Bob: Our family of origin/the family we grew up in does not determine what our future will be; but as Ron Deal points out, it does influence who we become.

Ron: Maybe, you come from an abusive home, where the only legacy you grew up with is one of abandonment and irresponsibility. No matter how hard you work at trying to outlive that and outrun that, you just can’t fully escape it. Maybe, you come from a family of chaos and neglect. Maybe, you had an abortion. Maybe just maybe, you’re just one of those regular families that has bad hair days, and bad parenting days, and difficulty. What do you do if that’s you?

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, October 18th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. There is good news and there is hope for all of us in broken, imperfect families. We’ll hear more about that today from Ron Deal. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. We had the experience—Mary Ann and I—when we were raising our kids—there were nights where we would get in the car, and we would be driving to our small group meeting. Some of our listeners have heard me tell this before; but we’d be driving there, thinking, “Okay; our kids are going to be in prison one day or, at least, they are juvenile delinquents. We are failing as parents.”

Here was the encouragement—when we got to the small group and it was time for sharing and stuff, we were hearing the other families talk about their kids; and we went, “Our kids aren’t so bad after all,” or “At least, they are on par with the other kids.” We were so encouraged to know that what felt like was only our story—it is going on in every household.

Dave: Yes; and hopefully, you are part of a group that will share that honestly. We have been.

Ann: Yes; and it’s so reassuring. It’s hopeful; because you feel like, “Okay; they’ve messed up too, but their kids”—it’s helpful to have someone further along so that you can see—“their kids survived it.”

Bob: Right.
**Dave:** We always picked the group by the families that were more messed up than us, so we would feel a little better when we left that place. [Laughter] We didn’t find too many of those. [Laughter]

**Bob:** Well, we’re going to hear Part Two of a message today from our friend, Ron Deal, that asks the question, “Why is it that there are so many dysfunctional family models in the Bible?” You read through the Old Testament—we’ve already heard Ron, this week, talk about how Abraham tried to traffic his wife in Egypt, and how there was the whole mess between Jacob—wanted to marry one woman; he had to marry the other one—so, now, she’s [Leah’s] the unloved wife.

You go on through the Bible—whether it’s Samson and Delilah—talk about a dysfunctional marriage relationship; right?

**Ann:** Even David—who we all esteem, and admire, and read his psalms and love—and yet, boy, there was some messed up stuff there.

**Bob:** Then his son marries 300 women and has 700 concubines, so there is some significant dysfunction—

**Dave:** Oh, yes.

**Bob:** —in the Bible.

Ron Deal addresses that in the message we’re going to hear Part Two of today. Ron gives leadership to FamilyLife Blended®. He is the host of a new podcast called *FamilyLife Blended*. You can find out more about his podcast by going to FamilyLifeToday.com and checking out the FamilyLife® Podcast Network. He is the author of the book, *The Smart Steptamily*, and other books on the subject of blended families and stepfamilies.

I think what he is saying is: “Look at your own family and recognize that you’re just like the people in the Bible,” and “God was their God, and He is your God; and He is at work in the midst of all of this.” Here is Ron Deal.

[Recorded Message]

**Ron:** Why in the world would God let this be the legacy of His people? Why in the world would He design the family for our benefit and then give us a story of people who can’t do it? Why would He lay out principles for living life, and the blueprints for doing family, and then have nobody in His clan—if you’re going to say, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” wouldn’t you kind of like to have examples?—say: “Hey, be like Abraham, “Be like Isaac,” “Be like Jacob”? But who wants to be like that?! It is kind of an important question: “Why in the world would God do that for us?”
I’ve got three quick reasons for you. Number one, He wants to humble us; He wants to humble us. He wants to remind us that it is not about our performance, or our power, or our ability to pull it off. How He loves us, how He uses us, and our accessibility to Him and what He will do in our lives has nothing to do with us. We want to believe the good marriage is all within my power: “If I could just grow up, it’s all going to be fine,” and “Good kids are all within our control.” Self-reliance is the temptation for all of us; it is certainly a temptation for me.

