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Sexual Discipleship

Guest:	Juli Slattery
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Bob: Has it ever occurred to you that sexual intimacy between a man and a woman—that was God's idea and His design? Here is Dr. Juli Slattery.

Juli: I think that the average Christian couple can't imagine God blessing anything sexual—where we see in the Song of Solomon that, actually, God is blessing this couple that is in the midst of sexual intimacy: "Eat friends. Drink. Imbibe deeply. Enjoy this, because I gave this to you as a gift. Even if you've got all kinds of things in your past, bring those before Me / lay them before Me; and I bless what you have today within the confines of marriage."

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey. I'm Bob Lepine. The Bible has a lot to say about intimacy in marriage—a lot of good things—and we're going to explore some of it today. Stay with us.

1:00

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. I think you were the first person I ever heard quote Howard Hendricks on the subject we're talking about today. And the quote, if I remember it—you can correct me if I'm wrong—was—

Dennis: I will. [Laughter]

Bob: No—no doubt there. I think he said, "We should not be ashamed to discuss what God was not embarrassed to create."

Dennis: That's right. You nailed it.

Bob: That's what we're going to be doing today; right?

Dennis: We are going to discuss what God was not ashamed to create. In fact, I just want to read about it—here in Genesis, Chapter 1, verse 27: "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." I don't understand it. I just know the Bible proclaims it. Somehow, our sexuality, as men and women, declares who God is to a planet that does not know Almighty God and all that He is about.

2:00

And I've got to tell you—over a lifetime, you just begin to explore what God is up to around this whole area of human sexuality. Dr. Juli Slattery is going to help us unpack this today and provide all the answers with a book that she has written called *25 Questions You're Afraid to Ask About Love, Sex, and Intimacy*.

Juli: Wow!

Dennis: Wow is right.

Juli: All the questions—I don't—

Dennis: Well, you actually chose to be on *FamilyLife Today* to discuss this.

Juli: This is obedience.

Dennis: I think it is. [Laughter] Juli has been married to her husband Mike since 1994. They have three sons. She is a clinical psychologist / authored a number of books. I just want to talk about something that you discuss in your book. I've never heard this subject before; but I have to admit I really, really like this—you talk about the need for sexual discipleship. I love the concept because discipleship means training;—

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Juli: Right.

Dennis: —it means equipping; it means helping someone know how to think about life. Now, you apply it, if you would, to the area of human sexuality.

Juli: Absolutely. You know, I grew up in a Christian family / in church. The best that I got was little pockets of sex education. The difference between discipleship and education is what you referred to, Dennis—is: "Do you know how to think biblically about sexuality?" Most of us, I would say, even me growing up as a clinical psychologist, as a Christian, we only have little pockets of information about God's perspective of sexuality rather than being able to think fluently about God's design for sexuality. Now, in today's world sex education from the church, and from the family I will say, is not enough because every day kids are getting bombarded with the world's sexual discipleship.

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They are telling what to think about homosexuality, they are telling you what to think about teen sexuality. Every day you are bombarded with these messages about what

sex should be and why we are sexual and it is all the wrong messages. So, if we as parents and as the church maybe preach on sermon on it every five years, just take our kids away for a weekend—which is a great place to start—but we are not teaching them to be fluent in their thinking of God's perspective on sexuality we are not equipping them for this rapidly changing culture.

Dennis: Give us an idea of one of those little pockets of truth you learned, growing up. Explain what you mean by that.

Juli: Sure. You're told sex is wrong before marriage; and somehow, it is right after marriage: "Don't do it before you get married. Don't think about it. Don't be sexual. But as soon as you get married, all of a sudden, this switch will flip, and you're going to have fun." So, that's what we're told.

The reality of it is—you are a sexual person—

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—before or if you never get married you're still a sexual person: "What do I do with that?" Then, once you get married—if you get married—it's not like this switch will flip and then, all of a sudden, you know how to enjoy this. I experienced that as a Christian young woman. It was like the messages were so confusing. I would say, in the first decade of our marriage, "This area was not good"; and we didn't know how to address it because we weren't given the training.

