Bob: Ronnie Tyler remembers there were things about being in a blended family that surprised her.

Ronnie: I didn’t know that I wouldn’t like to see someone else discipline the kids or, you know: “Is he strict on these kids because they’re my kids?” or “Is he just strict? I don’t know.” I never wanted anyone to say, “Oh, you married this man and you allowed him to...” you know?—so it was all of those thoughts going through.

I’m like: “Okay, this is husband over here; these kids are, clearly, not acting right,” you know. [Laughter] Then, I still have those feelings, like: “Okay; how do we handle this?” and “How do I talk to him about what I’m feeling?”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, July 1st. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. There are lots of surprises that come with being stepparents. We’ll hear from Ronnie and Lamar Tyler about some of what they’ve experienced. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. If I was to pull back and think about jobs I would not do well in—I mean, like nuclear scientist—I would not be a good nuclear scientist/astrophysicist—stuff that requires math and science would not be where I would excel. [Laughter] But honestly, one of the toughest jobs, I think, in America is stepmom or stepdad—

Ann: I agree.

Bob: —because the relational dynamics—I mean, being a mom or a dad’s hard. Being a stepmom or a stepdad—and trying to work through all that’s wrapped up in that—man, we’re talking about something that’s really challenging!

Dave: You know, I would have to agree. I mean, I honestly think I’d rather be a rocket scientist—and I couldn’t do it—but to step in, and try to lead a family, and blend that family together—that is a tall, tall task.

Bob: Well, and you have some experience with this, as we’ve shared before. You grew up in a family, where your dad left, and you had a stepdad come in; right?
Dave: Yes; I had a stepdad come in—well, actually I had a stepmom come in with her son. I was that other son, and I resented it. I didn’t want to like her, even though my dad’s in love with her—I’m like: “I don’t want you in my life. I didn’t make this choice; you did. So what do I do with that?”

Bob: Yes; well, we are going to hear today an excerpt from a new podcast that our friend, Ron Deal, has begun. It’s a podcast called FamilyLife Blended, and it’s just gotten underway. In fact, if you want to find out more about this podcast or any of the other podcasts that we’re creating, here at FamilyLife®, you can go to FamilyLifeToday.com and the information’s available there.

This is one of the episodes from Ron’s podcast, where he sat down and talked with Ronnie and Lamar Tyler. Ronnie and Lamar are a husband and wife, who live in Atlanta. They have a ministry called Black and Married with Kids. It’s the largest independent African-American marriage and parenting site on the web. Ronnie and Lamar have four children, and Lamar’s journey into being a stepdad was a tough journey. They had a hard path to follow, and that’s one of the things they talked about when they sat down for the podcast with Ron Deal.

[Podcast]

Lamar: Coming into the situation, I definitely had some assumptions that Ronnie’s kids would take a liking to me and keep a liking to me. I think that the first part—they took a liking to me—I don’t think they necessarily kept a liking to me.

Immediately, in the short term, I was definitely thinking that I would be able to step in, not necessarily—I didn’t want to replace their dad—but I was thinking that I could be a father-like figure for them—like a strong male role model for them/a strong father figure for them to pick up the slack in any areas that they needed. I thought they would be receptive to that.

What I can say is—I also thought that our friends and family—because I think everyone respected me, I thought they would respect my role in Ronnie’s life and our relationship, if I can say that. Those are all the things I came, into it, thinking would happen; and they didn’t necessarily fall out and play out that way.

Ron: Okay; even as he shares those, Ronnie, can you identify an assumption that you had about how your kids would get along with him? What was your side of that?

Ronnie: I mean, to be honest, I just assumed everybody was going to get along. I just—you know, I just assumed that.

Ron: —why not?
Ronnie: Yes; why not? I never stopped to think any differently.

Ron: Did they get along well in the beginning?

Ronnie: Yes; I think they got along well in the beginning.

Ron: They took to him.

Ronnie: Yes.

Ron: That feeds, of course, the assumption that that’s just going to continue to go forward. It started off well; why would it not?

