Bob: It’s important for moms and dads to be on the same page when it comes to parenting their children; but as Kate and Jerry Angelo point out—in a blended family, that’s not always possible.

Kate: When they’ve spent a long weekend—maybe, at their father’s house—they come home with behavioral issues sometimes. In the perfect world, you would be able to discuss that and parent the children properly; but in a perfect world, those are the things that probably led to your divorce in the first place; you know?

Jerry: That’s right. We weren’t the only ones that have a say in how the children were being raised. We had to negotiate that with the other household as well. When they’re able to do things in the other home that we wouldn’t necessarily allow in ours, it definitely creates a competing loyalty.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Wednesday, July 6th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. There are a number of challenges that blended families face when shared custody is a part of what the courts have ordered. We’ll explore a bit of that today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. You know, in the years that you and I have worked together with our colleague, Ron Deal, we’ve known him to be passionate about seeing blended couples take a challenging situation and watch it become a triumph / a trophy of God’s grace as God works in the middle of that relationship.

Dennis: That’s right. There are few things I’ve ever seen Ron kind of come out of his seat about—and it’s something that I don’t think, in almost 24 years of broadcasting, Bob, you and I have ever done a broadcast, talking about how the children of divorce get treated if there are blended families formed after the divorce is over.
Bob: Ron is with us again today on *FamilyLife Today*. Ron, welcome back.

Ron: Thank you. It’s always good to be here.

Bob: For those who don’t know Ron, he is the author of the book, *The Smart Stepfamily,* and numerous other books about blended marriage / blended families. He speaks all around the country on this subject.

In fact, you are hosting an event in September—September 29th and 30th—in Colorado Springs. It’s the Summit on Stepfamily Ministry™. We’re doing this in conjunction with our friends at Focus on the Family®.

Ron: *FamilyLife Blended™* is focused on helping the church to be relevant to the 40 percent of families in the United States that are blended families. This event / The Summit on Stepfamily Ministry is a training event for lay ministry leaders, senior pastors, children’s pastors—anybody who wants to know anything about stepfamilies and how to minister to them.

Dennis: And we’ve partnered with Focus on a number of issues over the years. A number of years ago, we partnered with them around the needs of orphans, foster care, and adoption. That has mushroomed into quite a ministry going forward. We’re really hopeful that this partnership with Focus is going to give birth to a new movement within the church to address the needs of blended families.

Ron: Absolutely! Focus on the Family sees the need, and we’re working together. They’re hosting, this year, our event—the Summit on Stepfamily Ministry.

Bob: And you can register if you’re interested in attending. Go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com, and look for the link for the Summit on Stepfamily Ministry. To Dennis’s point, as you and I have interacted over the issues facing couples in a stepfamily, you have always come back to what’s going on in the hearts of kids who are in the midst of this kind of emotional turmoil because this is tough for kids to process.

Ron: It is. And you know, there are a lot of blessings in a healthy, blended family for children--sometimes, I think we forget that—but there are a lot of blessings for kids when they’re in a home where they’re loved. Somebody—a step parent—we’ve talked about before how step parents choose to love a stepchild; and boy, what a blessing that is! They come on the scene and bring another adult into their life who really loves them, but there are some difficulties that kids sometimes face.
We have today with us, Jerry and Kate Angelo. Thank you for being with us on *FamilyLife Today*.

**Jerry:** Thank you for letting us be here.

**Kate:** Thank you.

**Ron:** On a previous broadcast, we talked with them about their ministry for couples; and they’re a blended family.

**Bob:** Yes; you’ve shared with us already this week that both of you were previously married. You each had two kids when you came to faith in Christ, met one another at church, and God led you to form a blended family and to marry one another. You weren’t fully prepared for some of the challenges that that would bring—especially challenges that your kids would be facing as they found themselves, now, in the maelstrom of a blended relationship.

**Jerry:** That’s right. You know, we were in that honeymoon vision: “We can handle this. We’re smart parents, and we know what we need to do in this situation.” You know, we were Christ-followers and we knew that we could “…do all things in Christ, who strengthens us.” There is a lot of truth in that verse; but I think, again, we might not have fully understood the project that we were undertaking.

**Dennis:** You know, you described it earlier—as this dating relationship that you two enjoyed was a lot of fun. The kids benefitted from that. They got a chance to kind of party with you as you went out on dates and to be a part of the excitement. But then, after you tie the knot, reality sets in. And you mentioned earlier, too, you were a bit naïve about the costs that were going to come your way around that. How did you see your children begin to be impacted by the blending of your families together?

