Bob: Genesis 2:24 says “for this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” I am going to have a very candid conversation about that one flesh relationship in marriage about sexual intimacy today with our guest Dr. Dan Allender. Here is Dan.

Dan: Now that Genesis 2:24 passage is the brilliant blueprint that God has for us for knowing how to have a relationship with our spouse. If you don’t leave, you are not going to have good sex. If you don’t cleave to your wife, you are not going to have good sex.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, August 16th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife Dennis Rainey, and I am Bob Lepine. We are going to talk today about how our intimate relationship in marriage is a reflection of what’s going on in the rest of our marriage relationship.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Monday edition. We are going to be dealing with what is a sensitive subject today, but I am confident that our guest is going to help us do that in a way that is not only appropriate but also thoroughly biblical.

Dennis: A lot of our listeners have read his books and have enjoyed them for a number of years. Of course, we are speaking about Dr. Dan Allender. Dan, welcome back to FamilyLife Today.

Dan: Thank you, Dennis. Thank you, Bob.

Dennis: He is a man of the kindred spirit. He is also the Founder and Director of Wounded Heart Ministries, a writer, a speaker, a therapist. And among his books, he has authored the Cry of the Soul, The Wounded Heart, Intimate Allies, and The Healing Path. He is married to his wife Becky. And Dan, I want you to share what’s the purpose of Wounded Heart Ministries and what do you do there?

Dan: Well, Dennis, it originally began as I dealt with the issue of sexual abuse. It was a burden that I did not seek but God indeed put in my lap. As I began to address those issues, the book Wounded Heart was written. I have done a seminar. I do workshops. Basically, I am working with people to deal not just for sexual abuse but the broad,
broad issue of what does it mean to live in a fallen world, knowing full well we are going to harmed not just by abuse but by many other events.

What does it mean to live for us purposes? What I have seen and certainly been working on for a significant period of time and it shows that most in the book *The Healing Path* is that evil is out to destroy faith, hope, and love. Now, ultimately, that’s the damage of living in a fallen world. It’s harder to believe and to trust, harder to hope and dream and anticipate, harder to love and give and receive. And so the task of Wounded Heart Ministries really is to help people grow and from my standpoint, and one of the most important and one of the most elemental areas of life, faith, hope and love.

**Dennis:** I have benefited personally from the ministry of that seminar and I would encourage any pastor or lay leader, anyone who finds themselves counseling another person, or for that matter, those who may suffer from damage in the past of sexual abuse, this seminar – well, I don’t know if there is anything like it in the country, especially from a Christian perspective. It is the most balanced and biblically based seminar of its kind anywhere in the world. You also are a professor at the Western Seminary in Seattle and have developed a program there with Western Seminary to equip seminarians in the area of biblical counseling. Tell us about that.

**Dan:** Well, that’s a joy. All my work and all my labor, I still deeply enjoy and I also appreciate. But this is just fun to be able to work with people, to train them to be pastors, to be therapists, to be folks who are just in their community working with others no matter if they have a shingle or not to be able to invite them to a passion for the gospel.

So we have a Master of Arts program in counseling. A Master of Divinity program and what we call a Master of Spiritual Nurture which is really a degree oriented for the layperson who wants to gain greater capacity to think about how the Gospel relates to life.

**Dennis:** I have known a number of people who have been through that seminary program and it really is a great program for anyone who wants to be biblically equipped in handling issues in life. And Dan, you have counseled now for more than 20 years. I hate to move to such a bottom-line question right at the beginning, but what would you say is the #1 problem when it comes to sexual intimacy in marriage for men and what would you say is the #1 problem when it comes to women?

**Dan:** Sin for men and sin –

**Bob:** Wait; let me guess on the women.  

(laughter)

**Dan:** Sin for women.
And again, it's a very important and very serious question which I am not neglecting. I really do want to underline the fundamental issue. In marriage, we are called, and certainly this is one of the blueprints that you guys cover so brilliantly in terms of the FamilyLife Conference, there is a blueprint to marriage and it begins with leaving your mother and your father.

