

RON L. DEAL

with Dianne Neal Matthews

FREE
14-Day Couple
Devotional

*Daily
Encouragement
for* **THE**
SMART
STEPFAMILY



Daily Encouragement for THE SMART STEPFAMILY

Introduction

Have you got a minute? Good, cause that's all you'll need to complete these daily couple devotionals for the next fourteen days.

Life is busy and the demands on your day just won't let up. Nevertheless, you're still trying to strengthen your marriage and blended family. That's why I wrote 365 brief but potent daily thoughts of encouragement to keep you moving forward and published them in the book *Daily Encouragement for the Smart Stepfamily*. Here is a fourteen-day sample.

Read them separately or as a couple and share your thoughts. Go ahead. It'll only take a minute.

Ron Deal



Daily Encouragement for THE SMART STEPFAMILY

Day 1

Remember Your Vows

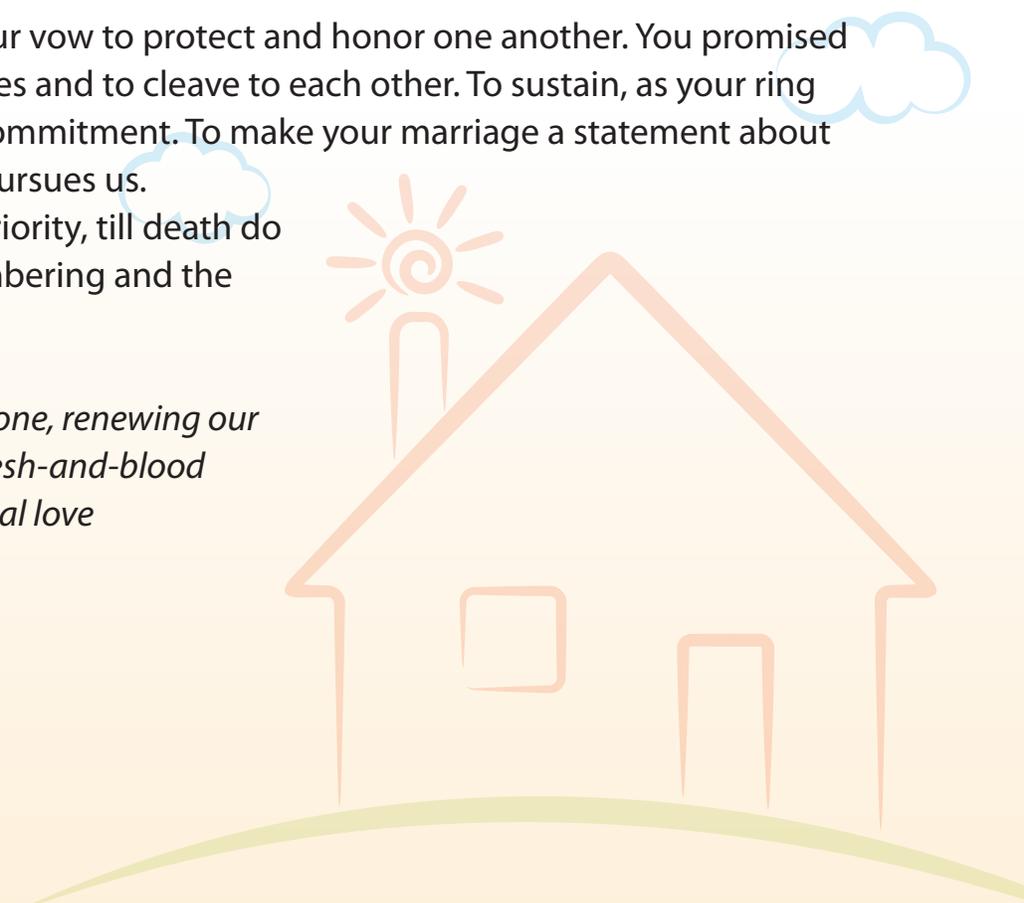
“... for better or for worse, till death do us part.”

I heard these familiar words when I attended a wedding the other day. I've decided that it would be a good idea for every married person to attend a friend or family member's wedding from time to time. Why? Because the wedding ceremony reminds you of what you once promised; it helps you remember the heart you had for your mate on the day you said, "I do." And because, sadly, life has a way of diluting and discoloring that day, but a wedding takes you back and refreshes those special memories.

Think for a moment about your vow to protect and honor one another. You promised to leave behind former loyalties and to cleave to each other. To sustain, as your ring symbolizes, a never-ending commitment. To make your marriage a statement about how God loves, desires, and pursues us.

And to make oneness a top priority, till death do you part. That is worth remembering and the vow worth refreshing.

Father, we stand before you as one, renewing our promise to live each day as a flesh-and-blood illustration of your unconditional love and faithfulness.



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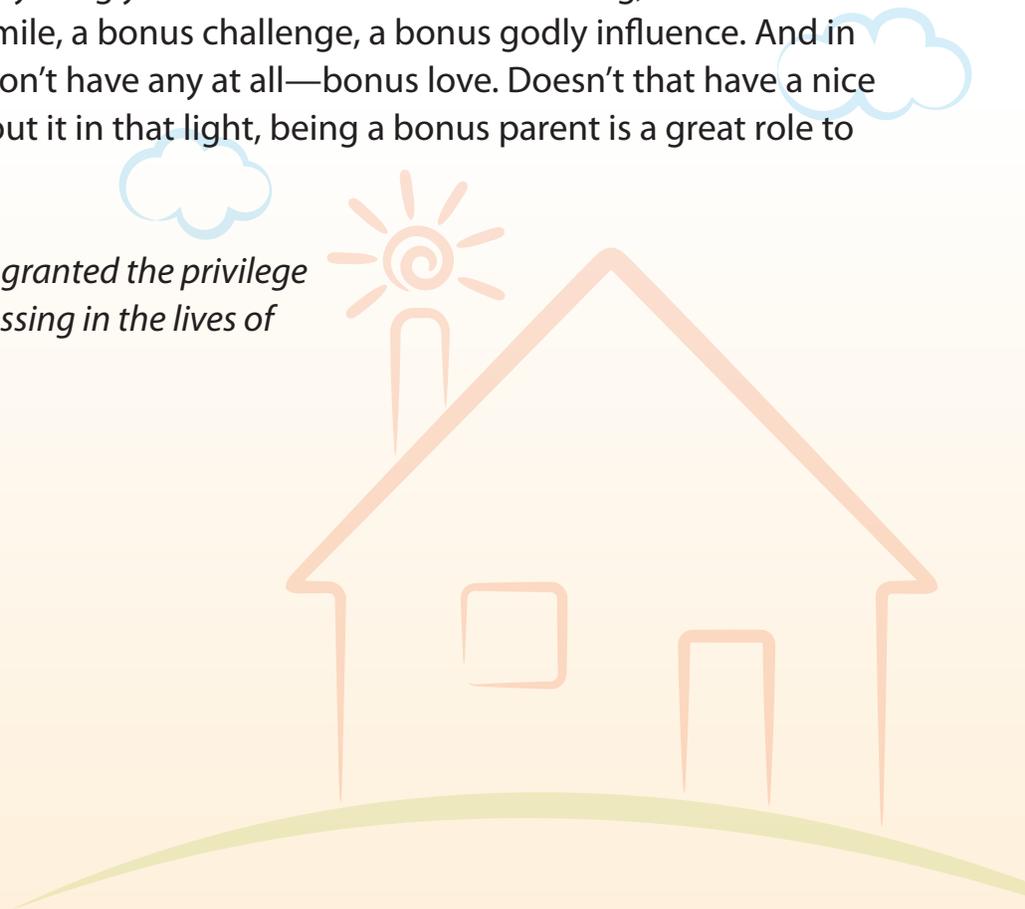
Day 2 Bonus Love

