Bob: One of the ways we express love to one another is by spending quality time with each other. Ron Deal says, when there's a blended family dynamic, sometimes the desire for quality time can create conflict.

Ron: For example, a mom who went through a divorce—she has three children—two of her three children, their primary love language is quality time; her love language happens to be quality time. They developed a ritual that really became meaningful to them. They would lay in bed every night—sometimes 30 minutes, 45 minutes, an hour—and tell stories, and talk, and read books, and stare at the ceiling—just kind of pretty much nothing, but it was everything—like it's their point of connection—quality time, deep in it.

Now, she marries a man. Every night, he's wondering, “When is [my] wife going to come out of the bedroom with her kids and spend time with me?”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, February 18th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. You'll find us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. How can husbands and wives, moms and dads, in a blended marriage situation do a better job of expressing love to one another without slighting someone? We're going to talk more about that today with Ron Deal and Dr. Gary Chapman. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. We're having the opportunity this week to take something that has had a profound impact on all of us in the room—the idea of speaking one another’s love language—and applying that principle to families, who are in a second marriage, where mom or dad or both, are starting a new family—maybe bringing his kids/her kids, maybe new kids into the family. They're trying to build family cohesion, and family unity, and family loyalty in what’s a little harder dynamic to engineer than if it’s a bio family.

As pastors, you guys are talking to couples and blended families. You know some of the front-line stuff that these folks are going through.

Dave: Yes; as we’ve led our church for over 30 years, it seems like the congregation is growing larger and larger, percentage wise, to be blended. You can’t stand up there and talk about husband/wife; it’s a whole different dynamic. To think about how the love
languages applies to that is a fascinating concept, because nobody’s ever talked about that; I haven’t heard.

Ann: I know that people in our audience at church are begging us: “Talk to us. Don’t forget us. We need help as a blended family.” I’m really excited that there are resources out there for them.

Bob: The resources are out there because Dr. Gary Chapman, who is the author of the *Five Love Languages* book, paired up with Ron Deal, who gives leadership to FamilyLife Blended®. They’ve written a new book that takes the five love languages and the blended families and puts them in a blender—[Laughter]—if I can say that—

Ron: Pun intended. [Laughter]

Bob: —and puts them together.

They join us again. Ron/Gary, welcome back.

Ron and Gary: Thank you.

Bob: We expressed our admiration for your work, Gary, in the *Five Love Languages* and how pivotal that has been. I’m going to turn things a little bit because you’re an admirer of the work that Ron has done, over the last decade-plus, working with stepfamilies. You’ve used his material in your counseling practice in dealing with folks; right?

Gary: Absolutely; in all my marriage seminars, we make that book available, *Smart Stepfamilies*; because we always have blended families, who come to my seminars. They often come up and ask, “Have you written anything on this topic?” I used to say: “No, but here is a book you need to read. We have it available; we sell it at our marriage seminar.” Now, I’m saying: “Yes, as a matter of fact, I have. [Laughter] Ron Deal and I got together, and this is what you need.”

Bob: As you were writing this book, I would imagine that, even with the years of counseling you’ve done, there were some light bulb moments/some “A-ha,” moments for you, in talking with Ron, where you understood the stepfamily dynamic in a little different way. I know, anytime he and I talk, I get insights into what’s going on in stepfamilies that I didn’t have before.

Gary: Absolutely; we had Ron at our church a few years ago. That’s the first time I really—I mean, I knew Ron/I knew of Ron, but that was the first time I had personal exposure to him. Yes, that was very, very helpful to our couples then. In the process of writing this—you’re exactly right.
I think one of the things is this concept, that we didn't necessarily get into very far last time, though we were explaining it; and that is, that there are different levels of intimacy in terms of expressing these love languages. We did talk about the fist bump rather than the hug. A hug is really pretty intimate, so there are graduated steps.

In the book, we go through all the love languages and talk about examples of expressing love at Level Number One, then Level Number Two, Level Number Three. It's not just the concept; we're giving some ideas on how to do that.

**Bob:** We talked about fist bumps versus hugs. That relates to physical touch, which is one of the five love languages.