Second, it begins when you cleave together as one. When there is really intimacy on the basis of communication, then it says, #3, you have a one-flesh relationship, you become one flesh. Now, that Genesis 2:24 passage is the brilliant blueprint that God has for us for knowing how to have a relationship with our spouse. If you don't leave, you are not going to have good sex. If you don't cleave to your wife, you are not going to have good sex.

Bottom-line, God's intention is for a marriage to reveal Himself. Now, this may seem just a tad irreligious or impious. But God intends for sex to be a metaphor, a picture of the union between a believer and him. So that union of flesh becomes in the wonder of sexual pleasure, a picture of the kind of worship that God intends for us to enjoy with him.

**Dennis:** You know when we approach this subject, it's interesting how we want to move to kind of the bottom-like for both men and women, but it isn't a "one size fits all" that is a solution for both sexes. You really do have to address the men as a group and the women as a group as you talk about this subject.

Let's move to the men and talk about how that gender issue begins to manifest itself in men and the problems he faces as a man when it comes to sex. What do we begin there, Dan.

**Dan:** Well, I will tell you what, most men would say and then we will deal with what's really happening behind closed doors but in a very appropriate way. What most men would say is their problem sexually is that their wife isn't that interested in them. And so in that sense, they are sexual, their wife is not, how can I get my wife to not be in the old term that we used to be used was frigid, how can I get her to basically warm up. And so the problem is, my wife is not interested, I wish she were, I am really a guy and that's what I think about and it's not my fault, so why can't my wife be more responsive.

You know when you really go behind the scenes, what you find is there are a lot of other problems. I go back to the category of failure. I fear failure. I fear that I am not going to be able to please my wife.

**Dennis:** Right.

**Dan:** Now, I am going to try and go through something very quickly here but still to be clear and that is the normal sexual responsiveness of a male. We know very much that
we are aroused quickly and then there is a drop of interest very quickly. A wife’s, a woman’s response is literally, almost literally the opposite. Now, who did that?

Well, I don’t think it’s a byproduct of the fall. I think God’s intention is to literally have made us so different that in order to respond to one another, we have to know the other. We have to know how the other is made and delight in it.

Well, I don’t delight sometimes in my wife’s lack of sexual responsiveness and I feel pressure. I feel like I am not doing a good enough job and why isn't she experiencing more pleasure. It feels like work and I am tired of the work. See she is not sexual. She is not built the same way you are. God didn’t design her in that particular way.

Now, there may be other factors why she is not experiencing greater sexual pleasure, but let’s start with that very first issue. I think I am sexual, I don’t think she is. In fact, I am afraid of failure. Every man is. And if he says he is not, all I can tell you is because he is either a liar or a sociopath. And in that sense, he may be very good at sex but only because he uses it to conquest and control, not to deepen intimacy.

**Dennis:** Do you believe that sex is riskier for a man than it is for a woman?

**Dan:** Oh no. I think there are certain ways, the issue of a man is failure, the issue of a woman is loneliness, and the risk for her is the potential to be left alone. The risk of a man is failing. So in that sense, God has so designed not only in one sense our being but the consequences of sin. But I have to understand something that’s so different than me. And that’s why at times, I sort of want to have the old category of “I am sexual, she is not. It’s her problem.”

If I can get a man to face the fact, #1, he is afraid of sex; #2, he is not just afraid of sex, he is afraid of the issues of failure; and then #3, not just the issues of failure but he is far more, more vulnerable with the level of do you want me? Do you really want me? And not just do I please you? But do I please you and am I somebody you delight in? And once you get done to those heart issues, you tell me a man who doesn’t struggle sexually.

That’s one of illusions of Hollywood we have got to get rid of in the Christian community. Men are afraid of sex. If you have got to a person listening to this broadcast who would say, “that’s all my husband wants,” all I can tell you is if you looked underneath the surface and you really were to engage him in relationship, you would find – and this is a tragedy – many women who don’t like sex would begin to change and grow to a point where they begin to really love their body as God made it and to give their body and to receive pleasure often become women who really enjoy the sexuality God has built in them.