“Okay, Ron, just where do I fit in this picture?”

I heard this familiar question while talking with a friend of mine. He’s a stepdad and he loves his kids dearly. He said, “Ron, I want to be the one who teaches my stepson how to shave and the one who walks Emily down the aisle on her wedding day, but I think their dad ought to do those things. So what is my role?”

You know, being the bonus mom or dad sometimes means you don’t get the first seat at the table (and you’ll have to grieve this). But it does mean that as an added parent figure in the life of a child, everything you offer is a bonus! A bonus hug, a bonus word of encouragement, a bonus smile, a bonus challenge, a bonus godly influence. And in a world where some people don’t have any at all—bonus love. Doesn’t that have a nice ring to it? When you think about it in that light, being a bonus parent is a great role to fill.

Dear God, never let me take for granted the privilege and honor of being a bonus blessing in the lives of my stepchildren.



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Day 3

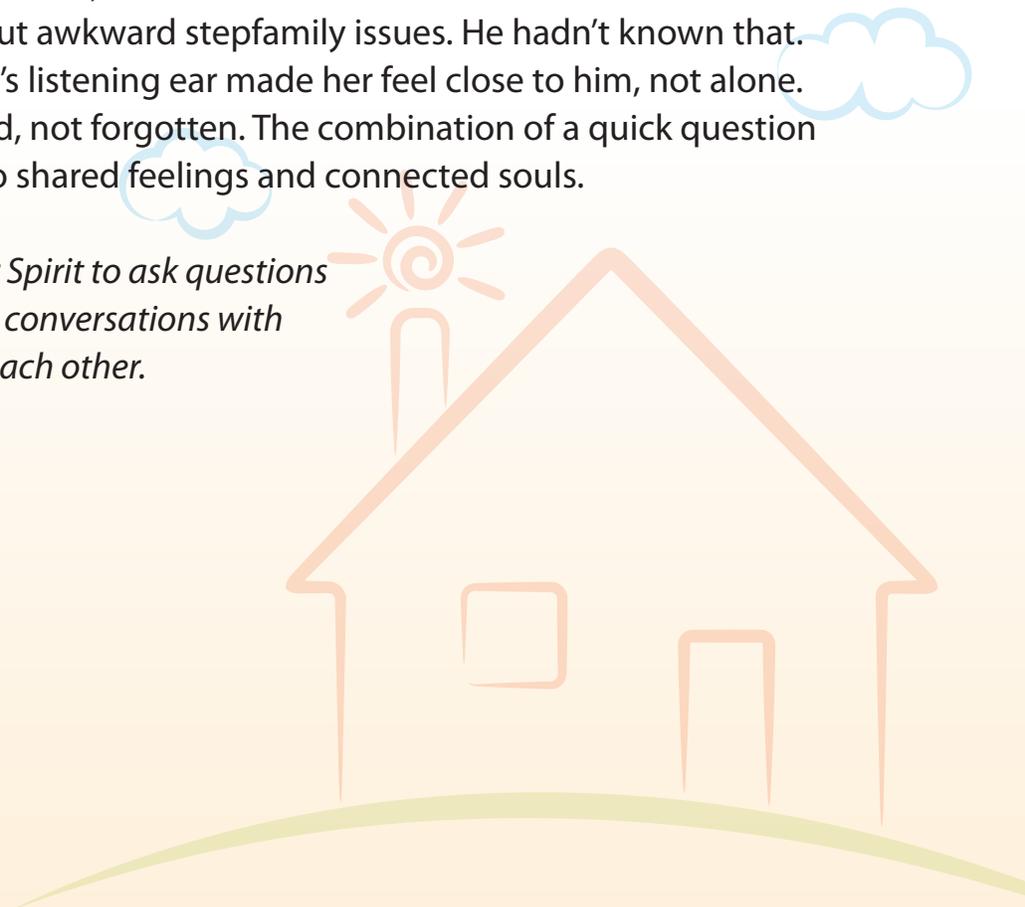
Connect to Your Child's Heart

One of my goals is connecting you with your child's heart. The other day I had a conversation that warmed *my* heart. This dad had listened to a podcast where I talked about kids, divorce, and blended families. It got him wondering if his daughter felt the way I had described. So he asked her. And sure enough, she did. But there was more.

You see, before their conversation she didn't have words for what she was feeling. Oddly enough, in asking her if she felt a certain way, he gave words to her experience and helped her talk about it. But there was even more.

Before he initiated the conversation, she had felt disconnected from her father and unable to talk to him about awkward stepfamily issues. He hadn't known that. The conversation and her dad's listening ear made her feel close to him, not alone. Supported, not isolated. Loved, not forgotten. The combination of a quick question and an open heart turned into shared feelings and connected souls.

Father God, prompt me by your Spirit to ask questions that can initiate heart-to-heart conversations with my kids that draw us closer to each other.



