

FamilyLife Blended®

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Episode 102 : Working Smarter, Not Harder

Guest: Gayla Grace
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Ron: Welcome to the *FamilyLife Blended* podcast. I'm Ron Deal.

We help blended families, and those who love them, to pursue the relationships that matter most.

Here's Gayla Grace. She's sitting right beside me.

Gayla: Hello.

Ron: Welcome to the *FamilyLife Blended* studio.

Gayla: Good to be here, Ron.

Ron: Yes, it's always good to have you here. We're going to be talking together about the new year and having stronger blended families.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: We'll get to that in a minute, but you may be wondering, why do we want to help people pursue the relationships that matter most? And that's because we believe that having healthier, vibrant relationships helps you have a stronger relationship with God and helps you love Him and love others.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: And loving God and loving others is kind of what it's all about.

Gayla: It is.

Ron: That's what we're about here and so we're glad to have you.

We're starting a new year and so in 2023 we want to give you a little bit of a strategy that will help you to love your family and to love God more completely and to grow your family in the process. We're looking forward to the year. Happy New Year.

Gayla: Yes. Happy New Year. It's kind of all about goal setting in the beginning of the year and that's a little bit about what our podcast is about.

Ron: Have resolutions served you well in the past?

Gayla: Oh, not great. [Laughter]

Ron: Me either. You know I go through this thing every year where it's like, okay, new year, fresh take on life, and what am I going to do with the time?

Gayla: Right.

Ron: Spend a little time thinking and dreaming and wondering about what God has for me, and that kind of thing. Sometimes there's a clear resolution I guess, or something I feel like I really want to chase, but not always.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: I kind of hear that from other people too.

Gayla: Well, and the statistics of the follow through with resolutions is pretty grim. So sometimes I think we just have to step back and consider a little more of, not a resolution, but maybe just taking steps that will serve us well and I think that's really what we're talking about today.

Ron: Yes, it is sort of charting a path and whether you accomplish or whether you just make progress. Progress is—

Gayla: —not perfection.

Ron: That's right. Ooh, progress, not perfection. You heard it here. [Laughter] Thanks Gayla for that. Any big plans for the year for you?

Gayla: Oh gosh. My daughter and her husband go to Vietnam in January and so Randy and I are trying to decide are we going to make a trip to Vietnam this year? Okay, I don't know. I don't know. They will not come home for two years, so it's a pretty big deal.

Ron: It is a big thing. My wife's been to Vietnam. She absolutely loved it.

Gayla: I've heard it's beautiful.

Ron: It is. I've not been there. She tells me it's beautiful. I've seen pictures. It sounds beautiful.

Gayla: Well, how about you? What are your plans for the year?

Ron: I'm hoping to go back to Ghana.

Gayla: Oh, that'd be great.

Ron: We haven't been since Covid. We have our heart there. For those of you that don't know who's listening, Nan and I have a mission there that's very personal for us, connected to our son who passed away a number of years ago. There's a big part of me that's there. I'm ready.

Gayla: Oh, sure.

Ron: I'm ready to get back over there. I hope it's going to be possible.

Gayla: We just both need to go out of the country and start making our plans.

Ron: There you go. Sounds great.

Well to you, the listener, calendar; we don't know what's on your calendar, but we do want to suggest a few things that you put on your calendars. Here's some things I want to mention. Empowered to Love Marriage Seminar that FamilyLife® is sponsoring. It's at a Sandestin Resort in Sandestin, Florida. If you don't know where that is, right next to Destin, Florida—great place; February 13 to 17. Nan and I are going to be featured there doing a conference for couples of all shapes and sizes, first marriages, as well as blended family marriages. So if you're interested, look that up. The show notes will tell you how.

We want to suggest you put Saturday, April 29th on your calendar. That's our next *Blended and Blessed*® livestream event. We're always excited about that every year, Gayla.

Gayla: Absolutely.