Lamar: It definitely does. I think, a lot of times, what I was thinking—I think what a lot of people think is [before the wedding]: “Okay; based off their first impression, and the first impression is good: ‘Okay; we’re good.’ The first month is good; the first year’s good: ‘Hey, we’re through the weeds,’ and ‘If we can get all the way through the wedding, and everything is still fine, I think that, okay—we feel like—‘Okay; we got this thing under control. We’re making all the right moves; doing all the right things,’” only to find out that may not be the case.

Ron: I’m reflecting on your comment about when you were making the film, *Blended*, discovering that lots of people have a very similar journey. Of course, not all the details are exactly the same; but there’s a similar flow to it. What you just said is a *very* common experience, I think, for couples in blended families. Things started off pretty good: “The kids were open, and we get along. We kind of hang out.” You’re spending time with her kids, and that seemed to go well. With a little bit of time, you just feel like: “Okay; we’ve got momentum. All those stories we hear about other people—that’s not going to be us.” But it did turn a corner somewhere.

Lamar: It definitely did. One of the things I’ll often think about, with stepfamily situations and with the stepparent, is that everyone—the children to the family and everyone around—always wants you to love the child as if they were your own; but they only want the good part of love. [Laughter] That means take them to Disney, hug them, kiss them—

Ron: —buy them stuff.

Lamar: Exactly—buy them stuff, tuck them in at night.

But I don’t feel like they want the stern parts of love—the correction. If they’re not doing the right things, correcting them/putting them on the right path—the discipline parts of love and those other pieces like that.
I think, once we were living together, all under one roof and we were married, then maybe with our son—he would do something that I may deem as disrespectful; or Ronnie may tell him, “Hey, do ‘x,’ ‘y,’ and ‘z,’” and he didn’t do all of those things—and I would step in. I think that’s when we, initially, began to butt heads.

Ron: Yes; it’s like: “Wait a minute! What just happened? I thought we were okay. Now, you’re looking at me like I’m a stranger—like you don’t have that same respect for me that you did ten minutes ago.” Is that what it was like for you?

Lamar: Yes; you definitely do. I always think, in those situations, it feels like the child—hands on their hip, ready to draw, at all moments—like their weapon against you, which is the dreaded: “Well, you’re not my dad,” “You’re not my mom,”—right?—“I don’t have to listen to you,”—and all these types of things.

I think where it starts to become a slippery slope is when other people around them can also be feeding those thoughts into them—whether it’s friends, or whether it’s family, or whether it’s the other biological parent, or it’s not just everyone not being on the same page and being on board to move the family together in the right direction.

Ron: Yes; Ronnie, I’m wondering—as you begin to watch this go differently, now, for your child and Lamar—what was going on in you?

Ronnie: I just had a lot of feelings—because it just wasn’t a good feeling—because the first thing is: “I just didn’t know why my child was acting out, and I did not stop to ask him.” He was more like probably between nine and eleven—I’d have to go back and do the math—but he wasn’t a baby.

We didn’t have any issues with my daughter. She was two, going on three, when we were dating—turning from two to three years old when we got married; so she was three probably, when we got married, and just didn’t have those issues with her. She started calling Lamar “Dad” shortly after we got married. He was just “Dad” or “Daddy” or whatever.

But my son—he just started acting out—being really resentful, not wanting to cooperate, not wanting to do family things. Then, when you did ask him to do family things, he would almost do things to ruin it—like, just with his attitude—like I just wished he wouldn’t have come; you know? Because he just like ruined the whole time. I’m sitting here, fussing and arguing with him—that wasn’t good. I just never even recognized that I needed to stop and talk to him about: “What is he feeling?” “What is he going through?” “How did he feel about us getting married?” I just never did that.

Another thing I was feeling was—with Lamar, it’s just like, “Okay; hold on here.” I didn’t know that I wouldn’t like to see someone else discipline the kids; or I didn’t like having thoughts about—I was thinking: “Is he strict on these kids because they’re my kids?” or “Is he just strict? I don’t know.” Or just feeling that urge to want to protect my kids...
because I never wanted anyone to say, “Oh, you married this man; and you allowed him to…”—you know?

Ron: Yes.

Ronnie: Although, he wasn’t necessarily doing anything like that; but you feel the need to want to protect your kids or to say, “Hey, I’ll take care of this,” or whatever. It was just like all of those thoughts going through: “Okay; this is my husband over here. These kids are, clearly, not acting right,”—you know? [Laughter]

Ron: Yes.