Let's say my love language is quality time. A weekend away together is quality time. Are we talking about an hour, having lunch together?—do we just do it in bite-size pieces?

**Ron:** You know, you really hit on it. Intuitively, we all kind of know. If I said, “I want you to make a new friend,” you wouldn’t spend a whole weekend together in an one-on-one intimate environment. You would start by having lunch. You’d have conversation around common topics that you both share interest in. You’d start there; right? And that’s going to eventually lead to more and more discussion.

We all have friends that we trust a little; and we'll share a little of our life, and our struggles and sin, and that sort of thing. But then we have the really close community relationships, where we’re sharing our real depth struggles, and pain, and heartache in life. Just like with friendships that are graduated—levels of intimacy, as Gary said—that’s true in blended families.

The problem comes when people ignore and think: “Well, we’re family now. It shouldn’t be this way. We should be able to go deep.” You know, if you try that and it works, great; hallelujah! More often than not, it’s not going to work.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Ann:** There’s a part of me that’s scratching my head, thinking, “Who wouldn’t want words of affirmation?” Are there levels of intimacy for words of affirmation?

**Ron:** I think it’s probably pretty rare; but imagine a child, who has had no contact with a biological dad for five years. And now walks in this man—my mom’s husband—whom I actually kind of like and respect. It really makes me feel good on the inside that he says to me, “Man, you’re really good at that.” But on the outside, to acknowledge that is to betray my biological dad. It feels like, to a child, that I’ve just said, “I don’t need my dad anymore”; or that I’ve implied to you: “You’ve replaced my dad,” which I don’t want you to think that. So, what I’m going to show on the outside, is, “I don’t want to hear that from you.”
It’s the difference between what’s inside and what’s outside. We’ve talked about loyalty conflicts before on this broadcast. This is a love conflict: “I love my biological dad. He’s not around; I wish he’d come back. I’m actually kind of liking and loving my stepdad. I have a problem: ‘How do I deal with those two conflicting loves?’”

**Bob:** Trust, loyalty—these are things that, I guess, in a blended family, you have to diagnose: “How is the trust bond between us?—are there gaps there?” and “If so, how do we fill those in?” “How’s the loyalty?—do we feel some of that?” It’s the divided loyalty of “Should I be loyal to my stepdad or my bio dad?” or “…my stepmom/my bio mom?”

As you’ve tried to work on this, dealing with people in blended families, can you give me an illustration/a scenario of how these love language issues and the trust/loyalty bonds all work together?

**Ron:** Let me tell you about a story we tell in the book—a mom who went through a divorce. She has three children; two of her three children—their primary love language is quality time—her love language happens to be quality time. Guess what? Through the single-parent years, she and her kids survived all the adjustments—the tragedy of the loss of the family, trying to figure how to regroup and move on with life.

They developed a ritual that really became meaningful to them. They would lay in bed every night—sometimes 30 minutes, 45 minutes, an hour—and tell stories, and talk, and read books, and stare at the ceiling—just kind of pretty much nothing, but it was everything—like it’s their point of connection—quality time, deep in it.

Now, she marries a man. He’s got a couple of kids. His kids are with him alternating days—four days here; three days over at their mom’s house. On the days where his children are gone—every night, he’s wondering: “When is [my] wife going to come out of the bedroom with her kids and spend time with me? We’ve had a long day. I would love a little time with my wife, just to reconnect. But she’s in there an hour.”

He has no idea the depth of the meaning of this little ritual. He’s feeling left out; he’s feeling ignored: “Where’s my quality time? Hello? Hello?”—you know? All of a sudden, this becomes a conflict; so what does he do?

First, he tells her—like, “What are you doing?”—and he’s kind of soft about it—like: “Could we spend a little time together?” After awhile, she’s like: “No, my kids really need this. This is really important.” He’s like: “Do you love them?” or “Do you love me?”—like it’s become—then, he starts trying to talk to the kids during the daytime hours: “You know, at night, why don’t you tell your mom she can come and spend time with me?” Now, mom’s going: “Wait a minute. Don’t tell my kids that I have permission to leave. You don’t understand the depth of this ritual and what it means to us.” This is a love conflict.
The good news is: everybody in this scenario has a big heart—and it wants to do the right thing, cares deeply about all the other people—but they just have to share one another. That’s a challenge to move into that space. Mom has to deal with the guilt: “If I start spending less time with my kids at night, how are they going to feel about that?” “If I get up and leave, and I haven’t read one more book, are they going to feel left out or abandoned?”