Ron: It's a livestream event designed for blended family couples. You can watch individually at home, or you can join us live in Melbourne, Florida, down on the coast, or your church can host it, and you can have a group of people in the room for less than a hundred bucks. We want you to start having those conversations with your leadership/pastoral team at your church right now. Now's the time to start talking about it because they're making church calendars, so get that on the church calendar and that

could be a great thing that happens at the end of April. Again, the show notes will tell you how to get more connected to all of that.

Okay, Gayla, let's tell them a little bit about what we're going to be doing. This year, 2023, we're going to spend a little time reflecting back on some of the themes from my book, *The Smart Stepfamily*, which just crossed over 20 years since it first came out. It's gone through a couple of revisions, and if you'd have told me when that book was getting ready to come out that it was going to be a part of the stepfamily ministry movement, I would've just laughed in your face.

Gayla: Wow.

Ron: But it has, and it continues to sell well, so it's making a difference for people's lives. To our listener, if you have not read that book, *The Smart Stepfamily*, please pick up a copy. I was just the 2014 copy—

Gayla: Yes, of course.

Ron: I'm always amazed when people go on Amazon and “You know we can get a 2002 copy.” Yes, that's/it's okay, but get the new one, right?

Gayla: Ron, I have that copy.

Ron: Do you really? [Laughter] Well, it's fine if you bought it in 2002, but don't buy it now.

Gayla: I agree but I bought it a long time ago.

Ron: Check that out. There's a whole video series of video curriculum that churches are using all across the country and the world really in different places and it's free on RightNow Media. Again, the show notes will tell you how you can access that great video series based on *The Smart Stepfamily*.

What we're starting to do today and sprinkle through 2023, we're going to revisit some of the themes, maybe tell some behind the scenes stories about the book and some of the material and things that's happened throughout the year. That's where we're headed.

Gayla: Yes; there's just some great nuggets in that book and some themes that are easy to capitalize on and expound on. I think that's what we want to do.

Ron: Getting smarter, not necessarily working harder. Working smarter instead of working harder. What's wrapped up in that for you? Not just about stepfamilies, but just in general. What's the difference between working smarter and working harder?

Gayla: Well, to me, working harder is just having to put in so many hours and really investing in a way that at the end of it, you're exhausted, and you can't keep going. Whereas smarter means that you make progress, maybe with less effort, maybe in less time, and you can begin to see how your efforts have paid off easier, quicker.

Ron: I think intentionality.

Gayla: Yes.

Ron: That's the heart of what *FamilyLife Blended* is about—is we're helping people be intentional about the relationships that matter most.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: And we're trying to give them some ideas and some direction/some informed wise direction about how to work smarter at their family so that they make more progress.

Gayla, I find it fascinating through the years; I think some people will spend more time buying a smartphone than thinking about their marriage or their parenting strategies. Do you think that's true? Or is that—

Gayla: No, I think it is true. I think that it's too easy to feel like, “Oh, things are just going to fall in place. I love the Lord. I love my family and we just don't have to work at this that hard.” But for blended families, that is not true.

Ron: Yes. I just think all relationships/everything requires something. You know, it's funny; we'll go to school, spend years investing in a career and rarely, rarely, rarely will we spend time to read a book or listen to a podcast or go to a seminar or something that will invest in one of the most important things in our lives. And that's our core family relationships.

And so essentially what we want to do is—and I start the book talking about, just how important that is for stepfamilies. And it can't just be any sort of education. It's got to be stepfamily specific—

Gayla: Exactly.

Ron: —education.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: Because that's what's really going to cue you in on your family and your journey and that's what we want to—

Gayla: And there's a difference. There's a huge difference in navigating a stepfamily as opposed to navigating a biological family. That's what we're always aware of is how to explain those differences.

Ron: Let's be clear to the listener. We're not suggesting that working smarter eliminates all the problems or struggles or just automatically makes everybody love each other and everything's going to be fine. There's still a journey to be had, but you're going to be more strategic. Again, more intentional about how you bring your family together and how you move it through time. So that's essentially what we're trying to do, and that's where the title came from.