Ronnie: Then, I still have those feelings like: “Okay; how do I handle this?” and “How do I talk to him about what I’m feeling?”

Ron: The Bible talks a lot about anxiety and how we are borrowing worry from tomorrow—that’s essentially what that is. Sometimes, we borrow guilt from tomorrow. You were fast-forwarding: “Well, what if they come back to me someday and they say: ‘You didn’t do your job, Mom. You didn’t protect us.’” You’re responding out of guilt that you might feel someday; it influences who you are now.

It’s funny how that stuff happens; because you have the best intentions and good will towards him and towards your kids; and he has the best of intentions and good will. Everybody’s trying to do the right thing and, yet, sometimes, you still end up going, “I’m not so sure we’re on the same team.”

Ronnie: Right; yes.

Lamar: Exactly.

Ron: And if there are others—were there others in your situation that were speaking in different messages that—as you said, Lamar—that weren’t necessarily encouraging the family moving towards one another—all the parts?

Lamar: Sure; I know the kids’ biological father—when he was around, he definitely wasn’t on board, moving in the right direction—which even still, as a stepparent, I don’t understand this; because I’m saying and I’m thinking, in my mind: “Well, I’m here. Me being here is actually helping your children out—them having a constant presence, them having somebody to help lift the burden and some of the load of being a single parent with their mom, and being here to fill in the gap in the times that you’re not.” So it definitely was that and just other—

Ron: You kind of felt like: “Hey, I’m due a little respect here. I’m helping you out.”

Lamar: Exactly.
Ron: He didn’t see it that way?

Lamar: Not at all. [Laughter] I think what it was—I mean, from my point of view—and I’m sure Ronnie has hers—from my point of view, I think it was almost the opposite [of the biological parent]: “Even though I don’t want to be fully engaged with the kids, I don’t want you to be either.”

Ronnie: Right; from him, in particular—he told me one day: “Your son is struggling with this,” and “Ronnie, you should tell your son that you will never love another man more than you love him,”—that came out of his mouth.

I’m like: “What are you telling him? Why would you even phrase it that way?—like comparing my love to his love? It’s just like—I don’t even know how to respond to that.” He was like, “Just say it; just say it to him.” It just keeps ringing; because he kept repeating it over and over, “Just tell him—tell him you’ll never love anyone else more than you love him.” I’m like, “What are you telling my son?”

That was the first—to me—moment, where I thought, “He’s telling my son some things about our relationship and about our family.” Then, I just heard other things like—just from family—about like: “You were better off. You could do this alone. Why did you have to get married? You owned the house; you have a nice job. You could take care of your kids alone.”

Ron: “You’re sufficient. You don’t need somebody else.”

Ronnie: Right.

Ron: Lamar, I’m curious—did you pick up on some of the messages that Ronnie was getting from her family?

Lamar: I did; and that was directly because just the communication between us—which I’ll give Ronnie credit for—because a lot of what was going on, she would come and share with me. Though it was hurtful to me, I still felt gracious that she shared those things.

A lot of times, as we faced turmoil and different things in our marriage, I really just thank God and realize how blessed I was that, even though Ronnie was being tugged by the kids, I could—I knew I was tugging her, to a degree, on my end; I knew family may be tugging her on another end—that through it all, she stayed committed to the marriage.

Because I know that, in a lot of situations, she could’ve easily just said: “You know what? I didn’t sign up for this. This is not what I planned, and it’s not worth it.” I think so many couples just throw up their hands and say: “It’s not worth it. This is not what I imagined.” But she didn’t do that.
I told her, at the time: “I thank you for not giving up. I know it’s tough. I know it has to be an incredible feeling to be in the middle of not knowing if you’re doing the right things for your kids, not knowing if you’re doing the right things for your marriage.” But the fact that, like I said, she stuck it out—the fact that we were able to come closer together and not allow cracks in the foundation of our marriage—I just appreciated her even more and loved her even more for that.

