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The Spiritual Component of Sexuality

Guest:	Juli Slattery
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Bob: Dr. Juli Slattery had been married ten years before there was a breakthrough that occurred in her marriage in the area of marital intimacy.

Juli: We had many years of boredom. You know, one of the first steps I took was I dedicated three months: "Lord, I'm going to pray about this area of my life. I'm going to *learn* to enjoy it, and I'm going to learn to pursue it." I got serious about saying: "God, You're not okay with where we are. I'm not okay with where we are. I'm going to devote myself to helping change that."

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey. I'm Bob Lepine. Could it be that a season of prayer and study could actually bring about a breakthrough in your marital intimacy? We'll talk more about that today with Dr. Juli Slattery. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. I hope our listeners have been hanging with us this week as we've been talking about a sensitive subject. I have to tell you—just in the conversation, there is such rightness in talking in a healthy—

Dennis: Oh, and it's healthy!

Bob: —biblical way—

Dennis: Yes!

Bob: —about what God created.

Dennis: If there's a radio program on—on all of radio—it ought to be a Christian radio program talking about sex from a biblical perspective. Dr. Juli Slattery has been with us this week. I just want to tell you: "You're doing a great job. Your book is excellent—*25 Questions You're Afraid to Ask About Love, Sex and Intimacy*."

Juli—welcome back to the broadcast, first of all. I just want to ask you—you've been married since 1994 / you have three sons: "What is the most important lesson you personally have learned about love, sex, and intimacy?"

Juli: That this is spiritual terrain.

It's not just a matter of good parenting or having a happy marriage—that sexuality represents a very intense spiritual battle. When I learned that, it was a total game changer in how I approached this in my marriage and parenting.

Dennis: So, in essence, you're saying: "Who are you listening to?

Juli: Yes; yes.

Dennis: "Are you listening to the Bible and God's perspective of sex?"—because that's really the only place you're going to find it is in the Bible—or "Are you listening, watching, and feeding from what the world is?"

Bob: Yes; when you're standing at the supermarket checkout line and *Cosmo* is there—what they're advertising on the front cover is not, "Here's how to think biblically about sexuality"; right?

Juli: No; no.

Bob: They're kind of compartmentalizing it to a purely biological activity that you can disassociate from every other aspect of your life. When people think that way, what happens to their sexuality?

Juli: Well, and I think a lot of Christians do think that way—they think that sexuality is compartmentalized.

What happens is that you never realize that Jesus needs to be Lord of that area of your life too. In 1 Corinthians 6, it talks about the sexual, and spiritual, and the relational all being intertwined—that you can't make a sexual choice that isn't also spiritual. When you start to understand that—that this is a major battle; and if I'm not careful with even the little choices I make, I can be contributing to evil I *hate*.

Boy, when you get that, it changes—for example, we all hate sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. We hate it / we wish it would go away. But we don't realize that our choices—for example, to look at pornography feeds into sexual exploitation and trafficking—that we have a part to play in that. Even just a cavalier attitude about casual sex—and you can hook up with whomever you want—you're contributing to the enemy's design on tarnishing sexuality.

That's really convicting. It changes the way we pray, and it changes the way we act.

Dennis: I want to take a step back and just address a couple, who are listening to our broadcast, where sex has become boring and—well, whether a man or a woman, it can just be something you just "have to do" or neglect to do.

Bob: Yes. Let's say somebody comes to you and says, "Okay; here's our deal…"—a couple in their 30s / they've got three kids. Both of them have full-time jobs. They would say: "You know, I guess for the last year, maybe once or twice a month we'll have sex and it is okay; but it kind of feels more like a chore. I'm honestly—I'm really okay if we just kind of let it phase out of our marriage." There are people thinking like that; aren't there?

Juli: There are; absolutely!

I would say: "First of all, you're normal. Those are normal seasons of marriage.

Second of all, you might be okay with letting it fade away; but God's not okay with letting it fade away. We know that because, in 1 Corinthians 7, one of the few very specific pieces of marriage advice that we get from the Bible is: "Don't neglect sexual intimacy except for mutual consent for a time of prayer,"—that's the only reason why you should be avoiding this.

Now, of course, there are health issues and things like that you may need to work through; but the spirit of it is: "This is *very* important for you to pursue,"—that would be the challenge of: "God would say you need to keep working on this,"—but it is normal to struggle.

Bob: Even if the husband and wife kind of mutually say, "We're okay with it sliding," you're saying: "You may be, but God's not. You need to make this a more active discipline in your marriage"?