And here's a little behind the scenes. I didn't come up with the title of *The Smart Stepfamily*, which then became this title of The Smart Stepfamily Series.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: Smart Stepmom, Smart Stepdad, you know, on and on. You know, we've kind of kept that theme going. That was the publisher's idea. And you know, as an author, you don't always get to name your own book.

Gayla: You don't, and sometimes you don't agree with what the publishers come up with. [Laughter]

Ron: And you are kind of stuck going, "Okay, but we're going to go with it and trust that maybe this is the best way to go."

Gayla: Yes, and it was a great idea.

Ron: It was a great idea. I think *The Smart Stepfamily* is a much better title than what I had come up with. I don't even remember what I had come up with.

Gayla: Was it The Successful Stepfamily?

Ron: No, it was, I don't know, Steps to Stepfamily Success.

Gayla: Oh, okay.

Ron: Something like that.

Gayla: Something long.

Ron: —and wordy. Long, would I ever come up with long titles?

Gayla: Yes.

Ron: My team just constantly tells me I have long titles, so that's true. That's very true. And so, yes, it was a better title, but it really gets to this heart of being intentional much quicker. You want to be smart about how to do stepfamily/blended family living and still, that's something we come back to over and over and over again in our ministry.

Gayla: Well, the reality is there are some things that we can do that sabotage relationships in stepfamilies. We may not even realize the danger of doing this.

I'll just give an example, Ron, to begin to talk about. In our early blended family life where—you know we've been blended 27 years now—so I think back years ago when Randy and I each brought two kids to the marriage, and we didn't understand the value of making sure that we parented our biological kids and not step over into trying to be a disciplinarian of our step kids until relationships were in place. And that can really hinder relationship building if a stepparent goes too far in the beginning of trying to discipline their stepchild and the relationship's not in place. It's going to slow down the relationship.

Ron: Let's take that a step further. Working harder is what most of us do. I've certainly been guilty of that in my life in certain aspects. When I'm convinced this is the best way/the right way, it should go well but it's not, so therefore I just need to press a little more, work harder at the same strategy. It's a little bit like that old thing “What's the definition of insanity?” Everybody knows it. It's working in the same way and expecting a different result.

Gayla: Right, right.

Ron: By the way, working in the same way, that's on us; that's the part where you're working harder and just sure you're finally going to get it to work the way you think it should.

In this case, a stepparent who says, “Yeah, but your kid really needs correcting.”

Gayla: Right.

Ron: “I'm really going to help your child. I really, I'm going to help them. They're going to be/they're going to thank me one day, so I'm going to get this kid to get up and get out of bed on time and be responsible.” There's the agenda and you work hard, hard, and harder at that and not realizing that the same strategy is just—it's the same wall you keep hitting your head against.

Gayla: Right; and then what else happens as the stepparent steps in and becomes a stricter parent, the biological parent steps back because they're reacting. They start worrying about how the stepparent's parenting, how that's affecting their child. And so, then they start thinking, “Oh my gosh, I'm going to become more lenient because you're so strict.” And that's a recipe for disaster.

Ron: Yes. Now they're both reacting off of one another rather than being proactive as parents together.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: Pushing each other in the wrong directions.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: That's all flowing out of, "But if I just do it again, it'll finally come"—no, that's working harder. Working smarter says you pull back and you go "I need to look at me. I need to look at the playing field and what's going on. Maybe there's a different set of rules here," which we often find in blended family. There's a different dynamic to the same types of relationships.

Well, this is parent child. It should be the same. I should be able to correct my stepchild the way I correct my biological children. Well, there's some other factors at play, so let's approach this from a different standpoint, not the same. And so, all of a sudden, now there's new options that are available to that parent and that stepparent. Stepparent can be the one who focuses on, as you said, relationship building, letting the biological parent take the lead.

Now, this is just one example, this whole parent stepparent thing—just one example of really, I mean, a thousand or more that are unique dynamics that are distinctives that if you don't get smart about them, they can really cause some difficulty.