Ron: And your empathy—communicating back to her: “Thank you for telling me. Thank you for including—this must be hard for you.” Boy, that’s huge; because it’s you getting outside of just how it impacts you—and stepping into her shoes and seeing that she is in an awkward situation—and that you’re sensitive to that. That has to make it a little bit easier for you to trust him with hard things—I would think.

Ronnie: It is—I mean, it was. I definitely appreciated him just because I knew that he was trying. He is not perfect; you know, he was 28; I was in my 30s when we got married.

But to your point, Ron—I just appreciate Lamar; because a lot of times, he may have wanted to do things differently, but he didn’t because of how he saw it impacted me. He may have been in his right to do certain things—because this is his home or this is whatever—but I saw him change course a lot of times just because of the way that I felt; or maybe I came and talked to him; or I saw him pull back and say, “Let me look at this”; or just change his behavior just because he wanted to make sure that I was alright. I think, if we do that for each other, we’ll make it through the difficulties.

Ron: Yes; do you remember any of those moments, where you felt like you had to—you were really being sensitive to how it was impacting her and you let something go?

Lamar: Yes; definitely so. I think a lot of times—even with our son, in those early days—a lot of times, there would be things, where if he was my biological son, I probably would have been more forceful towards discipline and things like that.

One of the things he would even say, sometimes, is, “You don’t treat me like”—once we had our children together—“you don’t treat me like you treat your kids.” One of the things that I would always think is, “Actually, if you were my biological kid, you’d probably get treated a little bit worse and get dealt with a little bit differently”; but there were times when he would do things, and I would let it go.

The kind of things that really pushed me over the edge, more so, was when I saw him doing things to her. “I can kind of let some stuff go if you’re not doing this thing,” or “…you’re not doing that,” or “…ways you disregard me.” But because of my love for her, what I didn’t feel like doing was seeing her disrespected, seeing her stressing and worried, or having to hit the roof because of different actions he may have been taking.
Ron: Did that feel comfortable for you? Did it feel like he was criticizing your kids? How did that feel?

Ronnie: Looking back on it, I definitely appreciate it; because I see what he was trying to do. He would—but sometimes, I would just roll my eyes or what have you—but sometimes, when I let it set in, I knew—regardless of what my response was, I knew that that was like a wakeup call. Sometimes, I’m like: “Well, I don’t even know what else to do; because I’ve already tried my best. I’ve already exhausted all my parental tactics and skills”; you know? [Laughter]

[Studio]

Bob: Well again, that’s an excerpt from Ron Deal’s new podcast, called *FamilyLife Blended*. He’s talking with Ronnie and Lamar Tyler about the challenges of stepparenting and of being a stepdad.

This is where we have to remember—whether it’s a first marriage/a second marriage; whether it’s an intact family or a blended family—we have to have the humility and we have to have the grace to be able to speak in love/speak the truth in love and, then, to hear that truth when somebody shares it with us.

Ann: Ooh, I can relate to Ronnie; because it’s hard when someone speaks the truth to you, even though it’s loving. Sometimes, our pride keeps us from hearing. But I love hearing that she could really take it. Maybe, it was hard for her to receive it; but she was learning from it.

Dave: Yes; and I loved their honesty, because the truth is—I don’t receive this well. I hope I get better at this, but God wants to change me. He often will use somebody I don’t expect. It’s, many times, been my wife.

Ronnie just talked about how God’s using Lamar, and it literally changed her and changed her family; because she had the humility to say, “This is God speaking through my spouse”; so it’s a beautiful picture. Even though it’s hard, it’s a beautiful picture of what God wants to do to shape us.

Bob: When our spouse is saying something to us—and we’re feeling like, “No; you’re wrong,” and we want to fight back—I think it’s good for us to just stop for a minute and say: “Hang on. God, is this You?”—right?—to have the humility to say, “I’m feeling like you’re wrong, and off-base, and attacking; but just hang on,”—“God, is there something You’re saying through my spouse to me that I need to hear?”

