Bob: When is a good time to start talking to your young children about the birds and the bees? Mary Flo Ridley says, “When a baby is born in the family, in the church, in the neighborhood—that’s a good time to have a conversation like this.”

Mary Flo: We used to tell our children: “We will know, right away, when the baby is born if it’s a boy or a girl. How do you think we will know?” I remember my son said: “Well, because if it’s a girl, she’ll have a bow; and if it’s a boy, he’ll be wearing blue.” You know, he just—I said: “Well, guess what? Babies are born naked. Can you believe that? And so, we’ll be able to tell, right away. If the baby has these parts, then, the baby is a boy. If the baby has these parts…but those are the only two choices available, and God gets to decide.”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, August 15th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. We’ll talk today about how and when we begin conversations with young children about human sexuality. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. I remember being in the fifth grade when the principal announced there was going to be an all-school assembly, boys only.

Dennis: Really?

Bob: Yes. And so, we were—

Dennis: Did you sniff it out?

Bob: I had no idea what “boys only” was all about. I just knew that it was the guys getting together. My dad had tried to have a talk with me about the birds and the bees. He had used terminology that went over my head, talking about body parts that I didn’t understand what that meant. We were on our way to a Cub Scout fishing trip; and I was really thinking about fishing and not about birds or bees, at the time.

Dennis: Yes.

Bob: And so, when we came into the assembly and had the all-boys assembly—
Dennis: This is a public school?

Bob: Public school. I remember walking out—

Dennis: This is like a hundred years ago. [Laughter]

Bob: —with my eyes—you know what? It was interesting because to do it with fifth graders was pretty revolutionary, in my day.

Dennis: I was getting ready to say, “I don’t remember any all-boy assemblies.”

Bob: No. And I think it was—my principal was working on his PhD. I think we were the guinea pigs—

Dennis: Got it.

Bob: —in a part of this.

Dennis: Got it.

Bob: Today, I think this is happening with kindergartners. I think sex ed, in schools, is happening in some places, at some level, with younger and younger kids.

Dennis: Bob, here’s what I want moms and dads, grandparents, to hear: “God gave children to parents. He gave them to families, and not to the public school—not even to the Christian school—to do this kind of education.” I’m not saying it’s wrong to do it there. I’m just saying it needs to first occur with a mommy and a daddy, in the safety of a loving family, where it’s taught from a biblical perspective.

Bob: And you should start the conversation early.

Dennis: Absolutely. In fact, some of our listeners are getting sweaty palms, even as we’re talking here. I talked to a businessman yesterday, who I’ve been pressing to have a conversation like this with his son. He’s having conversations—okay. So, he gets it. But I challenged him to go through Passport2Purity® with his son because it’s a great opportunity to connect around the most intimate of all issues in life with your child. If you can talk about this, you can talk about anything.

Bob: Well, and that’s something that we’ve encouraged parents to do when your son or daughter is 11 or 12 years old; but again, you don’t start the conversation on a Passport2Purity getaway. You start when they are little kids.

Dennis: That’s right. And we have a guest on FamilyLife Today—Mary Flo Ridley, who
A book called *God’s Very Good Design* has been written. It’s designed for the very thing Bob’s talking about; isn’t it?

**Mary Flo:** That’s right.

**Dennis:** You put together a biblical approach to sex education, starting at a very young age.

**Mary Flo:** Well, we want parents to have the very best tools in their hands. I know parents are, like you said, “Sweaty palmed,” and nervous and anxious about this and: “Where do I get started? What’s the *first* thing I need to do?” So, we’ve just sort of given them a guide—but through God’s Word. We have found Scriptures that are helpful and encouraging for parents.

**Dennis:** The thing that I like about what you’ve done here is you’ve really come at it from your experience as a mom. You had three children. You and Dave have been married for 33 years. You’ve also spoken to all kinds of groups, across the country. Share with our listeners a little of what you’ve done there.

