Bob: Is fear an issue in your life, in your marriage, or in your family? If it is, what do you do about it? Here’s Ron Deal.

Ron: Three hundred and sixty-five times in the Bible, God says, “Do not be afraid.” In some form or fashion, that statement is made. He invites us to not be afraid.

Isn’t that easy to say? It’s so hard to do; right? Has your four-year-old ever come to you in the middle of the night, after having a nightmare, and they are bawling and squalling and you said, “Don’t be afraid,” and it works? NO! It doesn’t work! We’re not that much different than four-year-olds.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, April 12th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. What is God’s antidote for fear? How do we deal with it? We’ll spend time exploring that today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Tuesday edition. We’re going to dive into a subject today that I don’t know that I’ve ever stopped to consider the impact that fears can have on how we get along with one another in a family and especially how that pervades a blended family.

Dennis: Yes. You’re going to hear from one of the premier experts in the country—if not the world—on blended families and stepfamilies, Ron Deal, who heads up FamilyLife Blended™. Bob, it’s really a treat to be able to feature Ron here on the broadcast because about 40 percent of all people getting married today are forming a blended family / a stepfamily. Honestly, they’re really an unreached people group. I don’t think the church knows exactly how to go about helping them.

I think we tend to think all stepfamilies / blended families start because of a divorce, but they can actually be started more than 60 different ways. As a result, they have a lot of challenges; and fear is one of them.

Bob: Because there is uniqueness in blended families and stepfamilies, FamilyLife has committed itself, over the last three years, to trying to take the lead in helping churches
know how to more effectively minister to the needs of blended families. We’ve hosted an event that has been a summit on stepfamily ministry.

In fact, this fall, we will be hosting our fourth annual event in Colorado Springs. Our friends at Focus on the Family are partnering with us in this event. We’re inviting church leaders in to spend time talking about: “What can we do to help make sure that couples who are in a stepfamily can thrive and make sure that the marriage that they have formed is the last marriage they’re ever in?” If you would like more information on the upcoming summit on stepfamily ministry, you can go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com. We have a link there that will get you all the information you need.

But let’s listen together, here, to Ron Deal as he addresses how families can face the fears that are often found in stepfamilies or blended families.

[Recorded Message]

**Ron:** I want to try to take a deep dive on an important subject. I think the fear factor, as I like to call it, is important to all couple relationships / all family relationships. I think it’s exceedingly important when it comes to stepfamily relationships. This isn’t necessarily something that only applies to stepfamilies—don’t think about it that way. Just think that there can be a heightened sense of fear, and there are some good reasons for that that we’ll talk about. There can be deeply-entrenched fears—this is the thing / not the only thing—but one of those core things that makes families stuck.

After lots of years of working at this and talking to researchers, there’s a group of us, around the country, that have come upon this thing we just call the “fear factor.” I want to describe for you what the fear factor is and then try and give you some practical things you can do to help yourself move through this thing that we simply call fear.

It’s not just fear—it’s multi-layered entrenched fear. When you’re sitting in a small group with a couple, and week after week, they’re coming back to the same thing—it’s the same thing / it’s the same thing. Everybody else has captured the thoughts that you’ve been talking about and teaching them, and they’re moving on; but this one couple is just stuck, stuck, stuck. Ask yourself: “I wonder what the fears are. What’s underneath this thing?”

I work off the “health principle” as a counselor, which means that I just have an assumption; and that is, that the most straightforward thing will work unless it doesn’t. [Laughter] If it doesn’t, then that’s my cue that there’s something else going on.

If you go into the doctor and you’re not feeling well—you wake up one day, and you’re not feeling real well, you have sniffles. You go in and you’re thinking: “I’ve got a cold,”—right?—“About three days, four days, five days it’s going to go away.” It’s a pain, and
you wrestle though it a little bit; but it goes away. But what if it doesn’t go away? Well, if it doesn’t go away, now you’re thinking, “I’ve got something else.”

