FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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What Does God Approve of?

Guest:	Juli Slattery
From the series:	25 Questions You Are Afraid to Ask (Day 1 of 3)
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Bob: More marriages than ever are struggling with issues related to marital intimacy and sexuality. Dr. Juli Slattery says, "There is a good reason why."

Juli: You can now assume that the average couple is dealing with issues of pornography / there is a good chance there has been sexual trauma in the past—that people are bringing in a lot of baggage, and shame, and guilt about the things that have happened before marriage. We're dealing with the assumption, now, that there are an awful lot of men and women who are single, into their 30s and 40s, before their first marriage. The game has really changed. God's truth hasn't changed, but how we address it and the assumptions we make are very different.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We're going to dive right into today and talk about issues that a lot of you are facing in your marriage. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*.

1:00

Thanks for joining us. We just ought to say, here at the beginning—we're about to have a candid conversation on a sensitive subject. It's one that you sometimes wonder, "Should we even be talking about this?" But honestly, every time we talk to couples about issues in their marriage, this subject comes up.

Dennis: It does. We've got a person who knows how to handle delicate subjects like this very, very well. Dr. Juli Slattery joins us on *FamilyLife Today*. Juli—welcome to *FamilyLife Today*.

Juli: Thanks for having me.

Dennis: You know, I'm really impressed, Bob, that Juli chose to be on *FamilyLife Today*. Most of our guests we trick, but Juli actually chose to be on *FamilyLife Today* and talk about this subject we're going to talk about. [Laughter]

Bob: She knew what she was getting herself into; right?

Dennis: In case our listeners don't know who that name is—Juli is married to Mike and has been since 1994. She has three sons—lives in Colorado. She is a clinical psychologist—

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—author of seven books, speaker, and host of *Java with Juli*, which takes place in a coffee shop.

Juli: It does; yes. See, I love coffee so much I had to find a way to work it into my normal routine.

Dennis: Yes. Have you done some *Java with Juli* on this book we're about to talk about?

Juli: Well, you know, I think that this book came out of a lot of those conversations. So, it's kind of sprinkled around, I'd say.

Dennis: Well, our audience is wondering what you've written about. Here's the name of the book—you're going to get the point—*25 Questions You're Afraid to Ask About Love, Sex, and Intimacy*. Why this book? Why now?

Juli: Well, I run a ministry called Authentic Intimacy. A lot of what I do every day is teach, and write, and answer people's questions on sexuality. Wherever I go—for example, speaking—we will have at least a half an hour, if not an hour, of live Q&A where women can text in their questions anonymously.

3:00

From that and, also, meeting with women and the emails we get—there are some consistent questions that women will ask. We just thought: "Hey, why not compile this into one resource? These are the questions that either we get asked all the time or, sometimes, they're the questions underneath the question.

Dennis: Is there a number one question women are asking today that seems to be a unique question because of the day we live in?

Juli: The questions that are most common, probably, would be the most common ten years ago, I'm going to think—about like: "What does God approve of in the marriage bed?" for example—or as a single woman—"Does God say this act is wrong?" That's the number one question. I think, in terms of the changing culture, what I've seen—and probably what you've seen in your ministry to marriage and family—is that things that were an *assumption* 15 or

20 years ago are no longer an assumption—like: “Where does the Bible actually say it’s wrong to have sex out of marriage? I’ve never heard that before,” whereas, again, 15 or 20 years ago,

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—those were assumptions that we could begin with.

Bob: When we host our *Weekend to Remember*® marriage getaways for couples, we always have time where we are with the engaged couples. Twenty years ago, when you got the engaged couples together in the room, you had an assumption, as a speaker, that some percentage of your audience was probably sexually active during their engagement period. Today, when you get together with that group, the assumption is virtually everybody—in fact, I think the statistic I saw most recently was that five percent of women who get married today are virgins when they get married.

Juli: Yes.

Bob: We’re in a very different place than we were two decades ago, as it relates to a lot of the subjects that you are writing about.

Juli: And it’s not just being sexually active; but you can now assume that the average couple is dealing with issues of pornography; that there is a good chance there has been sexual trauma in the past—that people are bringing in a lot of baggage, and shame, and guilt about the things that have happened before marriage.