**Ann:** And her kids have already gone through trauma—

**Ron:** They have.

**Ann:** —so she doesn’t want to add to that.

**Ron:** It’s one of those things, where: “Is there a clear easy answer?”—“No!” We’re still going to apply Gary’s basic principle of: “How do I sacrifice a little bit of me in order to love you?” We’re going to have to talk behind closed doors, as husband and wife, and talk about this and what it means.

Probably, everybody’s going to have to make a little sacrifice and change the ritual a little. We want to retain some of it for the sake of the children; but mom may have to begin to shorten that up a little bit so she has a little energy left for her husband a few nights a week. Will there be weeping and gnashing of teeth as this ritual changes? [Laughter] There might be. There might be a little heartache, a few tears.

I think one of the things parents need to understand is: “There’s value in us choosing one another as husband and wife,” and being mindful and considerate of what the children need through the transition into this new family.

**Bob:** You would say, I think, that if you’re going to err on one side or the other, you need to defer to the marriage over the time with the kids?—maybe require a little more sacrifice from the kids than from the couple?— which feels counterintuitive as parents.

**Ron:** You know, I would refine that a little bit; I would say, “Yes, you’re erring on the side of protecting your marriage; but at the same time, you’re going to move toward your kids so you can move toward your marriage.” It’s not to say: “Forget about the kids; neglect the kids. They’ve got to figure it out. Put them to bed, close the door, turn out the light.” That’s not reasonable either, and that’s not helpful for children; they need the reassurance of knowing they haven’t completely lost mom.

They are losing a little bit of mom. That will feel upsetting to them on some level; so mom can move toward them—give them time, try to maintain the ritual as best she can—and begin to shore it up a little bit so there is time for the marriage. And the couple may just have to find their couple time another place. It’s helpful if the stepdad in this scenario is willing to sacrifice his expectations in order to meet her, perhaps, in another time when they can spend time together.
Dave: You've also said, "Blood is thicker than marriage"; so how does that tension work into this?

Ron: We hope blood is not thicker than marriage—that's the decision point.

Dave: Yes.

Ron: We make sure the marriage doesn't get overwhelmed by the thickness of the blood. For the listener, who's going, "What are they talking about?" [Laughter] What we mean is mom’s biological relationship with her children—that bloodline is very easy to fall back on. Choosing the marriage is really a choice; it's the leave and cleave principle.

Bob: Yes; Gary, I’m thinking about, when we're on airplanes, and they say: “If we lose pressure, the mask drops down. Put your own mask on first, and then deal with your child’s mask."

“Put your ‘marriage mask’ on first, and make sure your marriage is strong; because if you scramble to your child, and lose the marriage in the process, the child is in worse shape than if the child has to feel some momentary sting from sharing mom or dad with a new spouse”; right?

Gary: Yes; this same concept applies really when both biological parents are there, in a first marriage, for example. There is often conflict between the wife or the husband spending too much time with the children, not enough time with me—it’s saying, "My love tank is empty."

This is where the love language can be really, really helpful for them; because “With the time you have, let’s invest it speaking the spouse’s love language,” whether it's a first marriage or a second marriage. If we keep the love tank full in the marriage, then we can give each other freedom to deal with the children.

Bob: “Don't fritter what time you have, talking some foreign language,"—is that what you’re saying?

Gary: Yes; absolutely.

Bob: When you've got that time, make sure you're focused to say, “I want to communicate love to you in this time.”

Ann: It’s so funny—as a woman/as a mom—that instinct to protect my kids is fierce. As I hear you saying, “You need to make sure your marriage is first,”—for Dave and [me], we're an intact family, so to put our marriage in front of the kids is a no-brainer.
But as a [single] mom, who has watched my kids go through trauma—either losing a father or, maybe, we’ve had a messy divorce—my instinct is to protect my children with everything I have; so when you say that, I’m like, “Ohhhhh.” Every mom is thinking: “What about my kids? I don’t want them to suffer more.”