You see—that’s the health principle—the most straightforward straight approach should work unless there’s something else going on that you can’t quite see—then, you being to explore further, and a little further, and a little further. I’m just saying what I’ve learned is—that we can cut right to the chase: “What are the fears?”—because that is the thing that keeps people stuck / that makes the things that should work not work.

So consider these two quotes said by a woman one day: “I asked my husband not to get any more tattoos. The one he has is his ex-wife’s name. But as soon as we separated, because of his children, he had his daughters’ names tattooed over his heart.” Tell me what her fears might be. What do you hear in that statement? Shout out something.

**Audience:** She’s not number one.

**Ron:** She’s not number one.

**Audience:** She’s out of the picture.

**Ron:** She’s out of the picture.

**Audience:** Not important.

**Ron:** Not important.

**Audience:** Not worth the ink.

**Ron:** Not worth the ink! Dude! [Laughter] That was awesome—not worth the ink.

Okay; listen to her request: “I asked my husband not to get any more tattoos. The one he has is his ex-wife’s.” Okay; so there’s this ever-present reminder that: “I’m not the first love of his life. I’m the second love of his life,”—and it’s just always there—“So please don’t do that—it just creates a little barrier for me. What that says is: ‘I’m not number one.’ Am I important?” My guess is she wouldn’t have this burning need to ask him not to have any more tattoos if it was just about the one he has, but maybe that she was feeling unimportant in the relationship and the ink reminded her of that; right?

“Then we have issues regarding his kids, and that divides us,” and “Sure enough, when we have a period of separation, he goes out and gets another tattoo; and it’s of his kids, right over his heart.” She’s hearing messages loud and clear over, and over, and over again. They’re the ones that you guys put words on: “You’re not number one,” “You’re
not very important,” “You’re not worth the ink.” They all result in one thing: “I desire to be important, but I fear that I’m not.” Got it?—fundamentally, that’s what this is.

See, this is not about who’s right and who’s wrong. This is about emotion. Emotion is the music that drives the dance. Now from a biblical/theological standpoint, God is constantly trying to help us be smarter than our emotions, be wiser than our emotions, not be subject to our emotions—that, out of choice of surrender and sacrifice, we love, whether it makes any sense or not. There’s always this tension between what our emotions are moving us to do and what the will of God would invite us to choose to do. There’s always that tension in that place; but most of us live, day in and day out, with the music of the emotions in our lives.

Does Scripture have anything to say about this? Yes; 365 times in the Bible God says, “Do not be afraid.” In some form or fashion, that statement is made. He invites us to not be afraid. You think of Jesus, sitting in the boat when the winds and the waves: “Don’t be afraid.”

Isn’t that easy to say? It’s so hard to do; right? Has your four-year-old ever come to you in the night, after having a nightmare, and they are bawling and squalling and you said, “Don’t be afraid,” and it works? NO! It doesn’t work! We’re not that much different than four-year-olds—I hate to say it.

So Scripture says there’s no fear in love. Let’s listen to this little dialogue: “...but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love [1 John 4:18].” The context of this is about our relationship with God: “Love drives out fear.” When we move toward someone in selfless love and they receive that selfless love—there are two sides of it—fear is driven out of the relationship.

The context here is people, who are looking at themselves, going: “I am such a mess, and God is so holy. There’s no way He’s going to have anything to do with me. There’s no way He would embrace us.” Rightfully so—they’re intimidated. They are fearful about moving toward Him because of His holiness. The passage is saying: “Yes; but if you really knew how much He loved you, you wouldn’t worry about that because you would understand that His love, moving toward you, just moves aside your fear. When you lay it aside and just rest—fall into His arms / just embrace His grace—then, all of a sudden, you’re not worried about the whole sinless-God-holy/you-mess thing. It’s just somehow okay.”