There’s an acronym that Mary Ann and I have used in marriage: “If we can put on the right HAT.” HAT stands for—to be Humble, to be Accountable, to be Teachable. If we can put on the right HAT and say: “Am I being humble? Am I being accountable? Am I being teachable?” then, in that moment, God can speak to us through—if He can speak
through Balaam’s donkey, He can speak through your spouse; don’t you think? [Laughter]

**Dave:** I knew you were going to go there! [Laughter]

**Bob:** Well, and I hope our listeners, who have not already started subscribing to *FamilyLife Blended*—the podcast that Ron Deal is host of—I hope you’ll go to our website and subscribe. Listen to the entire conversation between Ron and Ronnie and Lamar Tyler. You can find information about the podcast on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com, along with information about resources from FamilyLife Blended®—Ron Deal’s books: *The Smart Stepfamily, The Smart Stepdad, The Smart Stepmom*—there’s a bunch of help for you available, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com.

If you are in a local church, or if you have a heart for stepfamily ministry, in October of 2019, FamilyLife will be hosting the *Summit on Stepmfamily Ministry* in Chesapeake, Virginia. The theme of this year’s summit is “Stepfamilies in Crisis,” and there’s special pricing available now. Get the details and plan to attend the 2019 *Summit on Stepfamily Ministry*. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com for all the information, or call us if you have any questions at 1-800-FL-TODAY.

You know, Ron’s podcast, *FamilyLife Blended*, is part of our strategy, here at FamilyLife, to see every home become a godly home to effectively develop godly marriages and families. The President of FamilyLife, David Robbins, is here with me. We have a desire to see blended couples thrive in their marriage and in their family for their sake and for the sake of the next generation.

**David:** That’s right; we want the marriages they are in to be a marriage that lasts and that affects the next generation.

**Bob:** Ron recently hosted an event called *Blended and Blessed*. We had thousands of people joining us—via simulcast; people who were live at the event—and got great response from people.

**David:** Yes; all of these different quotes came in. It was so fun to see the activity on the livestream. One that just stood out, as I was reading it, was: “Yes, blended families are hard, but God is able. This *Blended and Blessed* event and just FamilyLife Blended is ready and waiting to offer the help that is so needed.”

That’s why I’m so grateful that we have Ron Deal and that we are able to do events like this.

**Bob:** Well, and again, if you’d like more information on how you can subscribe to the *FamilyLife Blended* podcast, go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com; and the information you need is available there.
Now, one final note. We’ve been mentioning, here, recently that the FamilyLife *Love Like You Mean It*® marriage cruise in 2020— that’s going to be our tenth anniversary cruise. We think anniversaries are a big deal and ought to be celebrated. That’s why this year’s cruise is going to be kind of a big deal, and we’re right at the edge. I don’t know if we sold out last week or not; but we’re right there, almost sold out on the cruise. But we’ve saved one cabin, because we want to give a *FamilyLife Today* listener an opportunity to be our guest on the 2020 *Love Like You Mean It* marriage cruise. We’d like you to come, and we have a cabin waiting for you.

Here’s how you can qualify to join us on the tenth anniversary *Love Like You Mean It* marriage cruise—and by the way, this covers your cabin, your airfare for the two of you, and your night in the hotel before the cruise takes off; alright? To qualify, we have a little workout for you—it’s the “Stronger Forever Marriage Workout.” You go to FamilyLifeToday.com, and you sign up to get this.

We’ll send you a PDF document; we’ll send you emails to remind you of your workout schedule. There is both the cardio to get your heart pumping a little faster in your marriage, and there’s strength training to strengthen your marital bonds. You can pick strength, or cardio, or a combination of the two. This is kind of like Beachbody® for your marriage; okay? It’s all about building a stronger, healthier marriage, so the next time your anniversary rolls around, you’re better ready to celebrate.

One of you who signs up to the get the information and participate in the “Stronger Forever” workout schedule, we’re going to draw your name; and you’ll be our guests on the *Love Like You Mean It* marriage cruise. No purchase necessary to enter; the contest began July 1, 2019; it ends on August 30, 2019. The official rules can be found at FamilyLife.com/StrongerForever. Sign up today, and who knows?—maybe, you’ll be selected to join us, as our guests, on the *Love Like You Mean It* marriage cruise in 2020.

And with that, we’re done for today. I hope you can join us back tomorrow. We’re going to introduce you to a young woman who, at the age of 17, told her mom she just had to come clean with the fact that she was attracted to other girls. You’ll meet Jackie Hill Perry and hear her story tomorrow. I hope you can join us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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