That’s when I kind of begin to connect some dots—that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—that phrase, I don’t think is about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but I think, maybe, it’s about God; because the second thing God wants to do, after He humbles us, is He wants to use His power to redeem our lives in spite of who we are; and He wants to reveal, through us, His redemptive work in the world. Our imperfections are an opportunity for God to work through us to send a message to everybody else. The story is God’s story not, necessarily, our story. He works through us, in spite of us, by His mercy and, then, through us by His grace.

Number three, He wants to invite you and me to join Him without fear/without being anxious over our imperfections—about walking around paranoid: “I’m not good enough,” “I don’t know why I’m here,” “I can’t help other people. I don’t have it all together,” “Who are we to try to offer a class?” “Who are we to stand up and try to represent this marriage and family? Who are we?” See, that anxiety speaks to how much we rely on our own perfection. It speaks to how self-reliant we really—that we really think, at the end of the day, it’s within our control. That anxiety gives us away, and we haven’t learned to lean on God’s grace enough.

I was doing a stepfamily conference one time, and we went to a break. This guy made a beeline up the middle row/middle aisle, and he came right to me. I remember he had a very intense look on his face. I thought: “I’ve made him mad. He’s going to hit me.” He came right up to me; and he goes, “What do I do about the ‘D’ and the ‘R’?!” I’m looking on his forehead for a big “D” tattooed and a big “R”; of course, there is nothing there.

“What do I do about the ‘D’ and the ‘R’?” I said: “Dude, you’ve got to give me a little more. What do you mean?” “Divorce and Remarried—it’s right there; it’s tattooed on my forehead. Everywhere I go—when I walk in the church—everybody knows this about me. I left my first wife; I caused a lot of pain to my children. I left the Lord; I ran away from all of that stuff. Then, I finally came back to God; and in the process, now, I’ve fallen in love with another woman. We’ve got a stepfamily. We’re trying to make a good go of this, and we’re here at this conference to try to figure this out; but I’m constantly reminded of my sin. Everything that is going on here is a reminder. I feel like, when I walk in the church, everybody can see the ‘D’ and the ‘R,’ and they judge me for it.”

Now, I’ll tell you what I said to the guy in just a minute; but before I do that, I just want to ask you, “I’m wondering what tattoos you came in here with today?” You know, maybe,
your marriage is struggling; maybe, you are in a hard season right now, and it’s just difficult; maybe, you’re struggling with one of your kids; maybe, your mother is just driving you nuts; you know? Maybe, you come from an abusive home, where the only legacy you grew up with is one of abandonment and irresponsibility. No matter how hard you work at trying to outlive that and outrun that, you just can’t fully escape it.

Maybe, you come from a family of chaos and neglect; and maybe, you had an abortion at some point in your lifetime; or you had a child out of wedlock. Maybe, pornography is just haunting you—like you’re working at it, and you’re working at it, and it’s just hard. Maybe/just maybe, you’re one of those regular families that has bad hair days, and bad parenting days, and difficulty; and you just don’t have it all figured out. No matter what you do, you can’t wipe off the tattoo. What do you do if that is you?

I looked at this guy; and I said: “Dude, I get it—divorce and remarried. I’m sorry people judge you for it; and by the way, they will—especially Christian folks. They’ll never let you live that down—some of them—and they will treat you differently. I’m sorry about that; but that’s not your God; because you see, in God’s eyes, maybe, the ‘D’ and the ‘R’ doesn’t mean ‘divorced and remarried.’ Maybe, it means ‘delivered and redeemed.’ Maybe, it’s really not about you, or your past, or your imperfections. Maybe, it has something to do with what God is willing to do, in and through you, in spite of you. Maybe, it’s about His story and not yours.”

See, that’s the thing that I want us to understand about how God works in the world. What we think is the worst part of us—in the hands of our God—it becomes the best part of us/becomes our most important tool.