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And we’re dealing with the assumption, now, that there are an awful lot of men and women, who are single into their 30s and 40s, before their first marriage. The game has really changed. God’s truth hasn’t changed, but how we address it and the assumptions we make are very different.

Dennis: There is one other subject you left out of that list, and that’s the multiple choice sexuality that we have today. People used to have to decide whether they were going to be immoral or not. Now, they have to choose whether they are male/female, homosexual male/homosexual female, transgender. There is fluidity about our culture today that really adds a lot of confusion as well.

Juli: Yes; that’s a great point. And I think, even within the last five years, we’ve seen this permission being given to children, to parents, and to teens. I don’t think we’ve seen the impact of that yet. I think, probably, in another five or ten years, we’re going to start seeing these young children that were told, at a young age, that:
6:00

“You can choose to be male or female,” “You can choose your sexual orientation,”—when they start getting into their 20s and 30s, it’s going to be, again, a big game changer.

Bob: Juli, I’m imagining that when you were a junior in high school and starting to think: “Gee, I wonder what God’s plan for my life is. I wonder what I’ll be doing and what—how He’ll direct my life,”—I’m guessing, as a junior, you weren’t thinking, “I bet I’ll be writing and speaking a lot about sexuality and intimacy.”

Juli: No; I wasn’t thinking that ten years ago. [Laughter]

Bob: So, where did this begin to blossom in your life and why this subject for you?

Juli: This really started to take root about 5 years ago when I was working at Focus On The Family. It began with the Lord taking me, personally, very deep in my relationship with Him, just out of the blue. There was a season of about a year where God was just waking me up in the middle of the night, just drawing me to Himself in a way that I had never experienced before.

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Just seeking Him in a different way. At about the same time, I had met Linda Dillow. I know that you two know her. I interviewed her as a guest on the Focus broadcast and we connected. She began to just spiritually mentor me. As I was going through that time of seeking the Lord, month after month after month, I actually started to get a pain in my chest / in my heart that would get more intense as I would pray. It was there for months. Linda started to say: “The Lord is giving you a new call. You need to ask Him what He’s calling you to.”

So, I’d just get on my knees and say: “God, what is this pain? What is this call?” One day, on my knees, I was just praying. The words of Isaiah 61, verses 1-3, just flooded through my mind—that “God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the broken hearted, to set the captives free.” I didn’t even know where that verse was found. I Googled it on my phone—found it in Isaiah—

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—and wrote in my Bible on that day: “This is Your call on my life,” and wrote the date and didn’t know where that would lead.

That’s kind of a long story to say that this was not my choice. I was probably the least likely to be a spokesperson on sexuality because I don’t like conflict / I don’t like difficult conversations—but it was so clear that this was what God was calling me to—just the pain, particularly, that women experience all around the world on this issue of sexuality and that God hears that pain, that He hears the cries, and that His truth is able to

minister. That's how all this began; and since then, it's just been really a daily walk of faith.

Dennis: You quoted what Isaiah talked about. It's actually kind of a picture of going to a prison—a place of torture / a place of pain. What percent of women today, do you think, are coming out of that prison when it comes to their own sexuality?

9:00

Is it over 50 percent; do you think?

Juli: For sure.

Dennis: And where are there major issues that they are struggling with right now that you are picking up?

Juli: Yes; I would say that percentage is probably around 80 percent in my experience. I think the reason that we don't see that big percentage is because the struggles are different. We tend to categorize and compartmentalize. For example, if we've got about 30 percent of women who've experienced childhood sexual abuse—probably, the percentage is even higher; but that's what's being reported—then, you also have women, who are drawn into pornography, that struggle with lust issues. They don't know where to go with those.

Then, you have women who struggle with sexual identity. As the research is coming out in homosexuality, you find that about seven percent of women struggle, at some point, with sexual identity issues. That's more than double the percentage of men that struggle. So, women are being told that their sexuality is more fluid.

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Then, you add to that, Dennis and Bob, just the average Christian wife who doesn't know how to enjoy sexuality—whether it is physically painful; or she's filled with shame and guilt about this issue / she can't forgive herself for things in the past. Maybe, her husband is involved in pornography or has been unfaithful. You add all of those together—and even things I'm not mentioning—and you're talking about a vast majority of women in churches, I'd even say, who have these hidden issues and nowhere to go to ask the questions because they're not invited to ask.