Juli: Absolutely! And the biology actually supports that.

The biology shows—now that we understand more about the brain and sexual response—that if a couple is sexually intimate on a regular basis, the hormones that are produced in the brain bond that husband and wife together—actually, in some ways / in a very healthy way—make you *addicted* to your spouse, where you can't wait to see them / you can't wait to be with them. You get a hormone in your body called oxytocin that makes them more pleasurable to you / like less offensive. It's the same hormone that a new mom gets when they have a baby, because you need to love that baby no matter what happens. God has created sexual intimacy, when it occurs regularly in the confines of a relationship, to be glue that continually draws a couple together. To neglect that is, not only something that God says is a bad idea, it's what scientific research is saying is a bad idea.

Dennis: In your book, you talk about a couple that almost sounds like what Bob was describing—been married ten years, had three kids, and were going through a time of sexual struggle/boredom. That couple was you and your husband.

Juli: Yes. [Laughter] We had many years of boredom. One of the first steps I took was—I dedicated three months: "Lord, I'm going to pray about this area of my life. I'm going to *learn* to enjoy it, and I'm going to learn to pursue it,"— which was just something that God gave me and challenged me with.

I'm a very goal-oriented person; and when I set my mind on doing something, I put energy into it—I save time for it; I think about it; I pray about it. That's what happened in this area of our marriage—is I got serious about saying: "God, You're not okay with where we are / I'm not okay with where we are. I'm going to devote myself to helping change that."

Dennis: Did you tell Mike you were going to do that?

Juli: No; I didn't want the accountability! [Laughter] I told him after! [Laughter]

Bob: So what happened in that three-month period?

Juli: A lot happened! I think I could see definite changes—

Dennis: Is Mike where we can call him right now? [Laughter]

Juli: He probably is.

Dennis: Let's get him on the phone and find out what happened.

Juli: Really?

Dennis: Really!

Juli: [Laughter] You are serious?

Dennis: I'm serious.

Juli: Okay.

Bob: You good with this?

Juli: Yes; sure!

Bob: Alright.

Juli: I don't know if he will be, but—

Bob: Well—

Juli: —we'll see.

Bob: —we'll find out.

Juli: Ask him honestly.

Bob: I think our engineer, Keith, is punching up the phone number right now. [Phone ringing]

Mike: Hi; this is Mike speaking.

Bob: Mike Slattery.

Mike: Yes.

Bob: It's Bob Lepine from *FamilyLife Today*. I'm here with Dennis Rainey and your wife, whom I—I heard her call you "Swoo"? Is that the—is that—

Mike: [Laughter]

Bob: What does that stand for?—Swoo?

Mike: I don't—there's not a real actual acronym or what not—it's just a song we made up, way back when, "Swee Swoo" and "Swoo" just kind of stuck after that.

Bob: It just stuck—well that's nice!

Dennis: So Mike, I just turned to Juli and I said, "So, you prayed about your intimacy with your husband for three months" and I asked her / I said, "So did you tell Mike?"

She said "No; I didn't want the accountability!" [Laughter] We were starting to ask her; and we thought, "No; let's just call Mike!"

What did you think about what was happening, Mike?

Mike: I think anytime you go back to God for anything—be it a budget, be it parenting, be it physical intimacy—you're never going to go wrong. As Christians, that's what we subscribe to—God has all the answers, and any area of our life is open to prayer with that. I think the world kind of guides us away from that, but I think that's the best thing to do. Juli has been a great example of doing that—she lives what she says. If she doesn't, she prays about it. We're very open with that communication, which has been great.

Bob: When did it dawn on you this was an area that your wife was beginning to pray about this whole issue of intimacy in marriage and that God was at work?

Juli: Well, if I could—maybe just tell a story to kind of prompt the memory of what was happening. This was probably a good ten years ago, before I started off thinking of Intimacy. I would have my quiet time in the evening.

As any young mom knows, the evening is your time—where you put the kids to bed; you don't want to be bothered; you have your tea; and your Bible, or books, or whatever. I would have my quiet time and just be asking God, "Would You show me how to draw closer to You and how to love You?"

During that period of time—of beginning to pray about this—the Lord would begin speaking to me," If you want to love Me, then go up and just initiate with your husband." There were a few times—and it's become more frequent now—

Mike: Exactly; yes.

Juli: —where I'll be doing my quiet time, whether it's in the morning or the evening—and that's the word that the Lord will give me—is: "This is a way that you honor Me."