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Day 4

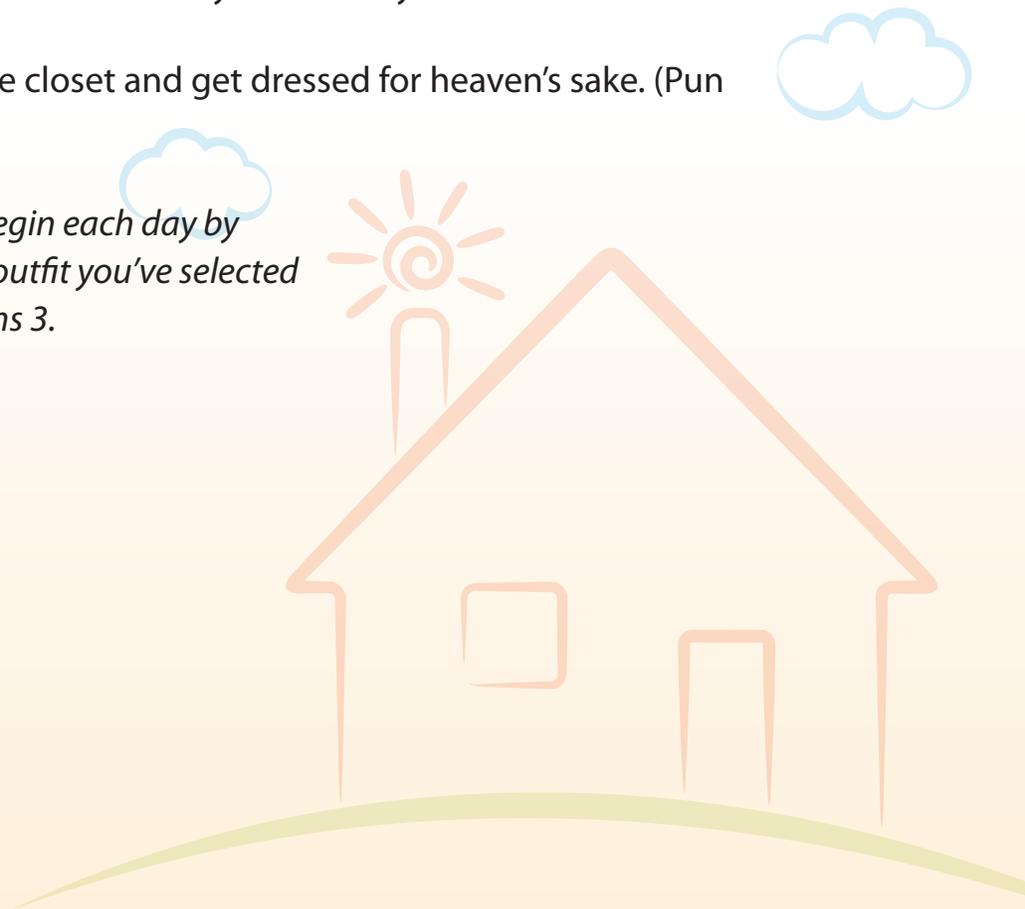
Dress Up in Virtue

When you woke up today, you got to decide what clothes you wanted to put on, didn't you? (That's assuming you're older than age two, in which case someone else probably chose for you. Or maybe not.) Colossians 3:12, 14 tells us to "Put on . . . compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience . . . and above all these, put on love."

Just as you choose your clothes every morning, you make a conscious decision whether or not to wear those virtues as you go throughout your day. And when you do put them on, you get the chance to reflect Jesus to your spouse, your children, your co-workers, your friends, and to the world. Now it might not feel natural at first, but the more you wear these clothes, the better they start to fit you.

So go on—get them out of the closet and get dressed for heaven's sake. (Pun intended!)

Father, help me remember to begin each day by choosing to slip on the perfect outfit you've selected for me as described in Colossians 3.



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Day 5

Honor the Past and the Present

Wise stepparents honor their stepchildren's past. When Victoria married a widower with four kids, she applied this advice and it really paid off. Victoria noticed how uprooted the kids seemed to feel when her furniture was moved into their family home. So she made changes very cautiously. First, she set up the kitchen according to her own tastes and needs, but she made sure that the mother's items were distributed or saved for each child. Then she waited five more years to redo the living room.

During the Christmas celebration seven years after her marriage, Victoria gifted each child with a photo of their family of origin *and* the current stepfamily. Now that's wisdom. She honored each child, their mom, their dad—and herself. And by encouraging her stepchildren to embrace their past, Victoria made it more likely that they will want to embrace her as a part of their future.

Father, show me ways to help my stepchildren know that I honor their past history and the other family members in their life as part of who they are.



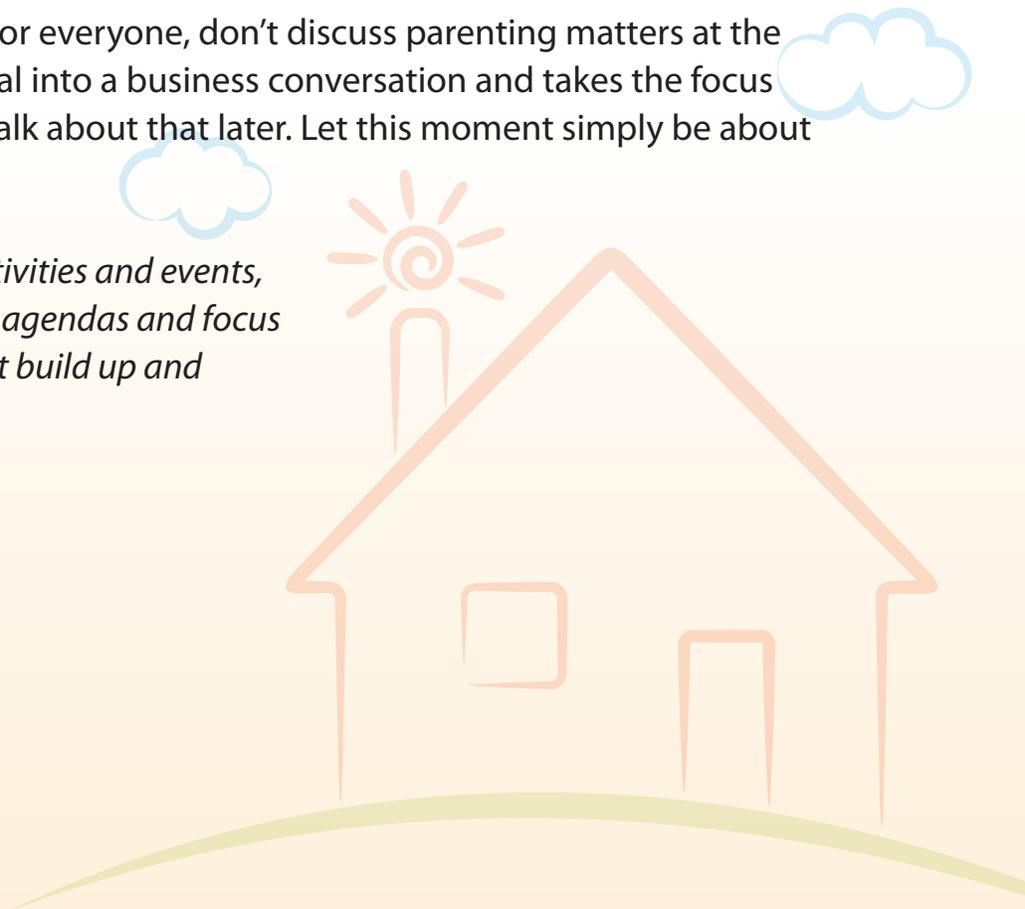
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Day 6 Event Etiquette