**Mary Flo:** Well, actually, I started as a speaker and not as an author; but when I would speak to parents, I would walk them through a strategy of how to approach this topic with their children. They found it so helpful that, then, the books led out from that. So, it’s been a way of sort of coaching—I feel like I’m just coaching parents through those early conversations, giving them sample conversations, and answering a lot of questions that they may have about this topic.

But I do come at it with a heart of a mother. I didn’t take this in college. It’s just that I know, as a mother of young children, what this experience is like; and Dave does, too. So, I just try to talk parents through that.

**Dennis:** It’s on the minds of parents. I know because I was in a meeting, here at FamilyLife, the other day, where we were finding out kind of how people came to ultimately acquire *Passport2Purity* to take their 10-, 11-, 12-year-old through it. You know what the number one word search was, Bob? This was really interesting—“birds and bees.” People are googling “birds and bees” to find out what’s out there—“What’s available to be able to teach my son or daughter?” Frankly, that could be a bit of a dangerous place.

**Mary Flo:** And it could be because you really don’t know what you are going to find, online, obviously; but there are just not that many resources for parents of young children. Your *Passport2Purity* is a *fantastic* resource; but before that—

**Dennis:** Right.
Mary Flo: —there are not very many resources—but: “Where’s the genesis of this? Where does it start? What is your vocabulary? What is the image that you want your children to have about sex? And how do you start to create that image in your family?”

Bob: Mary Flo, I just talked to a dad who went away for a weekend with a couple other dads and their sons—all of them about seven years old—and they were camping. But these dads had an agenda in mind. Over the course of the camping trip, one of the subjects they wanted to talk to their seven-year-olds about was pornography because they’ve read the statistics. Kids are stumbling on this or being led to this at ages eight, nine, and ten. The dad told me—he said: “When the subject came up, my son got this look on his face. It was a look of just confusion and horror mixed together.” He just said, “Dad, that’s gross!” He said, “You’re not going to have to worry about that with me.” You know, at age seven, of course, that’s how he’s thinking and how he’s feeling.

I guess I wonder when we talk about subjects, like this, with little kids—there are some, that they can understand and smile about and take in—there are some, that are way beyond what they are thinking and feeling; isn’t there?

Mary Flo: That’s absolutely true. I’m glad those dads did that because, truthfully, children are being led into pornography at a very young age. It’s just dropping like a rock. I was meeting with a group of family counselors. They said that is their number one problem. They are seeing kindergartners who have been exposed to pornography.

So, having that talk with that son was a healthy thing—just to say: “It’s out there. If you ever stumble across it, let me know. It’s a very toxic thing. So, don’t take it lightly; but here’s how you avoid it.”

Bob: But even a seven-year-old, who is thinking, “That just sounds gross!” you still have the conversation. He can still get a picture without it becoming tantalizing to him?

Mary Flo: Well, what I would encourage parents to do is to be sure that before they have the pornography conversation—“What is the picture you want them to have of sex?” Start there; and then, say: “There are some patterns that don’t follow God’s pattern, and those are out there. But right now, I want you to hear our voice on this subject. We’re going to show you exactly the purpose of sex that God had, and we’re going to show you His perfect design.”

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: You know—here’s the thing—you could do a good job of protecting your son or daughter from all the outside influences. So, you hear a statement, like you made, about kindergarten pornography—“How can that be?” Well, the issue is it’s not just your home that’s influencing your child. It is other kids—that they go to kindergarten with and, later on, to school, who are showing them things. You believe parents must be responsible
Mary Flo: That’s exactly right. You need to connect with your children on this subject at as young of an age as they can tolerate it—at a preschool level—just on some very simple things so that you start the journey young. That way—you know, like you just said, the school is not going to be there, later on, for that child. The school is not going to be there when they come home from a date, and they don’t know if maybe something has gone a little awry. But you need to be there. So, you need to start young. That gives you a lot of credibility.

There’s so much you can do, just in small conversations, along the way—just planting little seeds, filling their sponge, making sure that they are hearing what you have to say. So, you say it quite a few times. You talk about some of the simple things of God’s design.