I can tell you how many times what I’ve seen as a therapist, is the husband begins to retreat. He begins to back away because though he thought he wanted great sex, the real reality is he wanted an orgasm. An orgasm doesn’t require in one sense the labor
of love and work. And therefore, you see man who are drawn to pornography, drawn the masturbation, drawn to those things that require on his part no risk.

**Dennis:** What you are talking about there is the woman who in order to experience that total package is a woman who experiences a relationship with her husband and that’s what he is running from, isn’t it?

**Dan:** We are right back to that blueprint and that is he must leave his own mother and father and he must cleave to her. And those are prerequisites, always, endlessly to a kind of sexual relationship that isn't just good sex but a sex that is good for the heart and for the body.

**Dennis:** Let’s talk about – well, it’s a letter I always receive when we do these kinds of broadcast, it is a wife who writes and who says, “Dennis, I am really sick and tired of you guys doing broadcast about men who are pursuing their wives sexually when that’s not the case in our marriage.

I am the one who is interested, he isn’t. Is there something wrong with me?” It seems that in about 70% of the marriages, it is the husband who perhaps is more of the sexual initiator. But in another 30% of those marriages, it may be the wife who has the increased desire sexually for her husband. Can you give us a glimpse into what’s taking place in a husband who is not as interested in his wife sexually as she is in him?

**Dan:** Actually, it’s called HSD, Hypoactive Sexual Desire. It used to be called ISD. So first of all, the fact that it has a label tells us that this is not something that just came up in the last 20 to 30 years. It is an issue, that’s why we have been trying to address the Hollywood lie that men want sex.

Well, some do, but when they really are invited to a relationship, they back out. Now, what we are addressing is the fact that a number of men actually have come to a point where they have passion elsewhere.

I want to talk about three issues real quickly. #1, exhaustion, many men are so busy, so driven, so consumed that literally they are the ones who come home at 6:00-6:30 and are exhausted. All they want to do is get something to drink, read the paper, have dinner, mess with the kids a little bit, and then go to bed.

Underlying that, second issue is, many men – I don’t want to go to figures – many men have a very low level of depression. And when there is depression, you are going to find a lack of libido, a lack of sexual interest. And so many men, they are not major depressed and they are not suicidal but they are so exhausted, so overwhelmed and particularly in mid age, so many men are beginning to face the fact that the dreams that they had are no longer going to be fulfilled. They are not going make it to the top ladder at the corporate level. And now, what are they going to do? They are going to be a middle level manager. That’s pretty cool but it’s not going to lead them to the dreams of
their life. And so they begin to have midlife crisis, which another way putting that is a certain low level of depression at mid age.

Now, you also have the third issue and that is that we have passions elsewhere that don’t require as much risk. Rooting for the Broncos there is not as much risk as pursuing my wife, somehow getting on the internet. And now, a third issue that ties to that is we have a great potential in our culture to have such private immorality that nobody knows about it.

Going to a store and buying a pornographic magazine, at least you have to go in public. Now, the internet, I can’t tell you how often my clients are battling with the internet with regard to sexuality. I know you have had a number of shows on that, but I just want to add my voice to say it is a plague. And because of that, what we are finding is a lot of husbands have a loss of sexual interest because they are fantasizing and masturbating outside of the context of their covenant relationship with their spouse and, as a result, they don’t have sexual interest because it’s being directed elsewhere.

**Dennis:** Okay, let’s speak to that wife. How can she talk to her husband without causing him to flee further, without causing him to sell his soul even deeper to his hobby, his work, or maybe causing him to retreat into pornography and lie to her that he is even into it? How can she get through to him?