Dennis: And the key word is hidden.

Juli: Yes.

Dennis: They are suffering in private and their shame has them locked up in that prison.

Juli: Yes.

Dennis: And the Christian community, the church, we as a group of people ought to be the safest people on the planet for a person who is struggling with something that has maybe victimized them or maybe it was their own choice. But in the midst of a culture that is twisted and even pulling more people into the vortex of this.

11:00

This ought to be the churches' finest day but in essence we are kind of afraid of this. We don't want to go near this subject. In fact some of our listeners have thought: "You shouldn't talking about this on Christian radio. This is public stuff here."

Juli: That makes me sad to hear that and it is true that the church's reaction has been: "God really doesn't want us talking about this." When, in fact, God created it, If you read he scriptures from Genesis to Revelation you will see sexuality addressed over and over again in different contexts but we skip over those passages. We get uncomfortable. I think what is happened is that the church has not talked about this for probably hundreds of years. Now, all of the sudden, we realize what a crisis we are in and we feel ill equipped. It is like, how do you jump into the deep end when you have never swam with the water wings on? Pastors and leaders don't know where to begin. So that is a lot of—

12:00

—my passion. Helping equip the church and teaching what I learned to coin as sexual discipleship.

Dennis: One of the things I want to talk about before we're done is—I want to talk about equipping parents to know how to raise their sons and daughters in this culture and how to cope with damage that's done to their children—maybe, they're victimized / maybe, it's their own choice—but I'd like you to help parents know how to coach their kids / counsel their kids—allow them to come out of the prison / out of the hidden shame—and deal with this without having to go through a long valley in their adult experience.

Juli: As you know from doing this kind of work with helping parents you cannot give what you do not have.

Dennis: Yes.

Juli: And that's the first step—is that a lot of parents don't know where their own issues are regarding sexuality.

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They don't have a practical understanding of how God views sexual brokenness / healthy sexuality. So, they feel very ill-equipped to pass on those conversations and beliefs to their kids.

That's where you've got to start—is: "Who are you—as a mom or a dad, as a husband or a wife, as a male or female—in terms of your own sexuality working through your own brokenness?" Then, once God has really brought truth into your life, you can begin passing that on to your children.

Bob: You know, we talked about the fact that the vast majority of people getting married today have already been sexually-experienced / they've already been together as a couple. They're bringing into marriage—whether they know it or not / whether they believe it or not—they're bringing in baggage / they're bringing in scars. They have disobeyed what God has said is best. There is shame there, whether they realize it or not.

I remember, Juli—years ago, speaking to a group of parents and asking this question—I said,

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"How many of you would love for your children, as they are growing up, you would love for them to have exactly the same experience in dating and relationships before marriage that you had when you were growing up?"

Juli: What a great question.

Bob: In a room of a hundred people, you'd see two or three hands go up. Now, that's got a lot of parents out their going, "I don't want my kids to follow the path that I went on." Yet, many of these couples don't know what to do with the sexual shame, the sexual brokenness, the sexual sin that's a part of their past that is still influencing their attempt to have healthy marital sexuality.

Juli: And it's not only the shame that you bring into marriage—that's a big part of it—but it's also how you view sexuality. When you have sexual intercourse with someone before marriage, essentially, you are trading a commodity.
You're saying, "I'll please you if you'll please me."

15:00

You're always on trial. What the research is showing—particularly, couples that live together before they are married—they bring that attitude about sexuality and relationship into their marriage.

When you save sexuality for marriage, you're saying: "This is an expression and a celebration of the promise we've made to each other. No matter what happens, I'm not going to reject you. If you don't please me, I'm not going to reject you. We're going to work through issues."

And so, it's not just the shame and guilt. It's that residual belief about why we are sexual and why we share our sexuality: "Am I on trial in front of my husband or wife? Are they going to reject me?" or "Is this a covenant and the celebration of a covenant?" People don't think that way / they don't talk about that, but *that* underlies a marriage. Until you get to some of those issues, it's very difficult to pass on healthy beliefs to your kids.

Dennis: So, to that person who feels on trial—

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—who feels like he or she is under performance with their spouse—what do you advise him or her to do?