Well, in human relationships, I think that same thing can work, except I’m not loving a perfect person—God is—but my wife isn’t, and I’m not. So we love each other imperfectly. That always kind of stirs the fear just a little / sometimes, a lot. But if we could figure out ways of putting the fear aside, we could do that.
Now, you guys know me well enough to know that stepfamilies have lots of complexity that brings stress. Stress thickens blood; right? Why does it thicken blood? Well, in a marriage relationship, dealing with kids—so for example: “The complexity of dealing with our children, and parenting, and step-parenting, we get divided. You see it this way, and I see it this way; and we don’t agree. We end up on opposite sides. Because we’re on opposite sides, I’m now fearful that you’re prizing your kids more than me. I feel unloved, unwanted, and not number one. I’m not as important as I would like to be, and my desires are not being met. When my desires are not met, my fear goes up. So now, I feel like we’re not together—that it’s you and your kid against me,”—right? That complexity creates stress in our relationships. That stress causes me to pull away / it thickens bloodlines.

We are trying “…the triumph of hope over experience,”—that was a statement made by a guy 200 years ago—he said: “Remarriage is the triumph of hope over experience.” Life has taught you marriage doesn’t always work out, but hope lives on: “So let’s go another round/ let’s give it another shot.” So you jump in there with great hopefulness and expectation. Sometimes, it goes beautifully; and sometimes, there’s some hidden struggles there you just didn’t know about. So that’s kind of paving the way to you getting started; but then there’s these competing attachments—“your commitment to your child versus your commitment to me. Those two things sometimes compete with one another and that creates stress between us.”

“Attachment Injuries” is a big term, meaning: “I’ve been hurt before. Somebody turned and walked away in the first marriage, and that’s left a residue of hurt on my heart—“a residue of distrust about relationships and: ‘Why would I want to invest myself fully in you the way I did them because they left me? How do I know you won’t?’” Then there’s that loss of the past—and heartache and difficulty—not just your loss—but your kids’ loss / the other people around you that are invested. All of that is going on all while you have the intent of becoming a family.

So your desire—here is the cousin of fear; right?—let me say it this way: “If on one side of the coin is fear, on the other side of the coin is desire / my desire is that we come together. My desire is that we have a bonded marriage that is tight, and strong, and committed, and lovely, and we serve one another, and it’s safe.”

But my desires are not quite being met—because of the stress, because of the complexity, because of the injuries, because of my doubts, because of my fears—and it’s leading us to pull in the other direction. What does James say? “Why do you have arguments? Because your desires are not being fulfilled, and then you go about trying to make it all happen the way you want it to happen [paraphrase of James 4:1-3].” So desire is a good thing; but when we don’t get our desires met, fear is the thing that just comes along and gets in the way of everything else.
Here’s a question: “When our desires are not met and fear comes, what do we do with it?” I remember that season when we had three kids under the age of five; and we weren’t having sex because my wife was exhausted—working all day, taking care of kids. I would come home—“I’m a mom blob. That’s all I am.” She said: “I’m a mom blob. They’re sucking the life out of me. I’ve got nothing left.” [Laughter] I had this little whiny thing going on in the background; and it was: “I’ve lost my lover / my friend. She has no energy.” So I fussed, I pleaded, I pointed [whining like a baby].

In your marriage, who’s the baby? You both are—I am too. Now, how you plead, and how you whine, and how you fuss is different than mine; but it’s the same thing: “I feel detached. I feel left out. I feel you’re not responding. This is not safe—this thing with us right now is not safe. I need some help here! Where are you?” So we whine and we fuss: “I could use a little help around here,” “How come you always choose their side instead of mine?” “How come you’re never with me?” “How come you say you’re going to follow through with this parenting thing and you’re not there?” That’s whining and that’s fussing.

That’s being a baby—we all do it! We do it with God: “God, we prayed! Why didn’t You show up?” “God, we sought Your face,” “God, we tithed our money; and then my spouse just leaves,” “…then the cancer comes,” “Hello! Do You not care?” See, we whine / we complain. Our behavior is driven by the emotion of fear: “I’m afraid I’ve lost You.”