**Jerry:** I think, maybe, some of the hidden conflicts in the other homes, where we maybe had competitive-type scenarios happening. I think that a lot of them started to materialize, maybe, when we would have conversations with the children after they had conversations in the other home. In other situations, we would notice at the visitation exchanges. That’s kind of when we started to get an inkling that things weren’t always as rosy as we had hoped that they would be.

**Kate:** And I think that something that you kind of can assume from a blended family is the difficulties of not having your children with you all the time. In our cases, both of our former spouses lived in different states—in two different directions. So we had a lot of
travel back and forth with the kids for exchanges. You can see where that would be
difficult, and even holidays would be difficult.

Something that, maybe, doesn’t get addressed that much is that, when they’ve spent a
long weekend, maybe, at their father’s house, then they come home with behavioral
issues sometimes. That just might be because the parenting styles are different.

**Dennis:** Yes.

**Kate:** You know, the things that you wouldn’t allow in your home are allowed in another
home. In the perfect world, you would be able to discuss that and parent the children
properly; but in a perfect world, those are the things that probably led to your divorce in
the first place; you know?

**Jerry:** That’s right. We weren’t the only ones that had a say in how the children were
being raised. We had to negotiate that with the other household as well. When they’re
able to do things in the other home that we wouldn’t necessarily allow in ours, it
definitely creates a competing loyalty. That’s a challenge that’s very difficult to address.

**Ron:** Okay; so far, we’ve been talking about some things that a lot of people listening
right now can relate to—a lot of single parents are listening, a lot of people in blended
families, or a grandmother who has a son or a daughter who is now a step parent—they
can relate to what we’ve talked about so far.

But there was something really unique, Jerry, going on between you and your ex-
wife in a situation that involved your children. Do you mind telling us about that dynamic and
what role it played in their development and well-being?

**Jerry:** Sure. I had stayed in contact with the kids as much as I could, calling them every
day and trying to be a present father, because I knew that was very important in their
lives. I was also involved in their school, and talking with their teachers, and checking in
on them, and making sure that things were going well.

At one point, I was contacted about an alleged incident of abuse that was happening in
the other home. I was just in utter shock that that was happening—

**Ron:** Yes.

**Jerry:** —and for my kids to be in another state and to hear of this from a stranger.
Ron: You must have felt so helpless.

Jerry: Absolutely; absolutely. You know, what do you do when they’re not with you? So, it was an extremely difficult moment.

Ron: Kate, you’re watching on. You’re his partner—what are you thinking?

Kate: Well, before Jerry and I got married, I spent a lot of time seeking the Lord and saying, you know, “Would you give me a mother’s heart for these two children?” So it wasn’t that they were my step-children / it was that they were my children too. As a step parent, you really don’t have a voice.

So for me, it was struggling to navigate the waters of feeling like these were my children, too, and wanting to do something about it; then, also, trying to contain the emotions. I mean, I don’t know if you guys know this, but women are more emotional than men, generally. So when they hear of something like this, they can tend to explode. I really tried to refrain myself from doing just that.

Dennis: And, Ron, some of these issues that we are talking about here—they can be downright evil.

Ron: Yes.

Dennis: You can be having children, who are children of divorce, and in blended families, who are being exposed to pornography—

Ron: Yes.

Dennis: —they’re being exposed to other men coming into the home / acts of violence.

Ron: Yes.

Dennis: I mean, the issues are as many as can happen to children in any situation.

Ron: Yes; and those are the ones that are external—that we know something about sometimes. Then there are those subtle ones, where a parent pulls on a child’s loyalty / makes them feel guilty for enjoying the people in the other home—makes them feel like they’re “less than” because they like their step siblings; right? And then they have to carry that tension with them—the child does—carries that tension with them into their
second home. It makes a difference in who they are there and whether they have positive interactions with people or not. It can be insidious in the life of a child.

**Dennis:** So, Ron, let’s just talk about Jerry and what he was facing here with his children. What can you coach that parent, who is out of control and doesn’t have authority?

**Ron:** Yes.

**Dennis:** It’s across a state line, and they’re seeing something happen to their son or daughter—or maybe both—where they want to do something?

**Ron:** Well, let’s talk about the scale for a minute because, for a lot of people, the first thing they’re going to try to do is—if there’s a reasonable relationship with the other home, try to make contact with them and say: “Hey, this is something I heard / the school reported,” or “Johnny said such and such. Can you tell me anything about that?”

If that’s a reasonable relationship, you might be able to get some information that’s helpful. If it’s an unreasonable relationship—I think people know what I’m talking about there / it’s somebody who just doesn’t come from the same Christ-centered worldview, and they’re working on their own agenda / they are not interested in really what’s helping the child—you’re going to get lied to, you’re not going to get information, you’re going to get the door shut in your face, and that’s going nowhere.

