Bob: When two families merge—when they blend—and now there are stepchildren and stepsiblings—one of the forgotten parts of this equation often, is the new step-grandparents. Here is Ron Deal.

Ron: Sometimes, when somebody else made a choice—and all of the sudden, you've got not just one, but maybe you've got five step-grandchildren—what if you had a bunch—what if you already thrown yourself relationship with your biological grandchildren, now you've got five more? It's like—“How do I fit all of this in? How do we do the finances?” I'm just saying—I've seen and been involved in situations where the step-grandparents just aren't terribly excited about this. That can be a disappointment to their adult child.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, July 30th. Our host is Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. Step-grandparenting can be tricky. We have some thoughts today from Ron Deal on how to make it work more effectively. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. There was a conference back last fall for grandparents. We had some friends who put this together. We helped promote this event—a national conference of grandparenting.

Dennis: The Legacy Conference.

Bob: That's right. One of the speakers at the conference was Ron Deal who joins us in studio today and is the leader of FamilyLife Blended®. Ron, welcome back to FamilyLife Today.

Ron: Thank you.

Bob: You got invited to come and speak at this conference about step-grandparenting which, Dennis, I don't know if I ever even stopped to think about that subject—but that's an issue that a lot of families that all of the sudden find themselves in with very little preparation and very little coaching.
Dennis: I would say most grandparents feel overlooked when it comes to blending a family together; and I can’t imagine what it would be like—to feel like—in some regards, you may be an outsider—

Ron: Yes.

Dennis: —to get back in with grandkids that—at one point—you were their heros. You’re hearing a lot about this subject as you speak around the country.

Ron: I am, Dennis. Bob, in preparation for that Legacy Conference, I did some homework. I do this every single day, but I was a little shocked to discover that 40-percent of families in the U.S. have a step-grandparent—40-percent! By the way, that’s stat is 20 years old—it’s old.

Dennis: So, it’s likely higher.

Ron: It’s likely much higher. The other thing that I found was that the prediction that demographers have is that by year 2030 in the U.S.—there will be one step-grandchild for every 1.7 biological grandchildren—less than 2 to 1 ratio. It is a very common experience. It’s going to continue to be a common experience—and of course, it touches all three of the generations.

Bob: Not just all three generations, but I’m thinking about all of the different permutations of what makes a stepfamily—and then how that expands to the grandparenting. So, if our son and daughter-in-law get a divorce, and now she is the custodial parent, where do we fit into that; right?

Ron: Exactly.

Bob: If there’s an estrangement between our son and this daughter-in-law, we may be cut out of the picture—

Ron: Right.

Bob: —with our grandkids.

Ron: What that means is that, at Christmastime, when you want time with your grandkids, there’s probably four or five or six other sets of grandparents who, also want time with the grandkids. So, all of the sudden, life just got really complicated fast.

Bob: Then, I’m thinking about the other situation which is where our son or our daughter marries somebody who has been previously married and brings grandkids in, and we didn’t just become new in-laws—we became new step-grandparents—and it happened in an instant. So, instead of watching these kids be born, we’re now step-grandparents to a 13-year-old and a 15-year-old that we haven’t ever known before.
Ron: What if you have some real mixed feelings about that new relationship? By the way, this is one of the things we are hearing from people: “Hey, I have step-grandchildren. By the way, I also have some biological grandchildren. I’ve known them their whole lives, and they’ve known us—we have traditions and time together and all sorts of things. Now, I’m trying to figure out: “What do I do, and how do I find time for the step-grandchildren? But that relationship came about because my child”—let’s say—"made some really poor decisions; and we have mixed feelings about those decisions.”

“Now, those decisions have resulted in them getting married and having stepchildren—that gives us step-grandchildren—we never really wanted this. It kind of feels like if we jump in as step-grandparents and throw ourselves into those relationships, that somehow, we’re saying what my son or daughter did is okay. We don’t feel like it’s okay. We’re kind of stuck between, not wanting to give approval—but at the same time—the grandchildren shouldn’t be the ones that suffer.”

That’s the kind of difficulties that grandparents are finding themselves in—trying to wade through these waters and figure out what to do.

Dennis: You outline three different kinds of step-grandparents. There are step-grandparents who step into the life of a child and actually, are in a long-term relationship helping to raise that child to maturity.

Ron: Right. They’ve been in a long-term—we call them long-term step-grandparents, meaning maybe, they were a stepparent at a younger age; and they raised a stepchild, and that stepchild is now an adult, now married, now has children of their own. Technically, those are step-grandchildren to the grandparent; right? But you’ve been in their life since day-one.

That long-term step-grandparent, probably, has more of a relationship with their step-grandchildren like a biological grandparent would have with their biological grandchildren. It just feels more natural and more connected because of the length of the relationship.