**Dan:** Well, I am going to say something very simple and I don’t want to say it for long because of how it might be misunderstood. But the question is does she like sex? Does she really want to engage because there are a number of wives I work with as well who do want sexual contact and then when a husband begins to move, she quits. You often find there is yoyo, seesaw type relationship where one does, the other doesn’t. And then where there is a shift, it goes right back again.

So I need to know does she really want to be engaged and will stay engaged. Second, will she deal with at least the three issues I just brought up? Will she deal with the fact he is a workaholic? Will she deal with the fact that maybe there is depression? And will she deal with the fact that there might be immorality, maybe not an overt affair?

**Bob:** When you say will she deal with them, what do you mean?

**Dan:** Will she open that as a door and will she simply say to her husband “You don’t want sex.” “Oh no, I do. I have just been tired.”

“Honey, I don’t mean to be unkind but I have actually been keeping a record. You haven’t approached me in 62 days. The last time you approached me sexually was this date.”

Now, she has got the data. Now, I just can’t run from it. I have got to begin to say 62 days, not one sexual overture in two months? Something is going on here.
**Dennis:** Okay, I want to do something that I don’t know that we have ever done here on the broadcast, Bob. But I want to ask you to turn right now to the man who is in my opinion not assuming sexual responsibility for his wife.

He is having sex once every 62 days with his wife. He is not approaching her. He is not giving her the physical affection that she desires, she wants. In fact, he thinks she is now nagging him every time she brings this up. She has kept this scorecard on more than one occasion. Speak to him about what does he need to do and what does he need to admit to his wife.

**Dan:** Well, I want to go out to lunch with him and I want to sit across from him and say something like this “Do you understand sexuality is the Stradivarius of a relationship? It’s the one thing that’s affected by climate, temperature, etc.”

I mean there is no part of my relationship with my wife more frail than our sexuality. I have been married 22 years and, let me tell you, we have had some wonderful days, horrible days and those weren’t in the early part of our marriage. I am talking about last week, month, year.

When other portions of our relationship are not doing well or other things in our relationship with God are not doing well, it shows itself most profoundly in our sexuality more so than perhaps any other element of our life. So I want to look him in the eye and basically say, “Do you think you are alone, how dare you? Yes, you have been told that by Hollywood and you have been told that perhaps by a number of men in locker rooms. But I am telling you, I struggle sexually with my wife and you do, too. So let’s just get that down on the table.”

Now that I have said that, I don’t want the man to feel shame. He already feels shame enough for somehow not being man enough. But now, let’s begin to be honest and that is “Are you an adulator in terms of you are exhausted because you don’t have any time for sex? You don’t have any time for your wife, your children? Well, quit working 75 hours a week. Let’s talk about that. I don’t want to talk about sex. I want to talk about your workaholism.

Or you really are depressed. And oh yeah, you don’t need to perhaps be on antidepressants. Maybe you do, but let’s at least say there is a low level of depression we have got to talk about maybe because your dreams have begun to die. Now, that doesn’t sound like a sexual talk, does it? But in one sense, it’s directly or at least indirectly related to it.

Or third, let me just ask you very honestly, where is your heart with God with regard to the purity of your soul? You are struggling with the internet, struggling with pornography, fantasies, somebody at work that frankly has more of your heart than your wife? Let’s at least own up to it. And now, I am not going to put my finger on your face, you wretched man. I am going to say oh wretched men, we are.
Now – let’s begin to struggle with that and as we do, I am really going to presume that if you want God, no struggle is such that you cannot grow to a point where you begin to see a victory. And when that occurs, yes, there would be ongoing movement towards your spouse.

**Bob:** And Dennis, it occurs to me that for one of the reasons God has created us with sexual desire and with sexual drive is to force us to have to confront some of the issues that we have run from otherwise.

**Dennis:** No doubt about it. I think it is a mysterious drive that God placed within both male and female, that if that urge to merge was not there – I wonder sometimes how busy Barbara and I would be and how we would just go out and go do our own things and our life is touching only at points but never truly engaging and intertwining and becoming one, not merely physically but emotionally, spiritually and that truly delighting ourselves in one another’s lives.

