Bob: The Bible says that we are to forget the things that lie behind. Dr. Dan Allender says, when it comes to the experience of childhood sexual abuse, the experience may be in your past; but the ramifications of that experience are still very much with you today.

Dan: I think there is a kind of Christian worldview, at times, that says: “Don’t look at the past.” Look, it is hard / it’s unpleasant—so many years ago—but it’s still in your brain / it’s still affecting your way of relating to others. At some point, you’re going to have the courage to look back—open your eyes and begin to name, really, the unspeakable.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, May 30th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. How do we find healing and press on when we’ve experienced the shame and the pain of childhood sexual abuse? We’re going to explore that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Monday edition. I looked back, before we started today, just to see how long it had been—in the very first year that FamilyLife Today was on the air, one of the first interviews we did was with our guest today. It’s one of the few interviews we’ve ever done by telephone; but back in those days, we didn’t have any money to fly anybody to Little Rock.

Dennis: That’s exactly right. You’re talking, of course, of our friend, Dr. Dan Allender, who joins us again, now for the tenth time, on FamilyLife Today. Welcome back, Dan.

Dan: Dennis / Bob—just a delight, always, to be with you.

Dennis: Would you like us to leave? Tell the truth. Would you like Bob and me to leave and just have you take over the broadcast?—because it’s either that or, I think, we’re going to have to start charging you rent for being here. [Laughter]

Dan: Look—look, I love being able to talk about my work; but being with the two of you—aw—come on! [Laughter]

Dennis: Well, if you don’t recognize that voice or that name—Dr. Allender is one of the leading experts / if not the leader in the whole area of sexual abuse. That first interview
we did, Bob, was Dan’s book, *The Wounded Heart*. How many did that go on to sell, Dan?

**Dan:** About a half-million.

**Dennis:** Unbelievable. It really has been used by God in a lot of people’s lives to bring healing.

**Bob:** Yes; and in fact, we speak about this subject briefly at the *Weekend to Remember®* marriage getaways. Obviously we can’t unpack the issue for a couple in the few minutes that we have to talk about it, but we point people routinely to *The Wounded Heart* because it is the resource—it has been the resource for more than two decades—to help people deal with this.

We’re going to talk about this subject today—obviously, a sensitive subject. Dan you have jumped back into this topic, not to replace what you’ve done, but to add to what you’ve already done in speaking on the issue of sexual abuse.

**Dan:** A number of years ago, Becky, my wife, said, “Look, you have learned a great deal.” As much as we both appreciate what I was able to accomplish, as a 36-year-old, writing *The Wounded Heart*, she said, “You really need to do a 25-year retrospective and to take the material that you’ve learned…”—things that we now know about the brain / things I know now about spiritual abuse and the issues of what evil’s doing in the midst of sexual abuse. There are just things that needed to be highlighted again.

**Dennis:** As a result, you wrote this book, *Healing the Wounded Heart*. In fact, the last time you and I were together, we went fishing. You were talking about how many pages that this was going to be. This really is a separate work from the original book, *The Wounded Heart*.

**Dan:** It overlaps; but it’s enough different to say, “Look, after being in a field for a few decades, you better have learned a whole lot.” That needed to be, again, reengaged with those who have histories of abuse or who are in relationship with people who have been violated in that way.

**Bob:** You addressed the subject the first time in *The Wounded Heart*, not just because it was of clinical interest to you, but because it’s a part of your past.

**Dan:** The strange thing, of course, is I was four or five chapters in before I actually came to admit that I had sexual abuse in my own life. That’s part of the reality for many who have been abused. They may know—or they may not know—but naming it / just simply saying, “I am a victim of past sexual harm,” opens up a horrible initial vista; but indeed; over seasons; will open the heart to very significant change.
**Bob:** So when you say you started writing a book, and you were four or five chapters in before you named what had happened to you, was this a memory that emerged or was it just something that you were keeping so off to the side that you wouldn't point to it?

**Dan:** I’ve worked with people; for example, a sex crimes detective, who told me that she’d been molested by her uncle. I said, “When did he sexually abuse you?” And she looked at me and she said, “I—I was never sexually abused.” We use words to escape reality.

