



“People need to know that healthy stepfamilies break the generational cycle of divorce; they are redemption centers.”

**RON DEAL**

*Director for FamilyLife Blended*

*Host of a new 1:00 feature launching October 6*

Meet Ron Deal who now leads the initiative at FamilyLife to serve those with a “blended family”—which is actually about 42% of the U.S. population! Beginning October 6, Ron will be heard daily on a brand new 1:00 daily feature, “FamilyLife Blended”!

**What was the catalyst for a ministry dedicated to helping stepfamilies? Are you a step-parent yourself?** I am not a stepparent and don't live in a stepfamily. I jokingly tell people I'm the male obstetrician of the stepfamily world. My motivation to be in this ministry is not personal, but it is deeply professional.

I've been in ministry my entire 27 year career, most of it working for local churches as a family minister. As a licensed counselor and minister, I was inundated in working with stepfamily couples (stepcouples I like to call them). But I didn't just want to fix problems, I wanted to help prevent them. So, I initiated an educational outreach to stepfamilies in our church and community—and it worked.

Little did I know that hardly anyone around the country at that time was even trying to minister to stepfamilies. Pretty soon, people wanted to know what we were doing and how. I then wrote the first of five books and the grassroots ministry started moving around the country...and now the world.

**Is there a “singlemost significant issue” for blended families today?** From a spiritual perspective, one of the most significant issues for blended families today is the church. Stepfamilies are one of the fastest growing family types in America today, and yet, stepfamily ministry is one of the slowest areas of growth in the church.

Currently 100 million Americans have a step-relationship of some kind and it's predicted that half of us will at some point in our lifetime (like my brother-in-law who became a stepchild at age 47 making Christmas very awkward!). That's a lot of people! Combine those stats with a predicted 60% divorce rate for stepcouples and you get lots of hurting people who don't know where to turn. And right now, they can't turn to a local church because most have nothing to offer. We want to change that by partnering with radio “voices” that can call the church to attention and minister daily messages of grace to children and adults living in blended families.

**What do you hope listeners will take-away from hearing FamilyLife Blended?** For those in stepfamilies: daily encouragement and a small dose of grace. Stepfamilies often feel second-class, especially if their story includes divorce. Like the woman at the well in John 4, they often avoid church and formal religious activities for fear of condemnation. But like Jesus, we have living water to share—and it can change their life. Do you know who was the first evangelist to the Samaritan people? The woman at the well. Think about it: at the beginning of the day she hid her past so others wouldn't ridicule her for being divorced and remarried, but later that same day, went back to the city to bring people to meet Jesus. I think we can give people that same grace.

For those not in stepfamilies: an awareness of how they can encourage their friends and family members who are. If you aren't

in a stepfamily, you know someone who is. I want to give you words to share, a heart that is compassionate, and tools you can utilize to bless others.

People need to know that healthy stepfamilies break the generational cycle of divorce; they are redemption centers. And anyone who understands that, gets to join the Kingdom work being done. How cool is that!

**You and Nan have been married for over 25 years. What's the secret to a strong marriage that's attained “silver” status?**

Humility. Of course, humility before God is what allows us to come to him in faith to begin our journey and it's what empowers us to grow in faith throughout our journey. But humility in marriage is grossly missing from our typical marriage enrichment resources. Being humble about myself within my marriage means I first manage me (my weaknesses, behavior, and anxiety) before trying to manage my wife. Too many people are focused on changing their spouse which only ignites conflict and escalating distress. Ironically, being humble toward my wife fosters grace from her (see I Peter 5:5), and that, in turn, moves us closer to each other and the heart of Jesus. It's a very powerful dynamic.

Coming to understand this has been painful for us. We spent a lot of years in pride toward each other. That was a mess. But God's grace finally won out and humbled us. I can't wait for the next 25 years!

**You've personally experienced deep grief with the death of your 12-year old son in 2009. Tell us about Connor.** There is so much to share. At the age of twelve, Connor contracted a MRSA staff infection that ravished his body and stole his life. Of our three children, Connor was the healthiest, but the infection transported him from perfectly healthy to dead in just ten days.

Losing him has re-calibrated my life in countless ways. It has taught me how small I am to control and manage life and how dependent I am on God, especially about things I will never have the privilege of understanding in this life.

Nan and I established a nonprofit in his memory called Connor's Song (ConnorsSong.com). Together with the help of some former designers from Extreme Makeover Home Edition, we built a giant Lego to minister to formerly trafficked children in Ghana (visit our website to see what I mean). Talk about re-calibrating! Just spend time with a former child slave and listen to them for a while and you'll be grateful in ways you never imagined. Loving on those kids is the beauty from our ashes.

**What do you hope Braden and Brennan, your two living sons, will someday say was your greatest legacy in their lives?** That I loved them and introduced them to Jesus through my actions and words. From an eternal perspective, everything else pales in comparison.