I think in that regard, sex has been given to us to pull us out of all of life’s pursuits and to drive us back to something very private, very personal that was meant to take place in marriage after there has been the leaving and the cleaving, and at that point, you become one flesh. What a beautiful picture of what God designed in his process and what a horrible job we have done of fouling up that beautiful act of marital love!

**Dan:** And not just us. Evil is so committed to destroying what most reveal something of the wonder of God’s plan and something of the glory of what a metaphor it is of worship. So evil is so committed to, in one sense, entangling us from billboards, to pornography, to affairs. There is a sense in which you will not go out in this world today without being assaulted sexually.

**Bob:** Well, and it’s why we have to in this area renew our minds on this subject the same way we would renew our minds on any other aspect of life. I mean we have talked to you about the fact that our intimate relationship should be part of what we do for the glory of God. Whether you eat or drink, you do it all for the glory of God. And if we are going to do that, we have to be thinking rightly, our heart has to be tuned to what the scriptures teach on this.

You deal with that, Dan and in your book *Intimate Allies*, I think it’s part four of the book and I think it’s a very helpful resource for couples. In fact, we have got the book in our FamilyLife Today Resource Centre and our listeners can go online at FamilylifeToday.com for more information about how to get a copy of the book.

We also have copies of the book, Dennis, that you and your wife Barbara wrote called *Rekindling the Romance* where you deal with the romantic relationship and the sexual relationship. And that’s been a very helpful book for couples as well.

So let me do this, let me encourage our listeners to go to FamilyLifeToday.com. In addition to those two titles, we have other resources designed to help you in this
particularly challenging area of the marriage relationship. Go online again at FamilyLifeToday.com for more information about the resources we have available. Or call toll free at 1-800-FL-TODAY, 1-800-358-6329.

As you talked about the fact that our intimate relationship really is a reflection of what's going on in the rest of our marriage relationship, I was thinking about the CD series that we have been making available to listeners this month if they are able to help the ministry of FamilyLife with the donation of any amount.

It's a series that features conversation we had with Tim and Joy Downs the authors of the book called *The Seven Conflicts of Marriage*. And if we have got conflict going on in our marriage and we don't know how to deal with it or how to address the issues, that's not going to help us in the area of our sexual relationship.

Again, these CDs are a gift that we are sending out to those of you who are able to help with the donation of any amount this month to help support the ministry of *FamilyLife Today*. We are listener supported.

And in fact, this month we are hoping that we can rally 2,500 of our regular listeners who have never made a donation to *FamilyLife Today*, we are asking you to consider making a first-time donation this month and being one of the 2,500 that we are hoping to get introduced to this month. If you would like to get the CD series with Tim and Joy Downs when you make your donation, just type the word “SEVEN” into the key code box.

And if you are a first-time donor to FamilyLife and if you are able to make a donation of $100 or more, we have an additional way we would like to say “thank you,” we would like to send you a certificate so that you and your spouse can attend one of our upcoming FamilyLife Weekend to Remember® marriage getaways or you can pass this certificate along to another couple you know who would benefit by attending this two-and-a-half-day getaway for couples.

Really, there is nothing I know of that will do more for your marriage than going to one of these FamilyLife Weekend to Remember Marriage Getaways.

And again, you can attend as our guest if you are making a first-time donation to *FamilyLife Today* and you can make a donation of $100 or more. Go online at FamilyLifeToday.com, make a donation online. And again, if you would like the CDs, just type the word “SEVEN” in the key code box, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make your donation. Mention that you would like the CDs on Conflict. And if it is a first-time donation, just mention that you are also interested in going to the Weekend to Remember® and we will get a certificate out to you.

Now, tomorrow, we are going to continue our conversation with Dan Allender as we talk about intimacy in marriage and some of the challenges we face as couples in that area. I hope you can be back with us for that.
I want to thank our engineer today Keith Lynch and our entire broadcast production team on behalf of our host Dennis Rainey. I am Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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