Gayla: They can, and they can slow down relationship building, which is not what we want.

Ron: In the book, I tell a story about a woman I will never forget—sitting, talking with this woman and her husband and her just sort of sitting back, her eyes go bright wide, and she has this realization/this aha and she turns to her husband, and she makes a statement. Let me set it up.

He had three teenage girls and she had married in as a never been married before, no children of her own. And she has this aha. She looks at her husband, and she says, "I got it. I live in a stepfamily, but you don't." Now, the reality is yes, they both technically lived in it, but to her husband, these are just his daughters. Nothing's changed. I have a relationship with them and then I have a relationship with my wife. There's no stepfamily here. To him, it's as if, but to stepmom, it's, "I'm an outsider. The girls don't know where to/what to do with me. They/some of them are nice to me sometimes, and sometimes they're mean to me," and she has this constant experience of feeling like she doesn't fit.

And so, for her to go, “Oh, that's it. I sort of have a totally different experience of this family than you do,” was a moment where we could say “Yes, and now how do we work with that?” rather than “Husband, you got to be just like her.” No, he can't be just like the stepparent; he's the biological dad. It's not going to be the same.

And stepmom, given that reality, how does this change how you think about your role within the family? Let's start working smarter instead of harder. It's just one aha after another, often, are great turning points. I mean, don't you find that when you're talking or coaching with couples. They get that one thing that just turns the key.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: And they're in a different place. They're going down a different path at this point.

Gayla: Right. And I think about the stepmom in that situation. I think also that she would, after realizing that need to understand how important it is for her to express her feelings then to her husband and say, “You're not a stepparent, and I am. So let me just tell you how today I feel like an outsider and here's why.” Because he doesn't have any concept of that—

Ron: Right.

Gayla: —being an outsider, which is a lonely place to be. I guarantee you that stepmom has been there, and so I think that part of working smart and not harder is “Okay, I now realize I live a different life than my husband even though yes, we're both in a stepfamily, but he in no way walks the same road that I do as a stepmom.

Ron: And a follow up that we would encourage somebody in that moment to say, “Now what do I do with this?” Empathy is one piece, so I empathize with my husband's position rather than be completely irritated all the time with him for not seeing it the way I see it. Empathize doesn't mean he's right about every issue, it just means “Oh, to him they're just the girls and I'm his wife and he loves us both and he doesn't really understand that there's this awkwardness going on between me and his daughters. So, okay, given that, that helps me just sort of jump in his shoes a little bit.

Gayla: Right, right.

Ron: And hopefully he can do the exact same for her.

Gayla: Oh, absolutely; definitely needs to.

Ron: Well, okay, what are some other things you think people work harder at that it tends to backfire?

Gayla: I think sometimes, especially biological parents, don't—they have this tension between their kids and their spouse, and so they feel like it has to be one or the other? “Well, I'm going to lean heavily on the side of my kids.” What they may not know is they really kind of feel sorry for them because they've walked through the death of a parent or a divorce. They compromise some of the relationship with their spouse because of, “I just feel guilty about what my kids have been through,” and so they feel like they have to lean on one side or the other. And it's not one or the other; it's both. You have to still nurture the marriage because that's the foundation and without the marriage, then it's going to all crumble.

Ron: Right.

Gayla: And yet, yes, your kids have been through some horrific things probably. And how do you balance that of really helping them understand and grow, but still hold them accountable in everyday life?

Ron: I got another one I think people work harder at and that is, “I'm going to make you love me whether you want to or not.”

Gayla: [Laughter] Oh gosh.

Ron: Yes.

Gayla: Yes, that always backfires.

Ron: Again, people come by this, honestly, because that's the whole point. You got married because you wanted to have a family, a loving environment for you, for your kids. It makes all the sense in the world; there's nothing wrong with the dream. But just recognize that, the journey to the dream coming true is an individual journey for every person and they decide who they love and how much, how much they trust you, how much they let you into their heart and life.

Gayla: Right; right.