Bob: Such as? Let’s say I’ve got a three- or four-year-old. We’re right at the very beginning. I mean, I’m remembering back to those days and thinking, “Okay, we talked about private parts.”

Mary Flo: Yes.

Bob: That was one of those conversations, but that was more around protection than it was around understanding God’s good design. So, what kinds of things do I say to a three- or four-year-old?

Mary Flo: Well, before you have that conversation, you need to have a really strong message that you want your children to have. It’s sort of an overarching idea: “What is the image that you hope your children have about sex because they grew up in your family? What does that image reflect? What is the design? What is the purpose? Why did God create sex?”

For Dave and me, our message was that we wanted them to grow up, understanding that sex is a gift from God for marriage. We like parents to write just one simple sentence about this topic. We wanted that to be the message because we wanted them to understand the beauty and the boundaries. Those were going to be the two things we were going to talk about.

So, before you ever even have a conversation, I just can’t tell you the benefit you will get from making sort of a mission statement: “Here’s what we want our children, to grow up, knowing sex is all about.” We know the culture has a different message, but what’s your message? Have it be something you are very passionate about.

Dennis: You are taking your son or daughter back to the origins of where sex was created, originally. It was created by God to reflect His image: Genesis, Chapter 1, “In
the image of God, He made them male and female—created He them.” So, you take it back to the God of love—the God of giving good gifts—and you tie it to Him. That creates the wholesome approach to sex being something that is celebrated—as you mentioned—in marriage.

**Mary Flo:** I think the anchor of having it be in God’s Word and by His design—I used to sort of laugh about it. I would say: “I’m just blaming all of this on God—like He came up with this. We didn’t think of it. We didn’t invite it. So, let’s lay it at His feet and say, ‘God, this was your idea.’”

So, even when you get into Genesis 2, when it says, “And they were naked and unashamed”—and yet, we carry a lot of shame about how we’re going to talk about this to our children, when He is, already, in the very first book of Genesis—He’s already laid out for us: “Here’s how it happens. They’re male and female.”

So, when you do have a three-year-old, what is the vocabulary that you use to distinguish between male and female? That’s an important step for parents. Is it a silly, wingy-wangy word that you are using? Or is it just the word, “privates”? Or is it more of a medical word? And “privates” can be a very respectful way; but then, you need to further define that for which privates are males and which privates are female.

**Bob:** And would you coach a mom or a dad to be medically-specific and start using those words?

**Mary Flo:** Yes, I would. I would tell them they can be interchangeable with the more generic word like “privates” just because of manners—sort of—

**Bob:** Yes.

**Mary Flo:** You know, when you’re—

**Bob:** I’m imagining a child at Wal-Mart®—

**Mary Flo:** Yes, and that would be—

**Bob:** —pointing to a boy and saying, “He has a….”

**Mary Flo:** Yes.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Mary Flo:** So, we kind of—I mean, I’m just telling you my point of view. But yes, I think this generation of young parents is much more okay with all of that than maybe generations in the past. They are fine with that. But I think letting them know that there
is also safety concern that they need to know that part of their body, specifically. So, I do encourage parents to use those words early so that it’s not such a strange word.

**Bob:** Teach a boy about what he has, but also teach him how girls are different and explain the body parts that are different for them?

**Mary Flo:** Yes. And they’re learning about ankles, and knuckles, and freckles. Every word sounds funny to them. So, when they are little, just introduce those words, also.

The other thing that’s important is not just the words you use but, “Are you speaking respectfully?” Every person has been made in God’s image. Are we being high-minded about how we speak of anyone’s body? Everyone’s body should be spoken of in respectful tones—so, setting a tone in your home for that.

**Bob:** And when your three-year-old—when you explain, “Boys have these body parts, and girls have these body parts,” and then, they say, “Well, why?”