Bob: Of course, all of this depends on the kind of relationship that the stepchild has with the stepparent because that’s step-grandparenting is all incumbent on—“Are we still friends”—

Ron: That’s right.

Bob: —“with this child that we helped raise?”

Ron: Let’s just kind of walk through the possibilities. On the one hand, let’s say you have a great relationship with your stepchild who, now, becomes a parent. You have
step-grandchildren. Odds are you’re Grandma—end of story. That’s going to be a wonderful, easy ride.

Maybe you have—on the other end of the continuum—a really awkward, difficult relationship with your stepchild who, now, has children. It can go one of two ways. What I see a lot is that all of the sudden, the step-grandchildren create an opportunity for connection.

They don’t know you as anything different—they feel like you’re Grandma to them or Grandpa to them. All of the sudden, it helps your relationship with your adult stepchild. They watch you be grandmother to their kids.

Dennis: By the way, if you want to win a parent’s heart—

Ron: There you go.

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: —bless their child.

Ron: That’s it.

Dennis: I mean find ways to build into their lives. I’m not talking about spoiling them with gifts. I’m talking about finding a way to encourage them, build them up, speak truth into their lives, and be an asset to them.

Ron: I hear from a lot of long-term step-grandparents who say, “You know what? My salvation with my stepchild was the grandkids. That was the backdoor that improved my relationship with them.” I say, “Amen! Hallelujah! Whatever it takes.” Pour into that grandchild, and all of the sudden, their parent is more appreciative of you than they’ve been before.

Dennis: What would you say to the person who is listening to our broadcast right now that would go—“That’s me. I’m in that situation.” How can they take advantage of it?

Ron: You know it’s the heart attitude of inclusion—and connectedness is always a good, positive thing. I mean, extending yourself in love generally works on your behalf—wouldn’t we assume that as believers; right?

Dennis: Right.

Ron: Love conquers a lot of things. Now sometimes, you are not given permission to love. One of the barriers here for step-grandparents is that middle generation. Let’s say you have a son or daughter or stepson—stepdaughter who blocks your ability to be a grandparent. Well, they can. They can just say, “No, the kids are not available”; “No,
we’re not going to come over and spend time on Sunday afternoon and have lunch. No—” They can do that, and that’s really unfortunate—it’s a heartbreak when that happens.

What I would say to that step-grandparent is “Okay, you have limited opportunity. Make the most of what you have and don’t give up.”

Bob: I’d just throw in here—it can be our attitude: “I’m entitled to a relationship with my grandchild.” I think we’ve got to die to that entitlement at some point and go—“I can woo that. I can try to earn that. I can pray for that—but I’m going to have to let go of that sense of entitlement.”

Dennis: If you try to cash that chip in, you can alienate even further.

Ron: Yes. Yes, you certainly don’t want to do that because then that just almost invites somebody to say, “Oh no you don’t deserve”; right? Then, you’ve got them digging in their heels.

Bob: So, you’ve got long-term grandparenting. What’s a second kind of grandparenting?

Ron: The second one we call inherited step-grandparents. Here is what’s happened probably in your life. You’ve had a son or a daughter who made a choice to marry somebody who has kids. So, your son—let’s just say that—your son has become a stepdad. Well, you just inherited step-grandchildren.

Now notice, this was not your choice. You’re just cruising along in life. Your son made a choice to marry somebody with kids. You didn’t make that choice. You may be in favor of it. You may be happy about it—but at the same time, you didn’t ask for grandkids—you didn’t ask for this to be brought into your life.

I mean most grandparents are excited when they become grandparents. It’s a little weird sometimes, to hear people say the very first-time, but—“Yes, I’m getting used to the idea.” Then they throw themselves into. Sometimes, when somebody else made a choice—and all of the sudden you’ve got not just one, but maybe you’ve got five step-grandchildren—what if you already had a bunch? What if you already had—you’ve already thrown yourself into relationships with your biological grandchildren—and now, you’ve got five more? It’s like—“How do I fit all of this in? How do we do the finances?”

I’m just saying—I’ve seen and been involved in situations where the step-grandparents just aren’t terribly excited about this. That can be a disappointment to their adult child.

Bob: We’ve got to keep in mind—you don’t have an extended relationship with this new 11-year-old step-grandchild. You don’t know anything about what they like. You don’t
know anything about their history, for the most part. You are meeting them for the first-time at 11. They are not sure what to think about you.

**Ron:** —And you feel a little divided. You’ve got three other biological grandchildren. You do know what they like. You do have a relationship with them. Now, I’m supposed to take time away from them to invest time with this 11-year-old that I don’t know?

**Bob:** —who is not sure he wants a relationship with you. The easiest thing to do for a step-grandparent in that situation is go—“Let’s just back off and go where we’re wanted” —but I hear you saying, “That may be the easiest thing to do, but that may not be the healthiest thing to do.”