Dennis: You know, I am just reflecting back and I am smiling—I really probably shouldn't be but—I don't remember hearing any messages from the church.

Juli: None.

Dennis: I don't recall a message or a conversation with my mom or dad. I do remember a conversation with Jimmy Fletcher. It had been snowing and we were—I can show you the spot on the road—where we were walking along in our galoshes talking about stuff and he gave me my first sex education. I went: "No way!"

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I was in the eighth grade for goodness sakes. Now that was a different era, okay. I wasn't living under the bombardment of we have today. But you think about young people today. How many messages must they receive by the time they are 21 years of age?

Juli: It is millions, I would say.

Dennis: It would be. So what parent doesn't take a step back and feel helpless against the onslaught of the culture that is dramatically impacting their son or daughter?

Bob: I just have to say—I love the fact that your starting place for this conversation is—not how to counteract cultural messages or how to answer: "Well, what's acceptable / what's not acceptable?"—your starting place is: "Let's think like God thinks about this subject. Let's cultivate a biblical worldview and not just a limited, pocketed biblical worldview, where we know this is true and this is true; but we don't see the big picture. Let's get it all out on the table and understand it in a fully-orbed way."

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When you do that—now, all of a sudden, a lot of the questions that you have get answered by themselves; don't they?

Juli: They absolutely do. What I'm seeing, in working with women, is that the average Christian woman has been discipled in many areas of her life—including her marriage—but she hasn't been discipled in how to think about sexuality. So she know certain things about the Bible, certain things about marriage but she gets asked a question like: "Why wouldn't God want two women to love each other? What's the big deal?" She stumbles and says: "Well, I don't know. I guess it is in the Bible that it is wrong." But she doesn't know how to think biblically from a practical theology and how to respond to that with her children, with her neighbor. Or she is asked a question like: "Why would reading '50 Shades of Grey' together as a couple, why would that be wrong?" She's like: "I am not sure. I don't know how to answer that."—because she hasn't been disciple in how God views sexuality.

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Why sexuality is holy. Why it is under attack by the enemy. She doesn't see the spiritual landscape behind those questions and issues.

Bob: So, when you're advocating sexual discipleship—the term that Dennis mentioned—how does that happen in a practical way? I think there probably are a lot of people, going, "And who's competent to do the discipling, given the fact that we're all kind of messed up in this area?"

Juli: I don't know who first said it, but I've heard someone say that: "Some things are too important not to do poorly." In other words, we don't have to have it *mastered* to step into this arena. We just have to say: "Alright, Lord, we're dying here / we're drowning here. Would You begin equipping us? Would You begin raising up leaders? Would You give us wisdom to know what You believe about sexuality by reading Your Scripture with that lens?"

There are a lot of resources out there. That's part of my passion—is creating resources—there are other ministries doing that—but it says:

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"Let's not just look at the issue; for example, of pornography and say: 'Oh, that's bad. Here's how you combat it.' But let's tie that into the larger spiritual battle of what's happening in our church and in our culture related to sexuality and why God cares about that battle."

Dennis: And you don't have to wait until—as we're talking about here—you have the subject mastered—

Juli: No.

Dennis: —to begin talking with your son or your daughter.

I just have to raise one of the issues that a lot of parents are afraid their children are going to ask, "Well, Mom/Dad, did you wait?"—to which, how do you answer that question? How do you help parents know how to deal with their children's curiosity?

Juli: Yes; you know, it's a wonderful example to share the gospel right there; because what we know from children and, particularly, teenagers is that they learn and respect you the most when you're authentic.

You don't have to give details; but if you tell the story, right then, about if you didn't wait: "How I didn't trust God's plan," or "I didn't know God's plan.

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Here are the consequences that I walked with. Here's how the Lord met me and has forgiven me in that," and "I don't want you to have to walk through those same consequences that I did." So, not only there, discipling your children sexually, you're discipling them in terms of understanding what grace is / who God is—that He can forgive sin. It's those teachable moments that we, because of our own fear, walk away from instead of walking into.