There is this other story in the Bible—this one is in the New Testament; although the other families we’ve talked about have been in the Old Testament. In John, Chapter 4, there is this woman, who goes out to a well one day. She is there all by herself. Jesus happens to encounter her at this well, and they have a conversation. We don’t have time to read it all. Jesus engages her in this magical way that only Jesus knows how to do. He is going to engage her around this concept of living water, but she keeps thinking physical water.

He says to her, “Hey, would you give Me a drink?”—entering into this space of dialogue. She goes: “Hey, look, dude/buddy, You are a Jew; I’m a Samaritan. We’re not supposed to have this conversation. Don’t you remember the rules?” Clearly, she’s not tracking with Him. He tries one more time again—He says, “Well, if you knew who I was, actually, you’d be asking Me for a drink.” She goes: “You don’t even have a bucket. How in the world are You going to give me water out of this well?”

“No; lady, you’re not tracking with Me.” He goes a third time—He says to her, “You know everyone who drinks this water is going to be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I give them will never thirst again.” She goes one more time over into this physical space: “Oh my goodness! Sounds great. Would You give me some of that
water? I don’t want to have to come out here all the time to get water. I’d love to just stop having to come every day.”

“Look, lady, you’re not tracking with Me.” So, Jesus does a Jesus thing; and He changes the subject. He goes right to her real thirst—He says, “Go call your husband.” To which she says, “I don’t have one of those.” He goes, “Yes; that’s true.” He said, “You’ve been married five times, and now you are living with a guy.” Then she says: “Oh, so, You are a prophet. Only someone like that could know that about me. How in the world do You know this about me?” Now, He’s got her attention.

Does Jesus bring up her past in order to make her feel ashamed and make her feel like: “I’m so imperfect. I do not belong here. I should not be having this conversation”? Absolutely not. He uses her past to get her attention about thirst so He can talk to her about what the answer to her thirst is, so He can point her to living water. Now, she’s listening; now, she’s tracking with Him; and now, He can talk to her about eternal things.

At that point in time, He shares the living water with her in which she does what? She drinks; she drinks deep; she drinks it all the way down. How do we know?—because of what happens next. She goes back into town; she goes back into town, and she starts telling everybody: “Hey, I met this guy. He’s told me everything I’ve ever done.” They are like: “Oh, honey, we know what you’ve been doing. We’ve been talking about you all day. You’re trending on Twitter® as a matter of fact. You do know this; right?”

She’s like: “No; I don’t think you understand. I think the worst part of me is somehow the best part of me now.” How does this happen? She had the audacity to embrace grace, and then she let her story be wrapped into God’s eternal story.

Here is the thing about everybody in this room—we can’t change our story; your past is your past; but in Christ, you can change the story you tell about your story. The meaning of it changes when we wrap it into God’s eternal story. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It’s about God, and what He is doing in us, in spite of us, and through us—just like He does with this woman. All of a sudden, a less-than-perfect family becomes a less-than-perfect guide that brings about perfect results—people start flocking to Jesus. John goes out of his way to tell us that the people came from town, and many believed in Him—from isolation [for the woman at the well] to impact.

Now, I’ve got one last thought about this story. My favorite part of this story—the woman at the well, for me—does anybody happen to know the name of the well? This whole conversation takes place by a well. What’s the name of it? Does anybody remember?—it’s Jacob’s well. “Oh, you mean Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?”—absolutely. You want to talk about a monument. This well is sitting on land that Dad gave to his favored son, Joseph. It is a monument to family dysfunction; and 1,000 years before, there was a messed-up family. God said to them: “Your imperfection is really not a problem for Me.
It’s okay; I’m going to work through you. I’m going to use you, because it’s about what I’m doing/about how I’m redeeming your family story.”

Fast forward a thousand years, and there is another woman with a very dysfunctional, messed up, imperfect life, who encounters the same living God, who says to her: “Not only is your past not a problem for Me. I can do something with this story if you’ll just let Me. Drink the water deeply.”