Mike: Yes; basically, I remember when there was one time where Jules was—in her routine, typically on Saturday—Juli would get up, she'll go down and do her quiet time—kind of her normal routine, Monday through Sunday—she'll do that.

If it's like on a weekend, when I'm not going to work or jumping to the gym, I'll kind of stay in bed and kind of let her do her—that's her time with God. I never want to encroach on that.

There was a time, where I was praying about it—and I just doing my quiet time, and she was doing her quiet time. We were both praying about the same thing. Then Juli came up, and we would kind of share that together—like: "Were you praying about this?" and "I was praying about this," "I think God heard us." [Laughter] So that was really—that was very special.

Bob: You're a good sport, Mike. Thanks for letting us interrupt your day and just authenticate what your wife has been sharing with us here.

Mike: I appreciate it. Thank you, guys, for getting the message out, because Juli's been doing this for the last several years. When she was at Focus—and initially, when God was pulling her away, we prayed about it. I said, "As long as you're sure this is what God wants you to do, I'm 100 percent behind you." It's been a great journey. The main thing is we're all used by God.

Dennis: I appreciate your courage too. The easiest thing to do is nothing.

Mike: Sure.

Dennis: The easiest thing to say, if you're a very private person, is nothing.

Mike: Yes.

Dennis: And in the process, there's a lot of folks, again, who have received some help and hope as a result of you guys being honest about your own marriage.

Pray God's favor on you in your pursuit in your vocation but also in your family.

Mike: Thank you so much. I truly appreciate it. God bless. God bless all of you.

Bob: You want to say, "Goodbye," to your husband?

Juli: I love you Hon. Thanks for being a good sport.

Mike: Okay; I love you Baby-doll. Look forward to seeing you tonight baby; alright.

Juli: Me too; bye.

Mike: Bye-bye.

Dennis: [Laughter] I wish they could see Juli's grin, Bob.

Bob: I think they could *hear* Juli's grin—[Laughter] —as she said, "Goodbye," to her husband. You've been married how many years?

Juli: Twenty-two years.

Bob: And you're looking forward to seeing him tonight?

Juli: Yes; of course, I am—he's my best friend.

Bob: If your marriage had been on the trajectory / if it had remained on the trajectory that it was on—if you hadn't, ten/twelve years ago, had this kind of three months before the Lord, where do you think you'd be today?

Juli: Not where we are; because I had all the education I needed, as a clinical psychologist.

I worked with couples on marriage issues and sexual issues but never really understood the power of inviting God, and the power of bringing sexuality under His Lordship, because I'd never heard that before.

When you invite God into any sphere of your life, He's going to confront you on things that are difficult—yes—but He's / but He's going to provide hope and healing in ways that you didn't know you needed.

Dennis: You're a clinical psychologist. I'd like you to give your best counsel to men about understanding their wives.

Juli: I guess the analogy that I like to use regarding sexuality—and this is because I'm a mom of three boys—is I like to talk about Legos®. If you, on your honeymoon—you think you're going to open up this great gift that's going to be complete—you'll be really disappointed. And that's the truth with Legos.

If you go to the store and buy a package of Legos, and you see this beautiful thing on the outside—this cool Bat mobile or whatever it is—and you open it up, you're disappointed.

I would encourage *men* that God has given you a *gift* of building something together that, at first, isn't going to make any sense; but that's part of the design—that He's challenging you to learn to love, and to build, and to sacrifice. Your wife may take years/ I'm going to say your wife may take decades to really understand sexually, and emotionally, and spiritually. She does not understand herself. But God's challenge to you is to: "Continue to build; continue to pursue; ask God for wisdom—have a sensitive heart."

This is the other thing I think we pass right over—in Ephesians, Chapter 5, Paul writes specifically to husbands. He says to "…love your wives as Christ loved the church and laid Himself down for her." Then it says that "He washed the church with the word, presenting her as a spotless bride."

Part of what Paul is saying to you, as a husband, is: "Are you protecting the purity of your wife so that you can present her as a spotless bride?" Don't bring anything into your mind or your bedroom that would defile your wife. Make that a safe place, emotionally and spiritually.

Dennis: I would add one other thing too: "If you think you're going to trade in this box of Legos for a better box, that's all put together perfectly—it's a lie.

Juli: Yes.

Dennis: "It's a lie. The box God has given you is the one you need to keep your covenant with / keep building into and stay the course. Don't quit."

Okay; Juli—now, I want you to take the women underneath your arm and just counsel them. What would you say to them about their relationship with their husband?