Juli: I think it begins by acknowledging that we've brought, not only the obvious sexual baggage into our marriage, but we really allowed the enemy to have a foothold here. We've allowed him to tell us lies—like: "I can't trust in your love. You may reject me," or lies that: "I have to perform for you to stay with me. "Those are underlying our marriage. Let's, as a couple, just get on our knees and ask God to break all of that that happened before we got married and to renew what we are doing here."

I've met with couples who actually will say: "From this day forward, our sexual intimacy is going to be a whole different deal, because we *understand* it now. We're going to say: 'God, forgive us and release us from all of our past. We want to move forward with a new beginning.'" I think that's a really healthy place to start.

Dennis: I just want to underscore what you said about prayer.

17:00

I think there is something powerful, intensely spiritual, and healing to a husband and a wife who can bow their wills before Almighty God together, and pray together, and pray for one another, and begin to yield this area of their lives for God to sanctify it, make it right, make it holy—however, you want to describe it as the Bible would—and to allow that sexual dimension of the marriage relationship to be used for His purposes in their relationship; because it is good / it's not bad—the world is the one who has caused us to think that it's bad and evil.

Juli: Yes; and even when you mentioned praying together about your sex life and marriage, a lot of people are like: "Really? You can pray about that? God really wants to hear about it?" Yes! He wants to bless it, and He wants to sanctify it. If you, as a couple,

would commit—even for a month or two—to pray about sexual intimacy in your marriage,

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—to pray together, to pray before or after sexual intimacy you're going to see God begin to release things that you didn't even know were there from your past and bring healing that you didn't even know you needed.

Bob: A number of years ago, we had a conversation with a young wife. Her name was Heather Jamison—I don't know if that name rings a bell with you. She and her boyfriend became sexually active while she was a senior in high school / he was a freshman in college. She became pregnant quickly. The families got together and decided, "Well, if you're pregnant, you need to get married." They got married.

Years into their marriage, significant struggles—not just in the sexual area—but in *all* areas. Heather came to a point where she recognized: "We have never fully addressed the reality of our sexual sin. We felt bad about it. We were sorry about it." But she said, "There's a difference between that and repenting before the Lord with a brokenness—

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—and an understanding of how this was an offense against Him—not just a bad mistake we made—but we offended God." She goes on to describe how this act of being broken before the Lord about the reality of sexual sin was the first step to liberation for them.

I'm sure you've talked to person after person who has had that same kind of breakthrough.

Juli: Absolutely. And this can apply, also, to things like a spouse that's been unfaithful or a spouse who has been into pornography—to have that moment, as a couple, where you truly realize the devastation that's been done—not just sweeping it under the rug or saying, "Hey, we got counseling,"—but before the Lord, true repentance and *believing* that He is able to redeem and heal is the most profound thing that you can do.

Again, it's something I think we skip right over. We look for the advice of: "How do we fix it?" Scripture will say, "If you will confess your sin before God, He is going to be faithful to cleanse you."

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Bob: And let me just say—I think a person can tell whether they have really addressed their sexual sin from the past if they'll just do this simple test. If they'll say, "Here's what I did in the past, and I know it was a sin against God,"—and if they can just stop there

without saying, “But…”—see, it’s when we get to “I know it was a sin against God, but…—and then, we have all the excuses—“but I was this,” or “I did that,” or—now, all of a sudden, it’s like: “No; you need to be able to stop with: ‘I know it was a sin against God. I know it was an offense against His holiness.’”

You’ve got to get to the place where you really face up to the fact that this is not an excusable act, but this is really a conscious choice of sin that reaps consequences in your life. Until you get there, I don’t think you can get to the liberation.

Dennis: Yes; we’re not talking about a formula here to solve this problem, but we have talked about a couple of things that really do work.

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First of all, repentance—which we’ve been talking about here—where you do admit before Almighty God: “I’m sorry. I turn from that sin. We confess it together, as a couple; and we turn away from it.”

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 relationship to succeed.

FamilyLife’s mission is to effectively develop godly families, the kind of families that change the world one home at a time. A key part of our mission includes strengthen marriages and families all around the world. We want to do whatever we can do to bring timeless truth to bare on the challenges you face as you seek to strengthen your family.

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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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