May I suggest to you that we sit here today—2,000-some years later, after that story and that occasion—and you and I, everyday, live by wells. You and I are going out into the world. Number one, He wants us to hear, for us, that our past is not a problem for God. He is more than happy to redeem our story, and what we think is the worst part of us can become the best part of us. It can become a tool that we use to go into town and bring other people out to the well to drink deeply from the water.

But He also wants us understanding that we are doing that corporately, as a ministry. That is what FamilyLife seeks to do—is to go to the various wells, where people congregate in this world. Some of them are built around family type; some of them are built around economics; some of them are built around interests; but we want to be able to go into those places and stand there, and meet people with the life that they have, and offer them some living hope based on where they are.

We want to give them something practical and something helpful to deal with their real thirst—not only the horizontal, physical thirst that they have in this life/relational thirst that they have—but ultimately, point them to the eternal thirst and draws them to Jesus so that they will drink well; and they will go back into their corners of the world and bring more people out to Jesus. That’s how this whole ministry’s going to roll; that’s what we’re called to do.

What we’ve got to do is just have the audacity to embrace grace, to drink deep, to quit worrying about how much we’ve messed up; to just simply say: “God, I turn it all over to You. Use me in spite of me.” Let’s see what He does. Let’s pray.

Lord, I want to thank You for loving us and caring so much and deeply about us that You would be our God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Ron—that you would say: “Your past is not a problem, Ron. I’m here. I’m with you. Let Me redeem the story.”

Give me deeper faith, God, and trust in You so that I can constantly turn my life over to You. Would You give these people the same?—a trust at a depth, where we just release it/where we have the audacity to embrace Your grace to become Your tools and instruments for the world.
I pray a blessing over FamilyLife and where we are headed and where we are going. If we’re going in the wrong direction, then tell us; but if not, would You empower us when we discover people sitting by wells? Would You help us to have words that are relevant, and helpful, and practical, and that point them to things that are of ultimate, eternal value for them?

Thank You, God, for the “D” and the “R.” In Your Son’s name we pray. Amen.

[Studio]

Bob: Amen. Well, again, we’ve been listening to a message from Ron Deal, who gives leadership to FamilyLife Blended and who hosts the new FamilyLife Blended podcast, talking about dysfunction in families and how that’s an opportunity for us.

In fact, I’m going to let our listeners in on a little bit of secret here—and maybe, they’ve already figured this out—but here, at FamilyLife, our goal is—not only to effectively develop godly marriages and families—but to really speak to marriages and families as a way to get to the core issues of life/the spiritual issues of life and help people understand their relationship with God, and what it means to be yielded to Him, and to walk with Him, and to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit. We want people to thrive in every aspect of life.

I just have found, over my life, that the place where my relationship with God is most often tested/where it’s most often tested is in my marriage and in my family. If I can get that right, I can probably handle the other stuff.

Dave: Yes; it’s interesting what Ron was talking about; you know? The woman at the well—when you go to a marriage conference, or tune into a radio show like this, or a podcast about marriage and family, I think we often think: “I need marriage help,” “I need family help. I’m in trouble.” What we point you to is what Jesus did at the well: “You want water? You want your marriage fixed? Here’s the answer: living water—

Bob: Right.

Dave: —“it’s Jesus.” What Ron was saying there—Jesus is the only One that can deliver and redeem. It isn’t going to be some helpful book on marriage, which is definitely helpful; but you’ve got to go to the source. You’ve got to go vertical—go to Jesus and find life.

Ann: I think some of my sweetest moments, spiritually, have been when I have been so broken and lost in knowing how to make my marriage better and how to be a better parent. That has driven me to my knees: asking God for help, asking Him for wisdom, asking Him to redeem our family, to give us hope. I love the reassurance, just like the
woman at the well, that He is always there; and He’s always offering more than what we even hope for.