Does your child live in two different homes? If so, you might want to consider following some guidelines for event etiquette when attending their activities. We know that kids love it when their parents attend their recitals, concerts, sporting events, and school productions. But their enthusiasm dissolves if co-parents make it stressful. To make any event affirming for your child, be sure to mind your etiquette:

- Sit where you feel comfortable and be respectful to the other parent as you walk in and out.
- After the event, let your child hug or talk to each parent no matter who currently has visitation privileges.
- To keep the event safe for everyone, don't discuss parenting matters at the event. That turns a recital into a business conversation and takes the focus off your child. You can talk about that later. Let this moment simply be about celebrating your child.

Father, during our children's activities and events, remind us to drop our personal agendas and focus on making good memories that build up and encourage our kids.



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Day 7

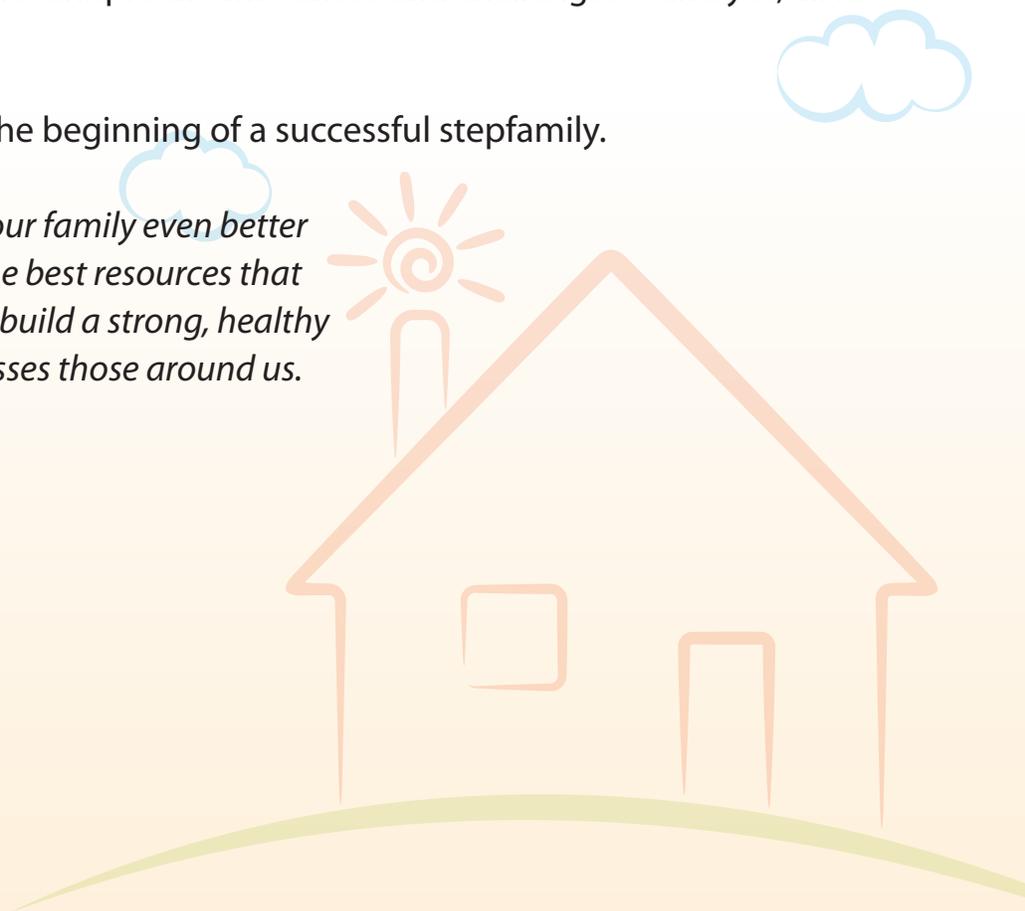
Learn All You Can

One piece of advice I always give stepfamilies is this: Learn all you can about healthy stepfamily living. Sure, your general knowledge of marriage and parenting will prove helpful, but it's the unique dynamics of stepfamily living that create stress and end up dividing families. So the smarter you are about relationships in *your* home, the better equipped you are to nurture and manage them.

Seek out resources specifically developed for the blended family. Although advice meant for biological parents may sometimes be helpful, in some cases it can actually backfire on stepparents. You'll have far more success with resources designed for the blended family home with all its unique circumstances and challenges—and yes, all its wonderful blessings, too.

Getting “stepfamily smart” is the beginning of a successful stepfamily.

Father, you know the needs of our family even better than we do. Please lead us to the best resources that will help us understand how to build a strong, healthy family that honors you and blesses those around us.