**Ron:** I think we should always—I mean the life and times of Jesus Christ is a guy who walked around turning outsiders into insiders. Is that not the heart of the Gospel? People who were far from God, and He brings them near to God. He extends the hand of friendship, if you will. He extends love and grace to people who don’t even know that they need it or want it. That’s the heart of our Savior.

I think anytime we do that in any situation—let’s just paint a scenario like we were talking about before—let’s say your son or daughter made a choice. It’s a choice you didn’t agree with. There are negative repercussions. You’re not feeling great about it, but—bam!—you’ve got an 11-year-old step-granddaughter. I think you swallow hard, and you go—“Lord, help me be an influence in this 11-year-old’s life—help us find ways of connecting—we’ve got to figure this out.” We don’t just pull back and go—“Well, this shouldn’t be, so I’m out of here.”

**Dennis:** I like where you are going with that, Ron, because I was just sitting back and thinking, “Most grandparents—when they are finally declared grandparents—are kind of wondering, ‘What’s my assignment here?’” It’s not necessarily cut and dried with every one of your adult children how they want you to be the grandparent in that situation. Then, you extrapolate the step-grandparenting assignment which that’s a new category for a lot of people. They don’t even know—well, it’s back to being dizzy again.

**Ron:** Yes.

**Dennis:** “How do I relate to this person that’s not biologically connected to me?”

**Ron:** You know here’s a principle that I think would apply with both biological grandparenting as well as step-grandparenting: Define the relationship—we’re going to have to have some conversations.

So, you go to your son or daughter; and you say, “Look, what role would you like for me to play? Here’s what I would love to do. Here’s where I’m interested. Here’s my heart—my passion. How does that fit with you? Your schedule? Your needs? You have a wife
or a husband to consider and their parents. Bring us in and give us some guidance so that we can come together and define what our role as grandparents look like.”

There is one other category, and it’s what we call the later-life step-grandparent. This occurs when someone later in life marries somebody who is a grandparent. So, let’s just paint a scenario.

You maybe, had a 30-year marriage, and your spouse dies. A few years go by, you’re in your mid-60’s—early 70’s—and you fall in love again. You marry somebody who is a grandparent. You instantly have adult step-children and step-grandchildren.

Notice, you’re the one who is motivated. You’re the one who made the choice to marry this person. Typically, that step-grandparent is highly motivated to get to know all the generations—both the adult stepchildren as well the step-grandchildren—but the adult step-children and the step-grandchildren may not have any need for you whatsoever in their lives.

What we often find in this scenario is it’s the adult children—now adult stepchildren—who go—“You know what? You’re Dad’s wife. You’re not my mom, and you’re not the grandmother to my kids. It’s fine if you show up at Christmas, and we sure want you to cook the turkey at Thanksgiving—but don’t step into that grandmother role. My mom was grandma—end of story. That adult child has a lot to say about whether or not that step-grandparent can play any role at all in the life of the family.

Bob: I just add to that—and we’ve talked about this before—patience—patience is a key virtue in all of this—and then grace. Keep in mind that your kids—your step-kids, their kids—everybody in this scenario has a context for what they are feeling. Loss has been a part of most of these people’s experience—and when loss is a factor—that can pop up in some relationally challenging ways; right?

This is just where we have to be the people who say, “You know what? I’m going to give a ton of grace. When you start acting out of your loss and start getting angry or frustrated or isolating yourself, I’m just going to go—’Okay, there is a context for this, and I’m going to give a lot of grace here.’”

Ron: This later-life step-grandparent dynamic essentially creates what we call adult step-families. The person who gets caught in the middle of the bunch is the biological parent. Let’s—back to our scenario—this man has married a woman later in his life—in their early 70’s—and his children—they loved Mom. She was a wonderful woman in their life—and she will always be Mom—and to the grandchildren—she will always be Grandmother.

Dad can—he’s got to be careful because if he’s in a position of demanding that his kids welcome her as they would a mother—I just find that that backfires. He’s got to be patient, too. Now, I also want the new step-grandmother in that scenario to not become
so possessive. I’ve seen some situations where they look to their husband and say, “Look, if they don’t invite me, then you can’t go be with your kids either—and your grandkids.” Oh! Wow!

**Dennis:** Yes.

**Ron:** That will divide really, really fast. All that does is sabotage yourself in the family. You have to make some sacrifices. Keep the connections alive so that eventually they see you as an asset—somebody new to get to know and hopefully, they do extend themselves and invite you in.

**Dennis:** Parents in any family are gatekeepers—

**Ron:** That’s right.

**Dennis:** —to give grandparents access to their grandkids.

**Bob:** You’ve just started exploring this subject. I mean we’ve just touched the tip of the iceberg in talking about it today. Have you written much on this? Can you point us to where we can get additional help?