Dennis: So, you're raising three teenage sons right now.

Juli: Yes.

Dennis: You would have that level of honesty, that level of an answer with your thirteen, seventeen, nineteen-year-old.

Juli: Yes, because they struggle, because they fall and I want to be able to meet them and the scripture says: “All of us fall. All of us need the grace of God—me too—and this is how God has brought grace into my life, and I would love to see Him bring that grace into your life right now.”

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Bob: You mentioned that in the first decade of your marriage, this was not an area of marriage that was something that you’d say you were thriving in. If you were doing a little sexual discipleship today with Juli Slattery—in year five of your marriage—

Juli: Yes.

Bob: —what questions would Juli be asking you, and what answers would you be giving her?

Juli: I would say the two questions that I was asking at the time were: “Why did God make us so different? This would be so much better if we thought the same and wanted the same things.” And I would be asking, “Why did God make this more fun for men than He did for women?” because that was our situation. It felt very much like this was my wifely duty.

God has begun answering those questions for me, and it’s a joy to pass those on to other women and other couples. You know, that first question of “Why did God make us so different?”—one of the things that I began to realize—

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—is that God cares a lot about how we love each other. He really cares that we become greater lovers, not selfish lovers.

As long as a husband and wife want the same things, they can be fulfilled by being selfish; but as soon as he wants something different than you want, for you both to be fulfilled, you have to learn to be servants and unselfish. God’s begun teaching me the beauty of working through those frustrations and becoming unselfish so that you both can be fulfilled. That would be the answer to the first question.

Then, the answer to the second question—boy, I was really messed up in my understanding of sexuality from a biblical perspective; because I think there is this Christian tradition, rather than biblical truth, that God has created sexuality for a man and the woman has that wifely duty. But when you read the Scripture; for example, 1 Corinthians 7—

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—before it ever talks about a wife's duty to fulfill her husband's needs—it says, "The husband has the duty to fulfill his wife's needs."

I think we skip right over that. We don't challenge men—to say, "Your wife is going to be a lot more complicated to figure out than you are; but God is charging you to learn about her sexuality, to learn how to please, to learn how to invite her into intimacy." We don't talk that honestly about what the Scripture actually says.

Bob: Juli, over the years, one of the things that has been a question that we've increasingly heard from women is, "I don't fit the stereotype." The stereotype is the husband has the appetite for this area, and the wife doesn't. "In my marriage"—this wife will say to us—"it's the opposite. Is there something wrong with me, or what's wrong with him?"

Juli: Yes. I would say that probably for couples that are in their 20s or 30s,

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—that stereotype is actually even broken now; because it's so common now for the wife to want sexual intimacy more than the husband does. It's a new norm which is something that we increasingly hear as well.

Bob: So, what's the deal? Why is it like that? And what do you say to a wife who says, "My husband just is not interested"?

Juli: It's difficult to have a cookie-cutter response to that, Bob, because I think that there are so many different reasons why that can be.

Dennis: Right.

Juli: For some couples, it's just their normal / it's their biology. It can be the fact that, in some cases, a woman has a higher than normal level of testosterone in her body. It can be personality. So, for some couples, you just have to say: "You know, this is our normal, and we don't need to compare ourselves to some stereotype. Let's just enjoy what we have together and work through it."

But there are also couples where there is something going on that needs to be addressed. A couple of the most common issues are—number one, pornography; and number two, I think,

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—men not feeling like men in marriage. We'll talk about both of those for a second here. With pornography, what you have to understand is—pornography ruins your sexual appetite. It's almost as if you feed a kid, growing up, Doritos® and ice cream and then

you put broccoli and chicken in front of them, they don't have an appetite for what's healthy.