But you’re saying, “Take advantage of the time with your new husband,” and “Really invest, and pour into, and speak his love language.”

**Gary:** Yes; because I’m saying, if you don’t keep the marriage intact and growing, then the kids are going to go through a second divorce. Let’s face it; there are more divorces in second marriage than there are first marriages. This is part of the reason, so let’s keep the love tank full in the marriage.

That’s an example to the children: “This is the way marriage is supposed to work. What we went through before”—Daddy left/Mommy left, whatever—“we want to have a really good marriage/a God-honoring marriage. We’re going to love each other, and we’re going to love you.”

**Ron:** Let me be really clear. Nobody’s saying to the biological parent, “Stop loving your kids.” In fact, in this scenario of the woman, who had the ritual with her kids that was so meaningful to them, they’ve got to keep some of that. It’s not turn it off and then switch and go outside and spend time with your husband. It’s a little of both.

It’s never one or the other; it’s both/and. It’s: “Both my kids and my husband.” Husband’s maybe going to lower his expectations of having his wife at a certain time during the night. She’s going to have to perhaps change her expectations of how much time she can invest with her kids, laying in bed at night, so she has a little gas left in the tank for her husband and for their couple time.

Everybody’s making sacrifices, but we’re ministering—if I can use that word—to the heart of both children and the adults.

**Bob:** I’m wondering, Dave, about your relationship with your stepmom. You explained to us already that, when your stepmom tried to hug you the way your bio mom had done, you were pulling back—like: “We’re not there yet. We don’t have this relationship.” Did it warm up over time?

**Dave:** Yes; to Ron’s point—it took a crockpot a long time on a low simmering. I had the dual tension of: “Number one, I don’t know you very well. I’m not even sure I like you. I don’t like this situation.” Then, I had the other side of, “If I hug her back, I’m betraying my mom.”

In my situation, my mom never ever met my stepmom—

**Bob:** Wow.
Ann: —until—

Dave: —although, yes, they met at our wedding.

Bob: Wow.

Ron: Oh, wow.

Dave: That was the day, which was years later.

Bob: Oh, that’s a special day for that to happen—

Dave: Great for us.

Ann: Exactly.

Dave: —like: “I’m glad you choose this to be your moment.” I don’t remember them even talking much, but it was, you know—I had that tension all my life, even though my mom, most of the time, wasn’t in the same proximity. I was just with my stepmom or with my mom. I still did not want to respond; I had to fight back: “I’m liking this woman!” She was really a wonderful woman and a wonderful mom. She was doing all the right things; and yet, I felt like I’m betraying my mom.

Ron: See, there’s that thing—the inside is different than the outside. If there is something I want stepparents to know, it’s that: “Sometimes, the kids like you—that’s the problem. They’re drawing you in, but they don’t know where to put you as it relates to the other biological parent already in their heart. That guilt thing makes them look like, from the outside, that they’re rejecting you. When, really, it’s just a matter of them trying to figure out how to allow themselves to enjoy you.”

Bob: I’ve got to ask you about the love language of gifts because I’m thinking, in a blended family/stepfamily situation—I just remember friends of ours—when the family split, all of a sudden, the kids were getting gifts showered on them as a way for either new stepparent or old bio parent to try to compensate for the hurt by saying, “You’re getting PlayStation®,”—it’s not even Christmas—“You’re getting a PlayStation, because I’m trying to show that I still love you.”

Talk to me about gifts as a love language in the stepfamily dynamic.

Gary: I think that one of the places we encounter that most often is the non-custodial parent will often give those kinds of gifts that the other person can’t afford to give sometimes. They wouldn’t consciously say, “I’m trying to buy your love,” but, essentially, that’s what they’re doing. Gifts might not be the love language of the child at all, so it may not be meeting that love need at all; it might be number five.
Bob: Right.

Gary: If it is the child’s primary love language, there’s certainly nothing wrong with giving gifts; but for the non-custodial parent to think that they are going to reap great rewards and “This person is really going to feel loved if I give them gifts,” is a misconception.