Ron: You're going to try to be *loving* toward them and prayerful that they become open and loving toward you, but you can't force or demand love. The minute you start trying to do that, it feels like a—I want to use the word violation. That might be a heavy word, but it feels like you just stepped inside my skin. You just begin to demand something of my heart that you don't have the right to demand of me, and so quit pushing.

And by the way, this can come from not just stepparents to stepchildren, but biological parents are working often so hard at the both end.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: It's either my kids or my spouse. They want to resolve that by getting the step people to like each other, to love each other.

Gayla: Yes.

Ron: And so, bio mom is coaching her kids all the time about how great stepdad is. She's talking up her kids to her husband, and she's just saying, "Don't worry about that thing." You know, she's downplaying stuff that maybe irritates her husband because she wants him to love them, not to be irritated with them and so it's control, control, control. At the end of the day, that's what it is and that's a brick wall. Like you keep hitting your head and you're—worse than that. You don't/you get hurt if you hit your head against a wall, but so do other people. They get wrapped into the pain that you're causing to the family.

Gayla: Yes. And the other thing that I might add is, especially if you're dealing with teenagers, you cannot force teenagers to do anything.

Ron: —to do anything. Amen. [Laughter] Right, right.

Gayla: Especially if you are a stepparent, trying to force that teenager to be your best friend. It's just not going to happen. Sometimes you just have to sit back and accept, "This is where we're at today. This is where our relationship is at today, and I'm going to be content with that. I'm going to continue to do my part to grow this relationship, but I'm not going to beat my head up against a brick wall and I'm not going to take everything personally that this stepchild says." Sometimes it has nothing to do with us and it has everything to do with them.

Ron: What makes people work harder? Take that approach. You know, I got a couple of thoughts. One of them is difficulty from the past, pain, heartache. If you've already been through hard, you don't want more hard; of course, you don't. And so, you/you're just trying to make it work. In particular, if you went through a divorce, which some people use the word failure when they're talking about that previous marriage. That's a word that sort of different people agree with or don't agree with, but even if you think of it that way, you don't want another failure. Alright, so you work hard to make people love.

Gayla: But you know what I also think about is, do we turn our trust away from God and trust only in ourselves? So we are going to work so hard to make this happen because I might pray about it, but I really trust that God's going to do it the way I want, and so then it all comes back on us. Well, then I'm just going to keep working harder and harder when sometimes we just got to turn it over and allow God to work in his own timing, that's going to be different than ours.

Ron: I want to encourage the listener, take what she just said; that God's not going to do it in the way that I want. And what you want is often driven by what you think you

need. And that's often driven by this desire to not experience more difficulty or pain, right? Ask yourself about that. What is going on with me? Why am I so insistent that these kids receive my correction as a stepparent? Why am I so insistent that this kid loves me and loves me today rather than tomorrow? What's going on there? What's my need that's within this push that I keep offering?

I don't know what that is, but it's important that you at least ask the question so you can discover what that is and wonder out loud with yourself. Maybe even, you know, with your spouse, talk it, talk it out loud. What do I do with this?

Gayla: Right. Where's that coming from?

Ron: Where's that coming from? And is there a better way to accomplish this?

Sometimes, I've had people just sort of stare at me sometimes when they hear the whole, how do you cook a stepfamily thing? Because at the end of the day, what that means is, I have to be patient. I can't get this kid to love me sooner rather than later. I have to be patient and wait on later, and I don't want to be patient.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: Okay. There's a stubbornness there. There's a little desperation built into that. What's that from? What's going on there? Know what that is so that it doesn't take you by surprise.

We had somebody write into us recently who reminded me of this very thing, Gayla, and I was so appreciative that she took the time to write in. She said, "Sometimes we talk about fear and pain. It's a leftover from a first divorce," but she said, "Sometimes it's also a part of the first marriage." Like there was a reason that that came to an end, and there might have been some real abuse or neglect or trauma and that stays with somebody. It stays on their heart. And you don't want more of that for your kids or for yourself and so you find yourself working really hard to make everybody do what you want them to do, and it's just not necessarily a helpful process.