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Day 8

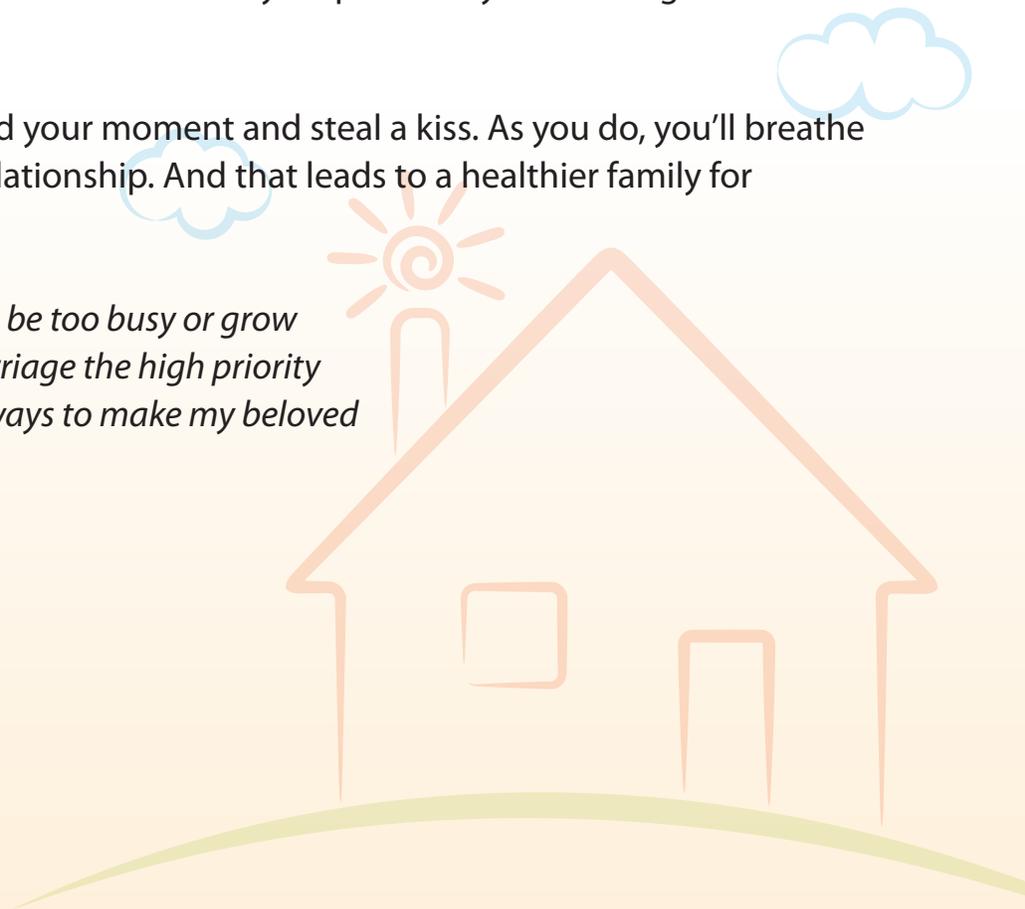
Steal a Kiss

One way to keep oxygen flowing to your marriage is to steal a kiss. Well, actually you're not really stealing it; you're drawing on your own bank account of affection. What you *are* stealing is a moment. A moment out of a hectic day, away from stress. A moment to step aside from the parenting role and remember the special bond you share as husband and wife.

Ironically, this type of stealing is also a way of giving. You see, a kiss is a much-needed point of connection. Research shows that when you have intimate moments built into your day, you oxygenate your marriage. Habits like a warm hug before work, a funny text exchanged, or a shared recreational activity help sustain your marriage in the midst of life's pressures.

So your mission for today: Find your moment and steal a kiss. As you do, you'll breathe new life into your marriage relationship. And that leads to a healthier family for everyone involved.

Loving Father, help me never to be too busy or grow too complacent to give my marriage the high priority it deserves. Teach me the best ways to make my beloved feel valued and cherished.



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Day 9

Redeeming the Next Generation

For kids, a healthy stepfamily is a great blessing. We've known for years that divorce leaves a negative emotional residue on a child's heart that can be witnessed over time. Two examples of this negative impact are cohabiting as adults and having a higher divorce rate than kids who grow up in intact families. But thankfully, that's not the end of the story.

Research now confirms that a healthy stepfamily not only prevents another divorce in a child's life, but it gives them a healthy model of marital relationships that equips them for marriage as adults.¹ In other words, after divorce a strong, stable, healthy stepfamily lowers the divorce rate in this generation *and* in the next. It reverses the curse.

What Satan tries to destroy through divorce, God can take back in just one generation. When you're having a bad day, hang on to that good news and keep going.

God, please touch our family with your redeeming power and help us prepare and equip our children for future healthy marriages of their own.

¹ Tianyi Yu and Francesca Adler-Baeder, "The Intergenerational Transmission of Relationship Quality," *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 47: 2007, 3, 87-102.



Daily Encouragement for THE SMART STEPFAMILY

Day 10

Connected by Grace

No matter how you're connected to a stepfamily—whether you're a grandparent, a stepsibling, a stepparent, or just a step-uncle-in-law—I want you to remember this: Grace connects, but possessiveness divides.

You know, the essential story of a stepfamily is *someone leaving* and *someone joining* a family. And whenever this happens, even under the best of circumstances, parents and kids feel some degree of insecurity. Unfortunately, that insecurity tempts us to become possessive—to pull some people toward us and to push others away. But our jealousy and possessiveness create division and conflict among family members. They also promote resentment toward *us*.

What brings peace is a spirit of grace, especially toward people we don't know very well. Stepchildren to stepparents, stepsibling to stepsibling, former wife to new wife.

So remember the grace that God has lavished on you, then turn around and freely offer it to others.

Lord, remove any spirit of possessiveness from our family. Help us be grace-filled in all our interactions with each other.