**Mary Flo:** “Because, by God’s design, He decided who would be a boy and who would be a girl.” In fact, we used to tell our children: “We will know, right away, when the baby is born, if it’s a boy or a girl. How do you think we’ll know?” I remember my son said, “Well, because if it’s a girl, she’ll have a bow. If it’s a boy, he’ll be wearing blue.” You know, he just—I said: “Well, guess what? Babies are born naked. Can you believe that?” “No.” “Yes. So, we’ll be able to tell, right away. If the baby has these parts, then, the baby is a boy; if the baby has these parts—but those are the only two choices available. And God gets to decide.”

**Bob:** So, you don’t get into reproduction, at that point, with a three-year-old / a four-year-old—that the body parts are different because they have different reproductive functions?

**Mary Flo:** Well, actually, as young as three and four, children are going to start to ask, “How does that baby get out of there?” And so, we do. That is, actually, kind of the third step—so, thanks for bringing that up. So, we’ve got our—

**Bob:** I don’t have the steps in order, then.

**Mary Flo:** Okay! No, you do. You do because—well, we’ve talked about, “What’s your message?”

**Bob:** Okay. That’s step one.

**Mary Flo:** And that’s really step one. “What’s your vocabulary,”—that’s step two. And then, the third step is, “How are you going to answer that question?” “So, how does that baby get out of there?” Because even though we know conception comes before birth,
children are, usually, first curious about birth and, then, curious about conception. So, we’re following their—

Bob: They want to know how it got out before they find out how it got in.

Mary Flo: Yes.

Bob: I’ve got you. I’ve got you.

Mary Flo: So, they give us the easier story first. [Laughter]

Dennis: Speaking of that, I don’t know that I’ve ever shared this story, here on FamilyLife Today; but I think I recall my first introduction to the birds and the bees, as a little boy, growing up. I was sick and didn’t go to school one day when I was in elementary school. It had to be first or second grade. We had a kitty cat who had, evidently, been promiscuous and—[Laughter]

Bob: There’s not another tomcat in the home? [Laughter]

Dennis: There was not. I was there in the living room—and I don’t know why my mom allowed this to occur—but she had the mother-to-be in a basket, having these kittens. I was lying on the couch—

Bob: And you don’t know why she allowed that to occur? I mean, there’s not much she could have done to stop that from occurring.

Dennis: Well, it could have had happened outside—maybe, it was cold. I don’t know. But I just remember, as a boy, going, “That’s really interesting.” You just kind of went, “Now, how did all that happen?” You know? And there was no education.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: There was no context. What I like about what you are really charging parents with, Mary Flo, is to say, you know: “Seize these moments. These are teachable moments to take children all the way back to the beginning—the book of beginnings—Genesis—and back to God, who designed them male and female and let them know it is good! It’s wholesome. It really is God’s creative design and that sex is intended for marriage.”

Mary Flo: That’s right. It’s as simple as that. It’s actually easier to talk to a young child about these things than it is once the hormones kick in. Explaining how life works is what you do, as a parent, anyway. We’ve just set that one aside, for some reason, for later because we think it’s so complicated.
I don’t equate this information with the Gospel; but we don’t wait until our children are old enough to really discuss the evidence of justification to introduce them to the idea that Jesus loves them. We start with some of the simple things that their young minds can understand. Then, we grow in those conversations, too.

**Dennis:** What I want parents to hear is: “This is not like a vaccination, where you get a shot and that takes care of it. In fact, you are going to have to have booster shots, along the way, to reinforce the vaccine that you give children as you begin to unpack what sex is all about—all the way through the grade-school years.”

Again, moms, dads, I know you don’t want to hear this from us; but it’s not a matter of if your son or daughter is going to see pornography—

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —it’s a matter of how much, and how soon, and how you engage them in the conversation to find out what they’ve seen so that perhaps you can take some of the distortion out the picture and, once again, take them back to the Bible, and back to God, and say: “This is God’s idea. Man has twisted it and turns it into something that really isn’t good. But with God, this is very good.”

**Bob:** Let me just ask this one question about—because we have a lot of parents who have adopted sons and daughters. So, when you are dealing with this subject, around human reproduction, the question is going to come up about their origin—any coaching, for parents, in that regard?