Juli: Well, I would say, “Don’t underestimate the power of sexuality,”—that so often we think of power as a bad thing—but I see that God has given a wife, naturally, tremendous power in marriage around the issue of her body and sexuality.

Because we’re not always open and honest about that being a powerful tool that God has given, we don’t use that power well—we either neglect it; we don’t prioritize it; or we use it in a manipulative way.

If you can say: “Oh man, God has given me a place of power in my husband’s life that I’m jealous of—I don’t want any other woman on the planet to have this power with my husband. I want to learn to use it effectively to capture his heart / to share something with him that no one else gets to share with him.” That’s going to take work to pursue; and I’ve shared in my own testimony how it has taken work, but it is *so* worth it.

Bob: I want to ask you about that power—because we’ve seen husbands and wives get pulled outside of the marriage covenant; because another woman uses that power with a married man, or because a married man pursues a married woman.

When a couple takes sexuality outside of their marriage—when they give up on what ought to be going on at home or when they just supplement it with an affair—what’s really going on in the heart of the husband or the heart of the wife in pursuing that infidelity in the first place?

Juli: There can be lots of things going on, but I think a profound thing is—they’ve never really understood, in the concept of covenant, that sexuality is all about covenant. The reason that God says it’s reserved for marriage is because there’s this lifelong promise or covenant. If you take it outside of that, you’re destroying something so spiritual and special, that recovering from that is *tremendously* difficult.

First, there’s that discounting of the covenant—but also, pretty much with every situation where there’s an emotional or sexual affair, you can kind of do the forensic on that relationship. The couple can begin to tell you, “This is when we started drifting apart,” whether it was when she got busy with the kids, or she put on weight and didn’t feel sexy anymore, or he got so pulled into his career that he stopped spending time with her.

I know you two work on marriages so much that you’ve seen this—that affairs don’t begin with that relationship of being sexually unfaithful—they begin when you get seeds planted in your mind that: “Someone else can love me more than this person loves me.”

Dennis: It’s an emotional connection—

Juli: Absolutely.

Dennis: —not a physical connection—but it grows into that.

Juli: Yes.

Dennis: I think what / what our listeners need to know that: "If your relationship is teetering toward an emotional affair, the advice is: 'You've got to extinguish the chemical reaction now. You've got to take the number out of your cell phone; you've got to completely sever the relationship—if it means changing places of work because of the temptation you have to protect your marriage, and your family, your children, your legacy.' This is really, really important what we're talking about here." I so agree with your advice: "Protect your covenant at all costs."

Bob: I think you made a good point. You might just pull back and analyze, "What is it that I'm most attracted to here?" because that will help you identify what's been lacking—some longing that's an unmet longing—that was designed for marriage that may not be happening in marriage. Then sit down with your husband or your wife and say: "You know, there's an area in my heart that I've just felt lonely in," or "…I felt lacking," "….an area where we can—can we work on this together, and can we try to grow this together?"—rather than saying: "I'm just going to go find it somewhere else." It is poisoned fruit outside the marriage covenant.

The other thing I encourage you to do is—just honestly ask the Lord—and even to share with a mentor and ask, "What lies am I believing?" because the enemy works in lies.

Dennis: That's right.

Juli: He will convince you that you're going to be happier with someone else, or some other guy is going to understand you more than your husband does, or that God can't rekindle and restore your relationship with your husband or your wife. You need to confront those lies with truth.

Dennis: You're not going to trade in this box of Legos and find another box that's perfectly put together, exactly the way you want it. You're still going to be dealing with your selfishness.

Juli: Yes.

Dennis: You're going to be dealing with another person's selfishness; and then, you're going to be dealing with the debris of a broken marriage / a broken family. That's not a recipe for success in marriage, family, or in life.

Juli, I just want you to know I'm really proud of you for stepping out in faith and beginning this new ministry called Authentic Intimacy.

I know that you didn't have to go try this / go do this, but I think it's a much needed area

and dimension of the marriage relationship.

Michelle: *FamilyLife Today* is brought to you by FamilyLife in Little Rock, Arkansas. And although FamilyLife is located in the United States of America, we understand that our cultures vary but the issues facing us are similar. We all have joys in life, we all struggle and we all want to love and be loved. And we want your family, your marriage and your relationships to succeed.

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I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our global broadcast manager Rhonda Street. I also want to thank our editor Larry Loraine. For Dennis Rainey and Bob Lepine, I'm Michelle Hill and I invite you to join us again for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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