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Day 11

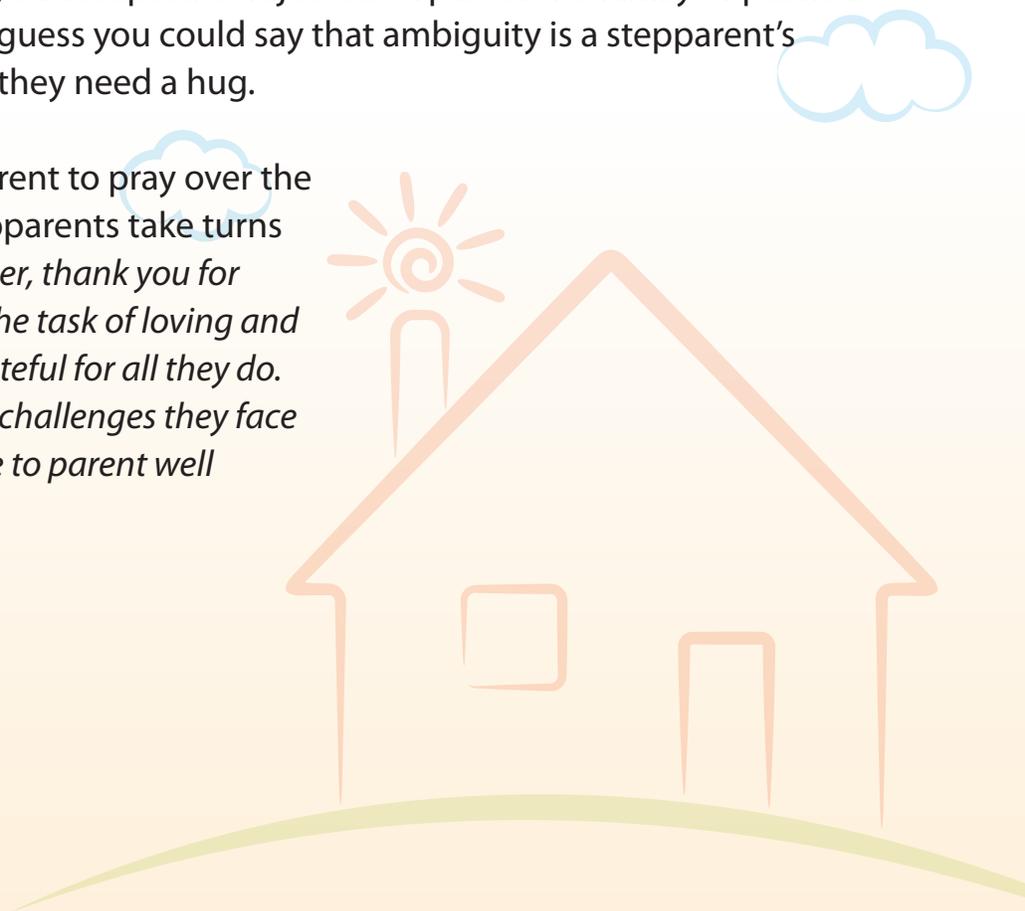
Stepparents Need a Hug

One stepmom was pleasantly surprised when her two oldest stepdaughters gave her a card on Mother's Day that read, "Everyone needs a back-up mom. You're mine!" What a huge compliment—she was beaming from ear to ear. She knows how hard it is for kids and adult children alike to honor their stepmom without dishonoring their biological mother, or feeling disloyal to her. So, why the need for the hug?

Because this stepmom's other two stepchildren didn't acknowledge her at all on Mother's Day. Not a word.

So what's your situation? Are you accepted or rejected? A part of the family or pushed aside? Talk about confusing. I guess you could say that ambiguity is a stepparent's middle name. And that's why they need a hug.

(A prayer for the biological parent to pray over the stepparent. If you're both stepparents take turns praying over each other.) *Father, thank you for my partner who has taken on the task of loving and caring for my children. I am grateful for all they do. Please strengthen them for the challenges they face and give us wisdom as a couple to parent well together. Amen.*



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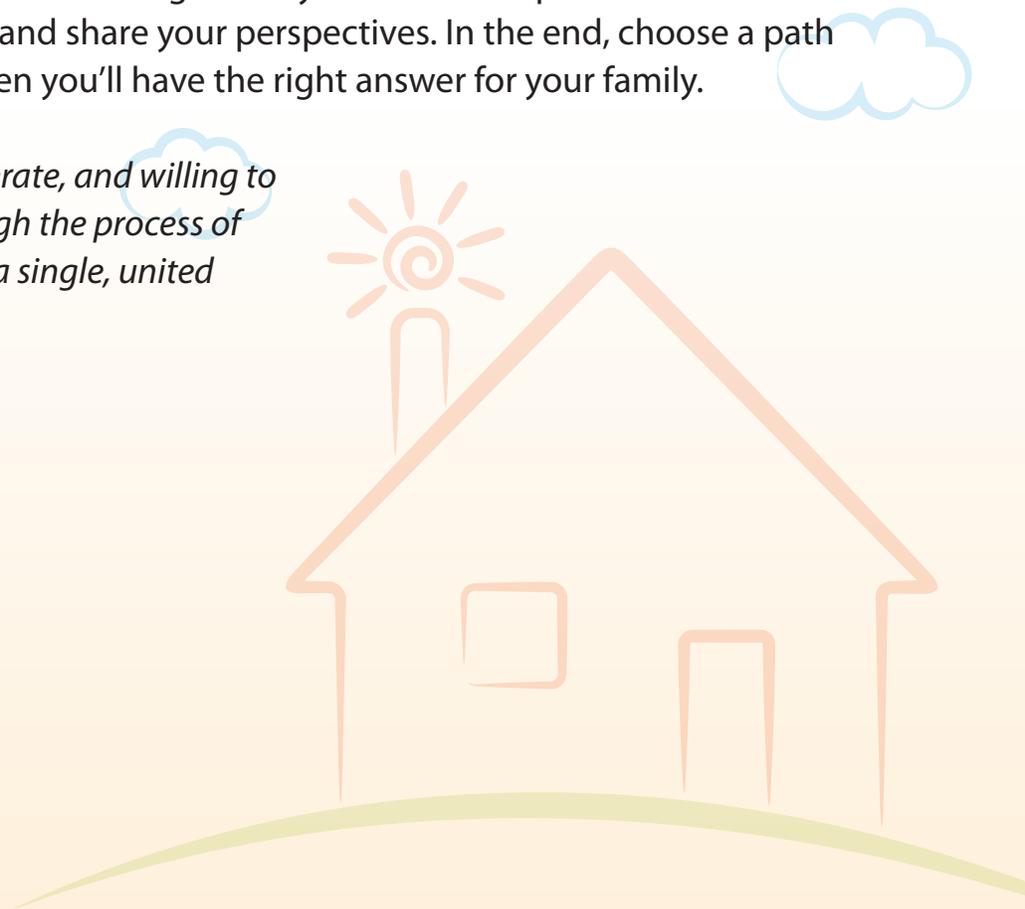
Day 12

Get on the Same Page

Every blended family is a cross-cultural experience. When you think about it, you're essentially merging two cultures. Language, traditions, inside jokes, the meaning we attach to certain words and actions . . . the list could go on. And merging parenting expectations is part of this as well. For example, he always made his kids pick up their toys before coming to the dinner table. She let her kids clean them up after dinner. So who's right? Which style should they adopt as they merge the two cultures into one?

Actually, I don't know the answer. I've searched the Scriptures and can't find a single passage about clean-up time. What I *can* tell you is this: For the sake of your marriage and your family, the most important thing is that you both end up on the same side. So go ahead and talk, negotiate, and share your perspectives. In the end, choose a path you will both support. And then you'll have the right answer for your family.

Father, keep us patient, considerate, and willing to compromise as we move through the process of blending our two cultures into a single, united identity for our family.



