crafted me for this life so not thinking of myself as second in that way to the Lord.

Then I think it's just a process, you know? I don't think that anyone does this perfectly. We are all navigating life differently with the faith that we have and the story that we have and the insight that we have. I think it looks different for everyone. We have to give ourselves a lot of patience and give the other a lot of patience and walk by the Spirit.

Ron: You've been listening to my conversation with Lore Ferguson Wilbert. I'm Ron Deal and this is *FamilyLife Blended*.

We'll hear one last thought from Lore in a minute, but before that would you do me a favor and give us a review? If you liked it, five stars would be great. We got five stars from someone recently who said, "This podcast is practical, super helpful, full of hope for me, a third wife who shares seven adult children, their spouses, and now seven grandchildren. It is never too late to learn and grow." Well, we certainly agree with that and thanks again for the review.

Lore and I talked about insecurity and jealousy for the first wife. I'd like to say a little more about that. Feeling insecure about being second reveals a depth of insecurity, maybe a lack of trust or perhaps some personal shame that's all underneath all of this. Sometimes, it's all of the above.

Sarah in the book of Genesis was the first wife but acted like she felt second to Hagar who's the maidservant that Abraham got pregnant after Sarah suggested it. Sounds a little crazy, but Sarah suggested all of this because God had promised them a child but, for whatever reason, she wasn't able to get pregnant. She didn't trust God. She got tired of waiting so she made this suggestion about him having a second wife. It was a common strategy in those days. It's strange.

But then, Hagar began to flaunt being pregnant. Sarah became jealous. Again, the first wife, but she started acting like she felt second. We can imagine she felt insecure, unwanted, ashamed, not good enough. By the way, prior to all of this happening, Abraham had not been a reliable husband in tough situations so Sarah probably had a good reason not to trust him a whole lot. All of this resulted in fear and jealousy and angry responses.

Hey look, if you can relate to any of those emotions, you're not alone. In my one-year devotional for step couples called *Daily Encouragement for the Smart Stepfamily*, I make the point that whether you're first or second or just plain insecure, to avoid a sense of competition, remind yourself that in God's eyes you are valuable, you have intrinsic worth and He is an endless source of love and gives you identity. He provides you with an endless amount of love for every single person in your life. And they have more than enough love for you too. As long as we let God be the source, we never need to worry about running out.

Now here's the hard part. Try to respond out of that God given identity and wellspring of love even when you feel insecure. That is so not easy. But letting that truth guide your response and moving towards compassion for your spouse instead of competition with someone who isn't even in the picture anymore is a much stronger way to go.

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

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Hey, do me a favor. Share this with somebody. We all need a little encouragement. Most people, just like you and me, have a few questions about life and they need some community, somebody to come along beside them so think of a couple of friends or family members that you could share this podcast with. Maybe post something on social media. We would really appreciate it.

Now, before we're done, I asked Lore if she had any additional thoughts for someone who is really struggling being second.

Lore: It's just so helpful for me to remember that today I am his first and today I'm the choice that he has made to love and honor and walk with in sickness and health and all those things. That helps me just to keep my eyes on today, on what I can do today, and not be thinking about all that's come in the past, whether that's a first marriage or whether it's just a history of a sexual past or an emotional past that someone has.

It just helps me remember that God's doing something new today. He's doing something new in our marriage today. He's doing something new in the world today. He's doing something new in the church today and I get to be a part of that today. That helps me to feel less like second best or second hand or plan B. I'm not plan B to God and I'm not plan B for my husband in God's eyes.

Ron: Next time, we'll hear from Jennifer and Kevin Ellers about what it's like to be crisis counselors dealing with your own family crisis.

Jennifer: Then after Kevin and I got married, I remember the first few weekends where we had the girls with us. I felt like I was invisible. It was like I was a piece of the furniture. I almost would have longed for them to look at me and say something nasty rather than not even look at me.

Ron: Jennifer and Kevin Ellers, next time on *FamilyLife Blended*.

I'm Ron Deal, thanks for listening. Thanks to our FamilyLife Legacy Partners for making this podcast possible.

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