In your marriage, who’s the parent? You both are because there are times when you’re responsive to one another—you’re very in tune, you’re attending to one another, you care deeply, and you’re listening, and you’re caring, and you’re checking in with one another, and you’re communicating about life—you’re engaged. You’re the parent who’s engaged. Sometimes you go still-faced—you’ve got other things on your mind, work’s a hassle, you’re stressed. You see—we’re all the baby, and we are all the parent.

The trick is: “Does fussing get us to where we want to be? Does fussing help things; or in general, does it make things worse?” Generally, it makes things worse. Let’s do a little case study. One of the things this guy does is—he defends himself. That’s a form of fussing and pleading—it’s defending: “No you don’t understand me. I need to help you understand me,”—so we argue. I love this / I do this—I’m a master at defensiveness—it’s one of my little fussing things.

So, if my wife has an opinion about me / she thinks something about me, I really want to argue her into liking me: “You know, you don’t understand. No, really, it’s not like that. It’s really was…” “If you’d have known what I was thinking when I did what I did, then you wouldn’t be thinking this about me.” So I’m arguing with her, which is stupid; right? She’s feeling one thing, but I’m trying to change her feeling so she’ll like me.
Number one—that’s an idol / it’s a form of fussing: “I’m afraid you don’t like me right now so I’m going to argue with you.” See how that works? Fear is driving my behavior; okay? So he argues, crosses his arms, withdraws emotionally when they get in conflict with one another, and he kind of shuts down and backs away—a lot of us guys do that / I’m pretty good at that myself. Pursues sex—one of the things—it’s a nice fix for us, men, is—if we can have you, sexually, then we feel like we have you again—it’s all good. Now, I’m not saying all of sex is like that; but especially when there’s tension in the relationship. That’s one way to kind of know we’re okay—is if I have you.

Well, she adds her fussing too / she’s a baby too. She complains: “Where are you? What are you doing?” “Why aren’t you thinking?” “How come you never talk to me? I always share with you about my day. Why don’t you ever tell me about your day?” Why is she doing that? Why is she complaining?—because the baby’s feeling detached. The baby’s desire is to be connected but not feeling that, for whatever reason—so we fuss; coaches him: “What you can do differently”; withdraws sexually but pursues the problem conversationally: “If we can talk about the problem and resolve it, because talk is how I know I have you.”

Notice there’s two very different strategies there between men and women. He’s pursuing the physical to know “I have you.” She’s pursuing the verbal to know “I have you.” In this case, they have the same purpose behind them; but the other is not open to receiving what you’re looking for—that’s a problem!

Again, we’ve got to know what’s behind this. It’s not that he’s just being a jerk or she’s being a jerk for no particular reason; it’s because they have some fear that’s driving it. In fact, we can map it—we can say, “What’s driving him to be this way?” Well, he feels a little controlled when he’s lost her approval / when she says: “You’re inadequate. Why didn’t you do such and such?” “How come you didn’t follow through with Johnny?” “Why aren’t you...”—whatever that is—he feels inadequate.

The last thing he wants, ladies, is for you to believe that he’s inadequate. That is [whew!] one of our biggest fears. So he then argues with you so you’ll not think he’s inadequate. Well, there are some reasons she’s being who she is—she’s feeling unimportant, detached, lonely—so then she coaches him: “You know, if we spend a little bit more time together...” “You know, if you would go for a walk with me, then we could have a little more conversation; and I wouldn’t feel detached from you anymore.”