Daily Encouragement for THE SMART STEPFAMILY

Day 13

Be Vulnerable

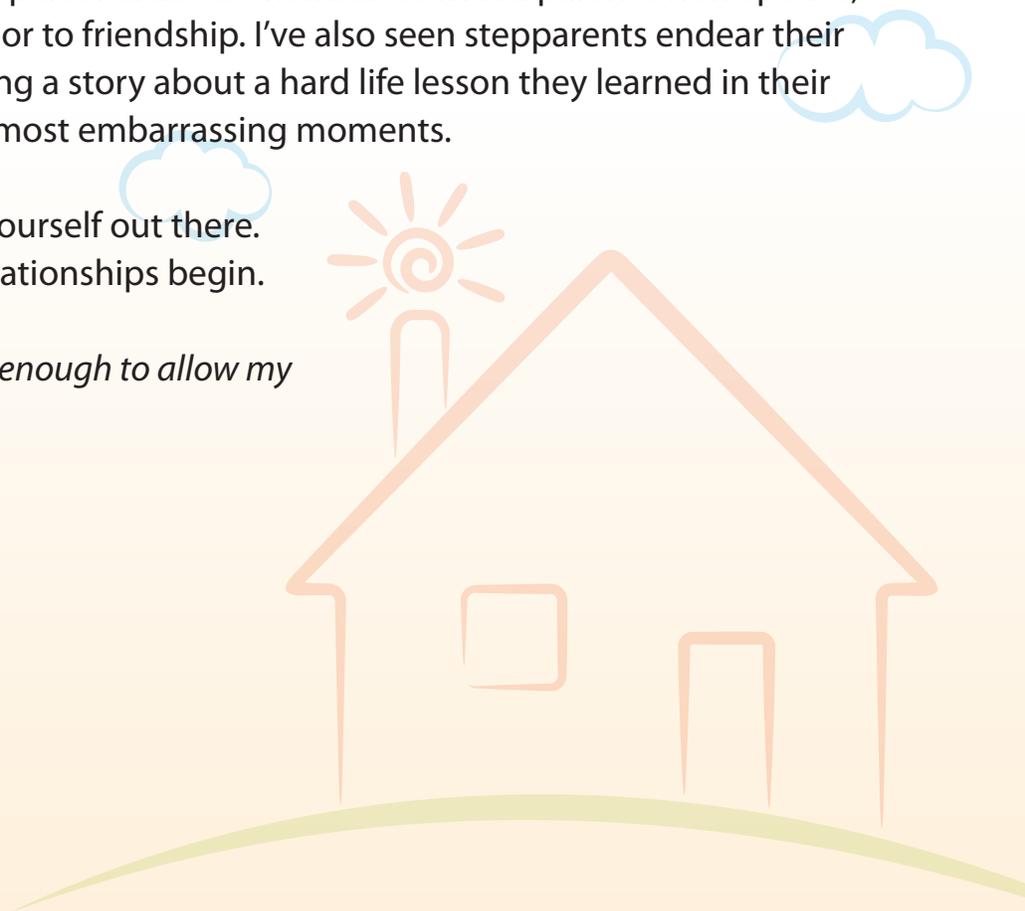
Want a great suggestion for deepening a friendship? It starts with *you* sharing *you*.

Ever notice that when someone is transparent and shares a vulnerability about themselves, we tend to respect them a little more? We admire their courage, and we feel like they're more approachable—like it's safe to be close to them. We also feel like we can trust them with our own vulnerabilities. And when both people share their real selves, the relationship takes a leap forward.

Now think about this: Stepfamily members can do the same thing. I've watched adult stepchildren share something personal about themselves with a parent's new spouse, and somehow it opens the door to friendship. I've also seen stepparents endear their stepkids to them just by sharing a story about a hard life lesson they learned in their younger days, or one of their most embarrassing moments.

Sure, it takes courage to put yourself out there.
But courage is where great relationships begin.

Father, help me be courageous enough to allow my loved ones to see my real self.



Daily Encouragement for THE SMART STEPFAMILY

Day 14

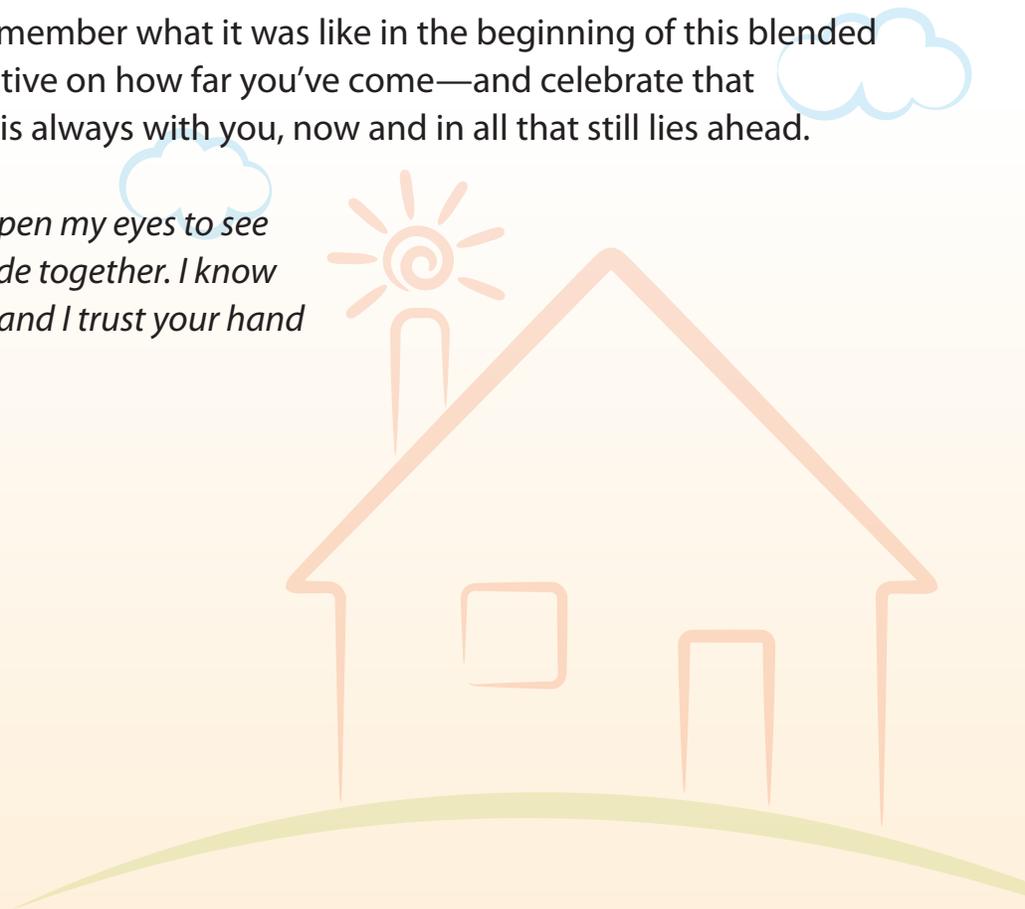
Check Your Progress

On any journey, part of gauging your progress is knowing how far you've come and how far you still have to go. Those who study productivity and team efficiency will tell you that you need to be able to measure your progress so you can know what you've accomplished.