**Mary Flo:** Yes. There’s a little bit more to tell of the story. Children are still, at a young age, curious about the birth process. I think you can explain—they even, as adoptive children, will want to know: “Why is that my birth mother? What is birth?” They want to know what that means. So, explaining birth to them is an important part of their upbringing, also, and just keeping to the mechanics—maybe, not a personal story; but maybe, a personal story. It depends from family to family.

But you’ll want to explain birth to them. Then, your unique story about how you came to want an adopted child—maybe, God just placed that on your heart or, maybe, there were some infertility issues—and, then, some of the story of the birth mother, if that’s what they are going to be sharing. So, it’s your story and their story that helps create this child’s special story.

**Dennis:** Over the years, we’ve had people ask us, “How do I go about in an age-specific manner of instructing my children?” There is this book series—God’s Design for Sex. What I’d like to recommend for parents: “If you order that complete set from us, here at FamilyLife, we’ll throw in a copy of your book, God’s Very Good Design”, because what your book does is a great overview for beginning the instruction with a
child. Then, what this other series does—is give you a lot more to be able to unpack, with your child, around an age-specific stage.

Bob: Well, Mary Flo’s book is designed for a mom and dad to read to get a strategy put together—to have a plan ready to go. Then, the books that you’re talking about that Stan and Brenna Jones have written together are books designed to be read to a child.

Mary Flo: That’s right.

Bob: Mom and Dad read it together to a child. So, it can be part of the strategy. In fact, you recommend it.

Mary Flo: I highly recommend it. I think, for some parents, it’s a helpful tool to sit down with a book; but parents also need to be aware of what they are going to say on their own because the books are not always with them.

Dennis: No doubt.

Bob: Yes. And it’s not, “Read a book; check it off; you’re done.” [It is,] “Read a book, and keep having conversations over and over again.”

If you go to FamilyLifeToday.com—on our website, we’ve got information about Mary Flo Ridley’s book for parents, God’s Very Good Design, and the series of books that we’ve been talking about from Stan and Brenna Jones. Again, FamilyLifeToday.com is our website. You’ll find all the information you need about these resources there. There is also information about Mary Flo’s Simple Truths series that we have in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center, as well. Again, you’ll find all the information on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call for more information at 1-800- “F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then, the word, “TODAY”—1-800-FL-TODAY.

Now, we are very grateful for those of you who have stayed with us during summer vacation. You know, when summertime comes along, schedules get a little different; and sometimes, the things that are a part of your routine during the school year just get put aside for the summer. We’re grateful for those of you who have continued to listen during the summer months and for those of you who have continued to support the ministry this summer.

Ministries, like ours, often experience a decline in donations during the summer; and we’re grateful for those of you who have stayed faithful—Legacy Partners, who have continued to donate throughout the summer—and those of you, who have contacted us, from time to time, to make a donation and show your support for FamilyLife Today. We appreciate you.

This month, if you can make a donation to help us defray the costs of producing and syndicating this program, we’d like to say, “Thank you,” by sending you a two-CD set of
a conversation we had with Steve Farrar about what a father can do to anchor his family in Christ for the next hundred years. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the button that says, “I CARE”, to make an online donation; or call us at 1-800-FL-TODAY. That’s 1-800-358-6329. Make your donation over the phone and ask for the CDs on Anchoring Your Family in Christ when you get in touch with us. You can also mail a check to FamilyLife Today if you’d like to support us that way. Send your check, along with your request for the CDs on Anchoring Your Family in Christ, to Post Office Box 7111—“Seventy-one, eleven”—Little Rock, Arkansas. Arkansas is A-R. Then, the zip code is 72223.

And we hope you'll join us back again tomorrow. Mary Flo Ridley is going to be here, again. We’re going to talk about what you do, as a mom or a dad, when your kids start asking about choices you made as a teenager. We’ll have that conversation tomorrow. Hope you can tune in 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’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time 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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