**Ron:** Yes, actually, a number of my resources do talk about adult stepfamilies and the step-grandparent dynamic. The most recent is *Daily Encouragement for the Smart Stepfamily*, which is a one-year devotional for blended families that talks about a variety of subjects as you walk through the year.

*The Smart Stepfamily* book and our DVD series that churches can use also will talk about some of these things. Then the books, *The Smart Stepmom* and *The Smart Stepdad*, each have chapters on these subjects.

**Bob:** Of course, we’ve got these resources available in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center, and listeners can go online and look for the right starting place—where would you say? *The Smart Stepfamily*?

**Ron:** *The Smart Stepfamily* would be a good start.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** I’d encourage people to look at the book of James. James, Chapter 1, verses 2 through 8 would be a great passage of Scripture for any step-family. Let me just read it carefully: “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”
Let me just say here—in all this conversation of feeling dizzy—I think this next command here in Scripture is really timely: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him, but let him ask in faith with no doubting. For the one who doubts is like the wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

If you are in a step-family situation—whether you are a step-parent, a step-grandparent, a bio-parent—and you need wisdom, call on God. Ask Him to give you wisdom: “How do we handle this, Lord? This is so complex. We can’t begin to sort through all the pieces of the puzzle here”—but God meets us at that point.

Bob: Yes. One of the things, Ron, that you have said is that you’ve got help on this subject. Folks can go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com. You’ve written books and articles—and again, there is information online at FamilyLifeToday.com.

You and your team are working—now—on an event that’s going to take place October 24th and 25th. This is our 6th Annual Summit on Stepfamily Ministry. It’s going to be happening in Little Rock. In addition to you speaking at the event, Linda Ranson Jacobs—who heads up divorce-care for kids is going to be here. Dave and Meg Robbins will be speaking—Lamar and Ronnie Tyler and others. The focus this year is on parenting in complex families.

As often as not, when you’re talking about blended families, the issues that people are asking you about are parenting issues. That’s what the focus will be. Now, this is an event for pastors, church leaders, laymen and women—anybody who has a heart for step and blended families and wants to help those families thrive in local churches—they should plan to be in Little Rock on October 24th and 25th for the 2018 Summit on Stepfamily Ministry.

There is information available online at FamilyLifeToday.com—or call 1-800-FL-TODAY if you have any questions. There is early-bird pricing available now—so get in touch with us quickly to take advantage of that. Again, the website, FamilyLifeToday.com—sign up for the Summit on Stepfamily Ministry happening in October.

I know for some of our listeners, school has only been out for about five or six weeks now. For others of our listeners in other parts of the country, school is starting back up next week. Can you believe it? There are some folks headed back to elementary and junior high and high school as early as next week in some parts of the country.

That’s why we’re encouraging moms and dads now, to sign up for a 30-Day Prayer Challenge encouraging you to be praying for your children every day for the next 30 days as they head back to school—whether they are in kindergarten or whether they are in graduate school. We will send you a daily prayer-prompt via email. It’ll give you Scripture and specific ideas on things to be praying for, for your children.
You can sign up for the 30-Day Prayer Challenge right now at FamilyLifeToday.com, and we’ll get you started immediately with your daily prayer prompts. Here at FamilyLife we are all about trying to effectively develop godly marriages and families—and praying for our kids is one of the ways that that happens.

We’re excited because there are a number of churches around the country who have already contacted us, and they are launching Art of Parenting™ groups this fall. In fact, some of them are kicking off the launch by showing the movie that we’ve put together called Like Arrows as a special church event.

If you’d like information about FamilyLife’s Art of Parenting video series—or the movie, Like Arrows, again, go to our website—FamilyLifeToday.com. Maybe, talk to your church leadership about whether this is something you want to do in your local church—and then get in touch with us. You can call us at 1-800-FL-TODAY.

Let me just say a word of thanks to those of you who partner with us so that all that we’re doing here at FamilyLife can actually happen. Those of you who are regular, monthly Legacy Partners and those of you who will from time to time help support the ministry with a donation—we are so grateful for your partnership.

In fact, we’d like to express our gratitude today—if you’re able to help with a donation—by sending you a copy of the book that Dennis Rainey wrote recently called Choosing a Life That Matters. It’s our gift to you when you go online to donate at FamilyLifeToday.com—or when you call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make a donation. You can also mail your donation, along with your request for the book. Write to FamilyLife Today at Box 7111, Little Rock, Arkansas; our zip code is 72223.

Tomorrow, we want to introduce you to a father who has a rather unusual family—a large family. His name is Pastor Gennadiy—and you’ll meet him tomorrow and hear about his 35 children. That comes up tomorrow. Hope you can be with us 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. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.


We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you’ve benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider donating today to help defray the costs?

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