I think parenting is like that. It's easy to identify qualities our children are missing and what we need to work on as a parent. But sometimes we fail to notice how far they've come or how our parenting skills have improved. Stepfamilies can start to feel like a never-ending work in progress. And that can be discouraging.

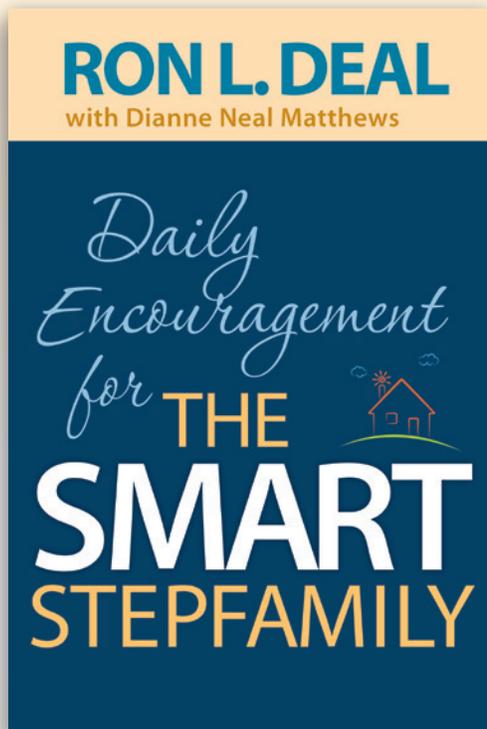
Why not take a minute and remember what it was like in the beginning of this blended adventure? Get some perspective on how far you've come—and celebrate that progress. And know that God is always with you, now and in all that still lies ahead.

God, when I feel discouraged, open my eyes to see the progress our family has made together. I know that we are a work in progress, and I trust your hand to guide us through.



Daily Encouragement for THE SMART STEPFAMILY

Get More Daily Inspiration and Wisdom for Your Blended Family!



Daily Encouragement for the Smart Stepfamily is your go-to source for 365 short and sweet thoughts that will keep your family blending and bonding throughout the year. Topics include

- parenting and stepparenting
- strengthening your marriage
- grief in the stepfamily
- bonding with children
- co-parenting with exes
- and practical wisdom for bringing family members together

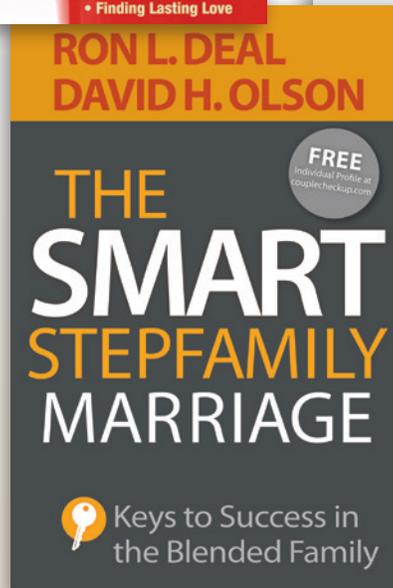
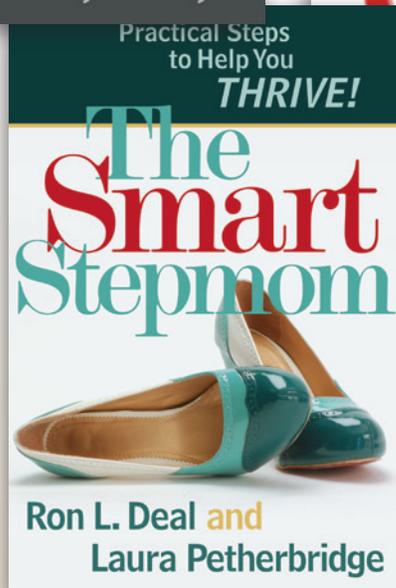
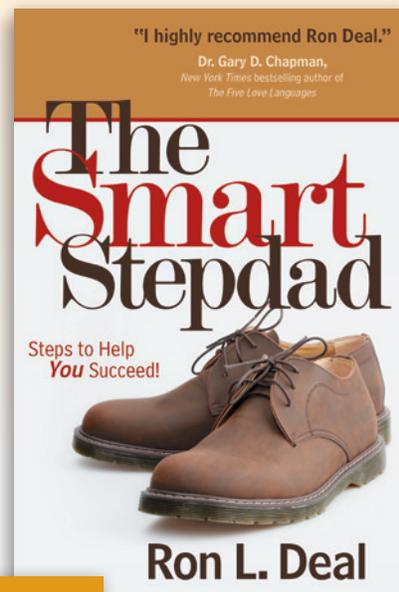
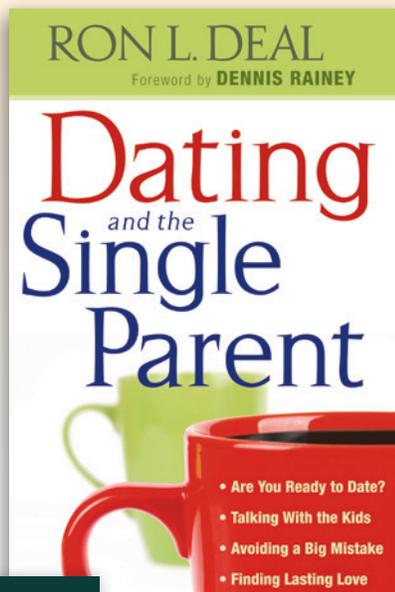
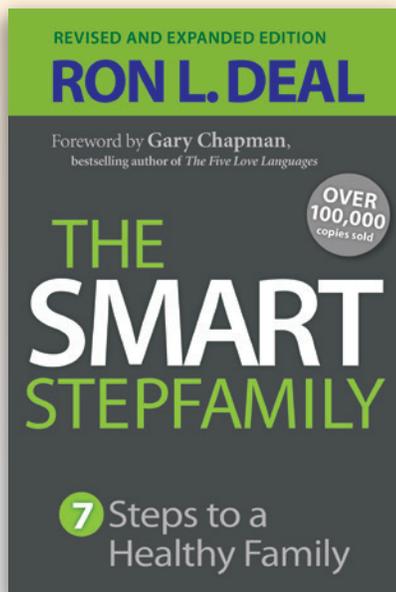
You'll also discover inspirational stories to lift your spirits and find helpful and hopeful thoughts for special days like Mother's Day and holidays.

**Available March 2018 wherever books are sold.
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**More Stepfamily Resources
from Ron Deal.**



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