Bob: The situation in a stepfamily, where maybe a child’s love language is gifts, but our budget is not a “gifts budget,” [Laughter] talk to me about that a little bit.

Gary: I think giving gifts is not how much it costs; it’s the thought that counts. We’ve always said that.

Bob: Right.

Gary: You can pick up a stone in a city parking lot and give it to an eight-year-old boy, say: “Hey, man, I thought about you today. I found this. Look at this. I want you to have it.” If gifts is his love language, you’ll find that stone in his dresser drawer when he’s 23; he’ll remember the day that you gave it to him.

Ron: That is really good.

Here’s another scenario that I think about/we talk about in the book as well. Imagine you’re a biological parent; you’ve got a couple of kids, but their love language is not gifts. Now, you’re a stepparent, so there’s some other children in the home. One of your stepchildren’s love language is gifts.

You’re like, “Okay; to try to win this kid’s heart and get to know him, I’m going to give him gifts.” Your bio kids are watching you give gifts to somebody else. Now, even though their love language isn’t necessarily gifts, when they see money going to the other side: “Wait a minute! You don’t do that for us!” All of a sudden, they can reap some jealousy—right?—between the two children.

I think the way you respond to that is to move toward your children—and talk, and listen, and discuss, and affirm: “You know what? I can tell you’re wanting to know that I still love you and that you’re special to me, and you absolutely are. Now let me explain to you what’s going on with me giving this rock to Dave over here. I’m trying to build a relationship with him.”

I think you can actually say that out loud and explain what’s going on. In the process, if you learn something about one of your children, like they would enjoy a few more gifts, I think you can begin to figure out how to give them rocks too.
Bob: I think we’ve all got to recognize that we’re in different places in terms of our relational skill/our ability to have healthy relationships. Some of us, no matter how old we are, we’re in sixth grade when it comes to relationships. [Laughter] Our relationships look like sixth grade relationships. Some of us are junior high; some are senior high; some of us are college or graduate school; or we’re out of graduate school.

When you recognize: “Okay; there are deficiencies. I have areas where I can learn and grow,” that’s where a book like what you’ve written can come along and coach you in those gaps and help you move from the sixth grade to the eighth grade, or the ninth grade, or the tenth grade; and watch the relationship start to flourish in the midst of this.

The book that Ron and Gary have written together is called Building Love Together in Blended Families. We feel this book is so pivotal/so important, that we’re making it available this week to those of you who can make a donation of any amount to support this ministry. Your investment in FamilyLife Today will make it possible for hundreds of thousands of people, every day, to receive practical biblical help and hope for their marriage and their family.

As a thank-you gift, we’ll send you a copy of the new book, Building Love Together in Blended Families. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to make a donation, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate. Let me say—this is a great book to give as a gift to someone you know in your neighborhood/in your workplace—someone you know who’s in a blended family. Just say: “I heard about this. I thought about you. I wanted to give it to you as a gift.” This may open the door for an extended spiritual conversation. Get a copy of the book, Building Love Together in Blended Families. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to donate. Thank you, in advance, for your support of this ministry.

By the way, Ron and Gary are going to be speaking together at an event that is taking place in Houston, Texas, on April 25th. It’s our 2020 Blended and Blessed one-day live event. If you live in the Houston area, you’re invited to be part of this event. If you don’t live in or near Houston, you can still be part of the event because it’s going to be livestreamed all around the world. Laura Petherbridge, Bill Butterworth, and others will be speaking that day. It’s all about “Building Love Together in Blended Families”—that’s the theme of the day.

You can go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com, for more information on how you can attend live, or how you can be part of the livestream/how your church can be part of the livestream. This is a great event to do in your local church, or with your small group, or just do it with your spouse and your family. Again, all the information’s available, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com.

Now, tomorrow, we are going to continue working our way through the different love languages and talking about how those work in a blended family environment. Ron Deal and Gary Chapman with be with us, again, tomorrow. We hope you can be with us, again, as well.
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 next time 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.

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?

Copyright © 2020 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com