Gayla: Yes. I

Ron: I wanted to ask you about something that was in a section of the book—just wondering how you feel about this. Feeling lost in the wilderness is par for the course. You think that's generally true for a blended family? Couples, in particular, that once they get married the journey begins and that they sort of wake up and go, "I'm feeling a little lost in this journey."

Gayla: Absolutely. It's a scary place to be. But I think it is so normal and sometimes step couples don't realize it's normal, and so then they think they're doing something wrong. But yes, you're in a role. You know, we talk a lot about ambiguity in stepparent

roles or even the biological parent at times. You're just lost and lost in the wilderness is just a scary place to be.

Ron: I want to just quickly jump in and say, "Hey, I think most of us are lost." [Laughter] I think most of life "Am I living God's will?" Am I doing what I should be doing? Is this where I need to be? You know, in my life, in my relationships, in my work, in my whatever. That's a normal thing. Any parent who's raising any child, your own or somebody else's, my goodness, you feel lost most of the time. It is a hard journey and yet we love our children, and we love certain moments about it, but then there's other things that we just feel lost.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: This is not criticism to say the blended family journey is often filled with people who find themselves feeling lost and that that's par for the course. That's not criticism. That's just, hey, it's kind of a different journey and no one really gave you a map. In effect, that's what we're trying to do is give people a map to help them navigate. But it's okay if you feel lost; just look for some answers.

Gayla: Yes. And if you get off the trail, find a way to get back on. You know, Ron, Randy and I were just at the Grand Canyon, and there are times that we got off the trail a little bit and then we had to think, "Okay, wait a minute. We can't stay off the trail because there's bad things that happen," and so we would find our way back on. I think that's what we are trying to do is help stepfamilies find their way back onto the trail when they get off.

Ron: Let me go one step further and then I'm curious if you have any reflections on the early section of the book. I love when I get to go and speak at a place and do an event for a church or something to talk about how much people need to feel lost. Let me explain.

By the way, I'll just tell people, here's another thing to put on your calendar. I'm going to be at the Win Shape Retreat facility. I get to do this every year. It's a retreat for blended family couples, March 17 to 19, 2023. It's a whole weekend. You get to sit down, relax, and we have meals together. We do high ropes course stuff together. And one of the things we do is, couples on this ropes course where we intentionally make them feel a little lost and they have to learn how to talk, communicate with themselves and with other people.

It's a great little moment where you go, "Yes, this is life." Like, there are times throughout our life where we're just going to feel this "We don't know what to do" sort of feeling. And in that moment, we've got to connect, we've got to pray, we've got to slow down a little bit, we've got to get our perspective so we can figure out what to do next. But the cool thing about needing to feel lost is that it forces dependence spiritually.

Gayla: Right.

Ron: And the second thing it does is I think in blended families, there's an irony and that is of course, you don't know how to do Thanksgiving; of course, you don't know how to celebrate birthdays; of course, you don't necessarily know how to respond when your stepchild looks at you like you got a third eye and you're really feeling disrespected and you want to like, "Is this my moment? Do I say something? Do I not? How do I go about doing this? I tried that once. It was a disaster. Now what do I do?"

All of that leads to prayerful consideration and thought and dialogue with your spouse so that you can find better answers, which ultimately provides a sense of familyness. It's ultimately what helps you to go from feeling like an outside stepparent who's clueless to somebody who's earned your stripes and you're now part of the family and you have a few answers. It's part of the identity making process.

Gayla: Right. I think it also forms some habits in us because just like you said, adversity encourages dependence on God. When we learn to look to God first and then we find what we need, then the next time when we run into adversity, we go back to that habit.

Ron: Yes.

Gayla: That serves us not only in our stepfamilies, but in life in general. I mean, you have adversity outside of stepfamily life and what do you do with it? Do you take some of these habits that you've developed as a stepfamily and apply it in other areas too?