That's what's happening with this whole generation of men related to pornography. They've been exposed to it from the time they were eight, or ten, or twelve and exposed repeatedly to the point where their brain cannot sexually respond to normal, healthy sexuality. In many cases, I think that's the issue—where men cannot respond to healthy, sexual intimacy; and also, it's safer for them to escape to fantasy or pornography rather than work through the issues with their wife.

Bob: There is no rejection in pornography.

Juli: Right.

Bob: But in marriage, you face the potential of being turned away.

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Juli: And there's no work that you have to do with pornography—there is no waiting / there is no loving, and sacrifice, and communication. So, men are just going that route instead of working on true intimacy.

Dennis: Yes; the command for husbands to understand their wives—it's not optional.

Juli: No.

Dennis: And this area, I think, points out to us how well we understand our wives or how little we understand our wives.

Bob: But you said it's not just pornography. There may be another factor that is draining the sexual interest away from a husband.

Juli: Yes; I have found in working with couples that very often the pattern that's happening in the bedroom is mirroring the pattern that's happening in their emotional relationship. We're seeing more and more that women are getting married with a sense of confidence and competence and "I know where we're headed, and I have goals." Men are more immature in terms of knowing who they are, what they want, and spiritually more immature.

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So, we have women really leading the family; and we have women that are critical of their husbands—almost treat them like little kids, like: "Pick up your socks," and "Why did you do it this way?" That is going to bleed over into the bedroom. I think a lot of the reason we're seeing this dynamic is because men don't feel like men in their marriage.

They feel like they are married to their mom, who is always criticizing and telling them how to do things. That is going to flow over into sexual intimacy.

So, now, the reason that is difficult to talk about these topics is—I would hate for the couple that has healthy, emotional intimacy—there is no pornography involved, but they still have this dynamic of the woman having a higher sex drive than the man—for them to feel paranoid—like: "Well, there must be something wrong with us."

But I would say—in probably 80 percent of those marriages, where there is this role reversal, there is something else going on—whether it's pornography, or maybe sexual abuse that a husband has in his past,

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—or this pattern of a woman being a very dominant person in the family and the man becoming passive.

Dennis: Comment on workaholism; because we live in a very fast-paced culture, where sometimes guys are just worn out from their jobs and they don't have a lot of energy.

Bob: Guys and gals—I mean, it is husbands and wives getting together at ten o'clock, going: "I'm exhausted. Are you exhausted?" I just have to say here— there have been a few times when my wife said, "I thought you said you were exhausted;" and I said, "Well, I thought I was." So, that—it doesn't always work that way, but what is this dynamic of how being exhausted can affect your intimate relationship?

Juli: Yes; and the number one reason why women are not interested in sex is because of exhaustion. I think men are catching up with that in terms of just the levels of stress that they're dealing with—

Dennis: Right.

Juli: —the tiredness. That's all feeding into a lack of sexual interest as well.

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But I think the main point here is that most couples do not see their sexual relationship as a priority. Now, some guys are saying, "I sure do"; but I would say, in general, the average couple doesn't say, before the Lord, "This is something that we need to make a priority and work on." Now, if you read 1 Corinthians 7, that passage is actually saying: "This should be a priority. You should not be neglecting this area of your marriage. You should be working on making it fun and exciting for both of you."

When you don't make something a priority, you save the leftovers for it—so: "If we happen to have a little extra energy—both of us—at 10:30 at night, when we've worked

all day and taken care of kids, maybe, we can enjoy each other." Well, that's not going to happen. When you begin saying: "This is not only a priority for us in marriage, it's also a priority that God has given us in marriage," you begin saying, "Okay; we've got to save some of the best of who we are to work on this—our energy, our time, our focus."

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That can be a game changer.

Dennis: And what we're talking about, Juli, is really a part of your concept called sexual discipleship, which is getting God's perspective on sex. I think you said it earlier—how did you say it?—about some areas are far too important to avoid?

Juli: Yes; they are worth doing poorly.

Dennis: Yes; that's true with our children as we educate them; and it's also true of us, as husbands and wives. We need to make sure we run the race together and end up at the finish line together.

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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 tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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