Now, you go, “Well, of course! She’s being that person because she really just wants to connect with him.” Hear the desire?—her desires are not being met, so fear takes over. She begins to act out of her fear instead of acting out of her desire. It leads her to be that person. By the way, that’s an unattractive person. If you were to pin her down and say, “Is this who you are?” She’d say: “No, I don’t even like being fussy like that. I don’t want to coach him and try to get him to do stuff for me. I don’t want to do any of that.”
Of course, you don’t want to be that person because it’s just that you feel like you have to because the fear is driving you to be that person. Same thing’s true of him. They’ve just become people they really don’t want to be. But of course, you fill in the gaps; and of course, you look at it and you go: “Ohhh; yes. She feels unimportant so she coaches him. His word for that is ‘controls’ him. That taps into his fear button that she’s going to try and be his momma and tell him how to be a man. That ain’t working; so he’s going to argue with her and tell her to ‘Back off!’ and ‘You don’t tell me…’ and ‘What right do you have?’” But when he does that, he’s shutting her down; right? / she is trying to communicate: “I need…” “I need...” but he’s going: “No you don’t! No you don’t!” which makes her feel unimportant and unsupported. So she does a little more of that, and he does a little more of that, and—are you with me?

We have this wonderful vicious cycle that we like to just simply call the fear dance. The irony is—the irony is that love and desire is what’s really at play. That’s really what they’re—they love each other like crazy. They’re trying to find each other, but fear makes them become people who are not really helpful people. Simultaneously, they’re being the baby and the parent to the other. What a mess! This is where people will get stuck—doing the same thing over and over again.

[Studio]

Bob: Well, we’ve been listening to Ron Deal with the first part of a message on fears in a family. This fear dance that he’s talking about—I’m thinking to myself, “That can happen in any marriage / in any family. It doesn’t take a blended or a stepfamily for that to be a factor”; right?

Dennis: It can be exacerbated there; but you’re right, Bob. There’s no question about it. The thing I like about how Ron Deal handles these issues is—he takes us back to the Scriptures and equips us in knowing how best to react and respond to our spouse.

What I’d like to do is just to invite listeners to join us at the 2016 Summit on Stepfamily Ministries, September 29 and 30, in Colorado Springs. We’re going to be at Focus on the Family—they’re co-hosting this with us. I hope folks will come; and I hope people, who are interested in having a stepfamily ministry in and through their local church / in their community, will come and meet some of the finest folks from all around the country, who’ve been doing this for decades, but there’s not been a place to go where they can share best practices.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: That’s going to happen here.

Bob: Yes, this is really for anybody who has a heart to see blended families working well and how the local church can help make that happen. The Summit on Stepfamily
Ministry happens September 29 and 30 in Colorado Springs as we’ve said. You can find out more when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com and click the link we’ve included there for the stepfamily summit.

Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com. We also have copies of Ron Deal’s book, *The Smart Stepm家庭*—that’s in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. You can order that book from us online at FamilyLifeToday.com, or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY to request your copy of the book.

Now, if you have been to a *Weekend to Remember*® in Western Michigan over the last 20 years, chances are you have run into Chris and Ruth Rose because they have been—between 1993 and 2015, they have attended 15 *Weekends to Remember*. Today, they are celebrating their 31st wedding anniversary. “Congratulations!” to the Roses. Fifteen *Weekends to Remember*—that’s how you maintain a marriage / that kind of regular marriage maintenance.

We hear about stuff like that—we get excited. We’re really excited about couples who are persevering and going the distance in marriage and figuring out how to make it work. At *FamilyLife Today*, our mission is to provide you with practical biblical help and hope for your marriage and for your family for every step of your journey.

We appreciate those of you who join us in that mission as Legacy Partners, giving each month to support this ministry, or those of you who will, from time to time, make a donation in support of *FamilyLife Today*. Right now, if you can help with a donation, we’d like to send you a copy of Barbara Rainey’s brand-new book, *Letters to My Daughters*. It’s our thank-you gift to you when you support the ministry with a donation. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to donate online; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate over the phone; or you can mail your donation to *FamilyLife Today* at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; our zip code is 72223.

Tomorrow, we’re going to be back to hear from Ron Deal about the relationship between fear and pride. Hope you can tune in tomorrow as we continue talking about the fear factor in marriage.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with help today from Mark Ramey. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We’ll see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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