**Bob:** Our desire here is that *FamilyLife Today* and all we do, here at FamilyLife, would help strengthen your marriage and family; but we actually have a desire that goes beyond that; that is, you would get in the game/get mobilized and say: “We can help other marriages and families. We can help those in our neighborhood, in our church, in our community. We can take the tools FamilyLife has created: we can take some of Ron Deal’s resources and help blended families and stepfamilies in our community; we could take the *Art of Marriage*® video series, and we could take folks in our neighborhood through that series,” or “…the *Art of Parenting*® series—take young parents through that.”

The reason we create these tools is because we are hoping that listeners will go, “We could do that kind of ministry.” It wouldn’t take long/doesn’t take a lot of preparation. It just takes availability.

**Dave:** And you’ll discover your own marriage—

**Bob:** That’s exactly right.

**Dave:** —will thrive as you give it away to help others. Just like the woman at the well—she’s running to the town. Let me tell you who got most excited about her faith—she did! Same thing happens in our marriages when we help others.

**Ann:** I think our marriage has been *most* transformed as we, first, sought God; but secondly, as we began teaching material. At first, we thought, “We have to get our marriage all together before we can give it away,”—

**Bob:** Yes.

**Ann:** —but no. We actually were still broken; and we admitted that to the couples that we were with, saying: “We need help. We’re looking to God, and we’re wondering if you would go on this journey *with* us as we go through this material.”

**Bob:** Yes; so, don’t be thinking, “We’ve got to get everything prettied up in our marriage before we can get involved in ministry.” You can do it today. Your point is right, Dave—it will be, probably, the biggest growth area for you if you’ll just get in the game and reach out and get some others to go along with you.

**Dave:** I can almost guarantee it.

**Bob:** *Absolutely.* I should mention, in addition to the resources that Ron has put together, *The Smart Stepfamily* is now available as a DVD series; it is an eight-part series. If you want to take a small group through eight sessions on *The Smart
Stepfamily, that resource is available. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to find out how you can order The Smart Stepfamily small group series; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. In fact, we’ve got a whole bunch of Ron’s resources listed on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com.

Next week, there are going to be hundreds of people joining us in the Tidewater area in Virginia—in Chesapeake, Virginia—in the Norfolk area for the Summit on Stepfamily Ministry, where the focus this year is on issues that cause couples and families to go into crisis mode and how the church can come alongside and minister to them. If you’d like more information, there is still a chance for you to register for next week’s event—October 24th and 25th at Community Church in Chesapeake, Virginia. Again, all the details are online at FamilyLifeToday.com.

I feel like we’ve been talking about lots of resources available, and there are. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to find out more about events, and DVD series, and books that can help your family/your marriage or ways that you can help reach out and help others. The website is FamilyLifeToday.com; and if you’ve got any questions, call 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

Speaking of events, this weekend, we’ve got couples, who are going to be joining us in Augusta, Georgia, and in Parsippany, New Jersey—hundreds of couples, who are spending the weekend with us for one of our Weekend to Remember® marriage getaways. I hope you’ll pray for these couples. Pray that God will work in their lives and in their marriages as they spend time together this weekend.

Thanks to those of you who make all that we do, here at FamilyLife, possible. These events, this radio program, our website, our resources—you make that possible as you support this ministry, either as monthly Legacy Partner or with an occasional donation in support of the work we’re doing here at FamilyLife Today.

If you can donate today, we’d love to send you a thank-you gift—a copy of Dennis Rainey’s book, Choosing a Life That Matters. It’s our way of saying, “Thank you,” for partnering with us in the work we’re doing here at FamilyLife Today. We are grateful for you.

We hope you have a great weekend. We hope you and your family are able to worship together in your local church this weekend, and we hope you can join us back on Monday when we’re going to have one of our “Ask Dave and Ann” programs. We had a caller recently, who called in and said: “My wife has put on a lot of weight, and I’m no longer attracted to her. So, what do I do about that?” We’re going to ask Dave and Ann how they would counsel that husband. Hope you can tune in for that on Monday.

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 Monday for another edition of FamilyLife Today.
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