Ron: It's a good point. You got any reflections on the early part of the book that you wanted to talk about?

Gayla: The only other thing I would say is we serve a redemptive God who wants to redeem relationships. If we get stuck in a place of "We're never going to get where we want to be," I think we can go back to, "But God can redeem relationships. He does it all day long." He's done it in our family, Ron. I think you have to just keep stepping into whatever that next step is to reach the promise land but know that God will walk with you, and He does want to redeem relationships.

Ron: Well, that's really good. You know, one of the things I had written down is, Just the importance of remembering. Throughout the Old Testament you have all of these laments. For example, two thirds of the Psalms are laments.

Gayla: Right, right.

Ron: Somebody's crying out to God about something. An element that is often repeated there is stop and remember. Right now, life stinks. "God, I don't know what's going on. I don't know what you're doing about it." But then I can remember "But in the past you've been faithful, and I can remember how You brought us through that one little weird

moment in life and you helped find answers.” The same thing can happen in a blended family journey. Like, “Oh man, we were clueless, but we've made a little progress” and “Look how the Lord's...,” “I don't know what to do about this next thing, but okay, let's just remember God seems to show up. He seems to be there. We have enough grace to get us through the moment. Let's just keep pressing on.” The alternative is to say, “Going back to Egypt.”

Gayla: Right.

Ron: “Forget the promised land. We're just going back because we can't see a way to get to the promised land.” There's no hope in that.

Gayla: No, there's no hope in that.

Ron: And that's forgetting. And by the way, the Israelites did that, like literally within days of watching God deliver them from the hand of Pharaoh with the plagues, which was obviously God's doing. They're like, “Egypt's looking really good.” [Laughter] And so that's human nature. When you recognize that in yourself, by all means, don't quit. Don't go back. Keep leaning in, trusting.

Gayla: Even if it's a familiar place. Sometimes there's some dysfunctional patterns that are just familiar to us, and so we go back to them. It doesn't mean those are the right patterns, so that we want to go to.

Ron: It's good stuff. Well, I appreciate you being with me today.

Gayla: Yes. Well, and Happy New Year to our listeners.

Ron: That's right. Happy New Year. May God be with you in all the things that you plan and the journey that He leads you through this coming year.

Well, if you want to learn more about *The Smart Stepfamily*, you can certainly look in the show notes. We'll let you know how you can get a hold of that. And if you haven't subscribed to this podcast yet, by all means, we'd love for you to do that, not for our benefit, but for yours. There's a lot there that you can go back and look at the previous hundred episodes and then also you won't miss anything new that's coming your way.

If this podcast serves you in any way, not just today, but any one of our episodes, would you just do us a favor and share it with somebody? Maybe it's a ministry leader and you're just trying to help them understand a little more about stepfamilies and to think more broadly about what the church can do to serve the stepfamilies in your community. Or maybe you have a friend who's living in a blended family situation, and you just want to share this or another episode with them. Just take a minute and text it to them and send them a word of encouragement. Who knows how you might be able to minister to them.

Please remember, our next worldwide livestream, *Blended and Blessed* is Saturday April 29th, 2023. Put that on your church calendar and if you're thinking maybe, you want your church to host that for a group of couples in your church or community, you might want to start having those conversations right now. Again, the show notes will give you some tips on how to do that.

Okay, Gayla, next time the episode conversation is going to be/I'm going to be talking with my good friend, Dr. Rick Marks, and we're going to be talking about his story of how he was alienated by his father, away from his mother. He didn't really have any relationship with her for most of his childhood, but then how he got reconciled with her. We're really excited about that conversation, and we're also going to spend a little time talking about what you need to know about parent alienation for yourself or somebody else. That's next time on *FamilyLife Blended*.

Well, I'm Ron Deal; appreciate you listening. Want to let you know that our *FamilyLife Blended* is produced by Marcus Holt and Josh Batson. Our mastering engineer is Jarrett Roskey. Our coordinator/project coordinator is Ann Ancarrow, and our theme music is composed and performed by Braden Deal.

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