At that point, you have to use the system; right? You have to use authorities, you have to use an attorney, and you have to use the courts to try to get information / to try to create change so that the child is not exposed to those situations again.

**Dennis:** And I would add that you need to involve the church—

**Ron:** Yes; that’s good.

**Dennis:** —your own local church—to be surrounded by wise counsel that may or may not be driven by the legal system.

**Ron:** Right; right.

**Dennis:** There may be a way around this from an arbitration standpoint—to handle things so that it doesn’t get escalated by going to court.
Ron: And that’s if people are willing to submit to that. And you certainly need the church to support you, as an individual, and as a parent.

Dennis: Yes; yes.

Ron: You need somebody on your team, praying for you.

Bob: But hang on. Isn’t it possible—in a situation like this—that a child is trying to manipulate the situation with false data because they want to be at Daddy’s house or whatever else?

Ron: Right. That just adds to the confusion. It is possible that that happens. I think our responsibility, as adults, is to err on the side of believing; you know? Let the facts bare out and prove that that was a false accusation. You don’t just close a blind eye and go on “as if…”

Bob: Right.

Ron: I think you believe them and move forward as best you can.

Kate: Well, I wanted to say that, while you do want to get your church involved and asking for prayer and support, you also need to be very careful about who you talk to about the situation because the more people who are involved, the more different points of view that you have. What human—parent or otherwise—would see alleged abuse / or see abuse of a child and not just be outraged?

Dennis: Yes.

Kate: You want to be very careful about engaging a lot of other people, and just telling them your whole story, and giving them all the information. Potentially—whether it’s true, or not true, or whatever happens in the case—you just want to be very careful about the type of people that you’re asking to support you during those times.

Jerry: It’s very important to seek good godly counsel.

Bob: Yes.

Ron: Jerry, now, you pursued some legal avenues; correct?—and hit some roadblocks.
Jerry: That’s right. Not only was there one incident of abuse, there was also, a few years later, a second incident. Each time that that happened, it was like a total alienation of communication and no transfer of information. It was a black-out.

Ron: And if I understand your story correctly, those two incidents / alleged incidents of abuse were with one child; and one of your other children was showing physical, emotional, and psychological signs of being in an environment where they were not able to grow; yes?

Jerry: That’s correct. The other child—his situation was manifesting into a physical impairment of his growth, to the point where he had lost about 10 inches of growth off of his life for that period of time.

Bob: Wait. You’re saying that his physical growth was stunted because there was abuse going on?

Jerry: That was the allegation; yes. As a matter of fact, he underwent multiple tests at a medical facility and was examined medically. They just could not explain any medical reason why he would not grow. They said that it must be psychogenic factors that were affecting him.

Ron: Now, Bob/Dennis, when a child is in an environment that is so oppressive that they’re not even growing, I mean—and that’s what we can see on the outside. There are so many children in our world, who are in this environment where, emotionally, they’re not growing; where psychologically, they’re not growing; educationally, they’re not growing; spiritually, they’re not growing because one parent is playing games against the other parent / because one parent has an environment where they’re not raising their child in a godly way—it is stunting the child.

I mean—I’ll tell you—if there’s something that gets me riled up, it’s that! What’s really difficult about this situation is—here’s Jerry, trying to be the responsible father / trying to do the right thing by his kids; and yet—because they share custody / because there’s game playing going on on the other side of the equation—he’s limited in what he can do. But what I know about you is that you didn’t quit; right? You kept pursuing the situation and trying to help your children.

Jerry: We couldn’t quit. There were times when I didn’t know where I was going to get that money to pay that attorney because, you know, you have to do that. You have to have those resources; or there’s nothing that you can do, seemingly.
Ron: And had you not kept fighting—I mean, that’s just the thing that I keep coming back to today. You know, we, as Christian, have got to fight for our kids—we’ve got to fight for our kids. In situations—whether it’s just sending them off to school each day; sending them off to be on the playground or in the neighborhood with other kids; or, in this case, it’s sharing them between homes and there’s something going on that’s stifling who God has created them to be—we’ve got to be the ones who pursue, pursue, pursue.

Kate: And I think it’s important just to say that we were fighting for the kids, not against the other parent.

Ron: That’s really important—I appreciate you saying that. That’s keeping your heart in the right place so you know what the focus is.

Jerry: And that’s not easy.

Ron: No; it’s not. Anytime you’re paid evil—to “repay it with good,” as Romans 12 says—

Jerry: Exactly.

Ron: —is an incredibly difficult thing to do.

Dennis: So, Ron, I want you to comment on one other thing: “What happens in a situation, where you go head-to-head with a former spouse that has deep pockets, and can stretch this thing out indefinitely, and play, really, hardball?—and you’re existing marriage / the blended marriage is really beginning to suffer?” I mean, it could be at the point where—well, comment on it if you would.

Ron: Yes; you’re bringing up a good point. Sometimes the challenges in the blended family are not so much about what’s happening in your home—it’s about what’s being brought into your home from the other home; right? It’s the stress that’s created by somebody else outside. That’s a very real thing that couples have to deal with.

I’d love to say that every situation kind of has a victory story the way Jerry and Kate’s does. I’ve talked with too many people, through the years, to know that it doesn’t always work out that way.

But one thing I do know is that God’s people have to continue to rely on and trust in Him, and keep pressing for what’s right / keep pushing for what should happen, and not
quit. I just see so many people, in Jerry’s situation, who quit / who just kind of throw up their hands and say: “The legal system’s against us. We don’t have the money that the other family has. You know what? It’s just a whole lot easier if we just let it go.” No! This is a child!

**Dennis:** And here’s where I want to go back and underline—double underline—about seeking wise counsel / godly counsel—not the counsel of Facebook® or going on Twitter® and asking for tweets in response to how to handle this. No; huddle up with people, who’ve got a long history of wisdom and track record of knowing what to say according to the Bible, and listen carefully to them. Then, commit it to prayer, and be very careful how you walk / being wise about how you walk.

**Bob:** Right.

**Ron:** If I could add one thing to people, who are in the church today, it would be: “Please receive the stories from Jerrys and Kates of the world, and don’t judge them.” I was talking with a couple, just this week; and their story is kind of similar to theirs. When they went to their church for help, what they got was: “Well, you kind of got yourself into this situation. So…”

**Dennis:** Oh, wow!

**Ron:** And all that does is just—it totally decompresses somebody / it just deflates them—and now, the church is not an asset in their life and God becomes suspect. No! We need to receive, we need to support, we need to get behind, and we need to help!

**Dennis:** There are a lot of broken people in the church.

**Ron:** Yes.

**Dennis:** As in, *all!*

**Ron:** All! [Laughter]

**Bob:** And Ron, what you are seeking to do, through FamilyLife Blended, is to help people understand that God is in the business of redemption / that He brings beauty out of broken things with your writing ministry, with the speaking that you do, with the upcoming Summit on Stepfamily Ministry that’s happening in September in Colorado Springs, where we’re helping to equip people to work in local churches with blended and stepfamilies. This is really what your heartbeat’s all about.
I want to encourage our listeners: “If you’re in a blended situation and you’ve not yet read Ron Deal’s book, *The Smart Stepfamily*, go online to FamilyLifeToday.com and you can order a copy from us online. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY and you can order a copy of Ron’s book over the phone.”

If you’d like more information about the upcoming Summit on Stepfamily Ministry, it’s September 29th and 30th in Colorado Springs. We’re going to be partnering together with our friends at Focus on the Family for this fourth annual event. I hope many of you will come join us and be a part of the Summit—get more information, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com—or call, toll-free, at 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

Now, I don’t know if you have yet attended a wedding this summer. We’ve gotten lots of invitations and have been to a few weddings of friends. We’ve still got some weddings that are coming up later on this summer. We think weddings are wonderful, but we think anniversaries are even more wonderful because those anniversaries are markers / they’re milestones of perseverance, and of love, and of faithfulness. And we want to celebrate anniversaries. We’re the Proud Sponsor of Anniversaries™ because God has called us to provide practical biblical help and hope for marriages and families over the years.

For 40 years, we’ve been helping more couples have more anniversaries. We just want to say, “Thank you,” to those of you who are a part of helping to make all of that happen. As you help support the ministry of *FamilyLife Today*, you are partnering with us in all that we do, here at FamilyLife; and we’re grateful for your partnership.

You can make a donation today when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com, or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate. Or you can mail your donation to us. I’ll give you the address in just a minute. Let me just mention that here, during the summer, is a particularly challenging time for ministries like ours because we often see a decline in the support that’s coming in. So, if you’re able to help with a donation today, it would be very much appreciated. Again, you can do it online at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY; or mail your donation to *FamilyLife Today* at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to talk about how you can be used by God in your neighborhood, in your community, in your church to be part of helping couples go the distance in marriage / helping them thrive in their family. Our friends, Dave and Ann
Wilson, have some thoughts on that; and we’ll hear from them tomorrow. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. Join us back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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