In one sense, I knew there were sexually-shaming, violating events; but even in the ability to teach it, I had not applied the very truth to my own life. A good friend heard me teach and asked if I had ever been abused. I said, “No”; and then he asked again, “Had you ever been sexually shamed / ever sexually used by another person?” I answered very quickly, “Well, of course!” And then he asked me to begin to name those moments. As I did, the tears, streaming down his face, said, “Are you really saying you’ve never been sexually abused?” I, at that point, said, “No.” He pressed again; and at that moment—who knows how the Spirit works—but the veil was rent; and I literally had to say out loud, “I have been sexually abused.”

Again, it’s hard for some to hear that it is possible that you could be teaching, thinking, writing, and never make that application to your own life; but that’s how powerful shame is—to be able to numb you to the reality of what you suffered.

**Dennis:** I’m actually hearing you name, I guess, two—not extremes—but two reasons why we—we can’t name it. Number one: we’re naïve. We just naively look at our past and maybe brush it away as something that happened but don’t want to think that it was significant. The other is that we’re really ashamed and we want to bury it. We don’t want to have to deal with it.

**Dan:** Absolutely! And in that naiveté, I think there’s a kind of Christian worldview, at times, that says: “Don’t look at the past.”

**Dennis:** Yes.

**Dan:** “Only look forward to the high maturity of the call of following Christ.” Indeed, we are to do that; but not with pretending that the past is never really the past—it’s actually being lived out in our lives today. That ability to name—look, it’s hard / it’s unpleasant—so many years ago—but it’s still in your body / it’s still in your brain—it’s still affecting your way of relating to others. At some point, you’re going to need to have the courage to look back—open your eyes and begin to name, really, the unspeakable.

**Bob:** Why is it so important—in your case, you acknowledged you were sexually violated. Your friend said she was molested. Why is it so important that you say, “That was abuse”? Why do you have to put that name to it for it to—for it to make sense?
Dan: Well, as simple as: “And the truth…”—not sort of a modulation of the truth / not a near-truth—but “…the TRUTH [emphasis added] will set you free!” Is that true in a relationship with Jesus? Yes! The truth of what He has done for us / the truth of what He does for us today—all that! But why not talk about truth about the nature of life? To the degree we deny the nature of what is true about life, our hearts are not going to be as free as they’re meant to be.

Bob: So, if we soften and anesthetize the past, you’re saying that something stays bottled up there that—that keeps us in bondage?

Dan: What we know about the brain, for example, is that the reality of what has been suffered does not go away—it doesn’t. It continues to affect your ability to handle emotions / your ability to relate to others—even your own sense of joy will be affected by things that have happened 20, 30, 40 years ago. We’ve also learned that the more that you engage that harm, your brain literally—I mean, literally—rewires itself. So we are part of the renewal—of what, in Greek, is called arnus—but the brain / the mind needs to be changed. We think of that usually as only that thinking portion of our brain; but we were meant to change the whole brain—which includes images, and the right hemisphere, and includes the way that our limbic system responds to the world with anger or withdrawal. We are meant to be renewed and restored.

Dennis: I’ve got an observation and a question for you. The title of your book, I think, kind of foretells what you’re talking about here—in order for there to be healing, you have to admit there’s been a wounding.

Dan: Right.

Dennis: So, that really causes me to go all the way back upstream and ask you the question. Give us a working definition of what sexual abuse is in our culture—so go back to the definition: “What is the definition of it?”

Dan: Whenever a child or an adult, who has more power than you, introduces you into a sexual experience that is not under your control / not your choice, you have the dynamic of sexual abuse. The question of: “When was your first experience with pornography?” Very few people just kind of land on a magazine that’s in the street, pick it up, and see something that they’ve never seen before. Often / far more, you are led into pornography by an older—and even a peer / but an older, wiser child—wiser meaning sophisticated. That introduction is not just random—they were doing so for their own pleasure of bringing you into that. Whether there was any other sexual contact in that process, it is a form of sexual abuse.

Bob: So what a ten-year-old boy says to an eight-year-old boy: “Come here. I want to show you something on the computer.” You’re saying that ten-year-old boy has just sexually abused the eight-year-old boy.
Dan: Absolutely. It is the same dynamic of: “You’ve been groomed / you’ve been invited into pleasure or to an experience of—of erotic engagement.” You didn’t choose that and it’s now the part of the world—your eyes / your body.

You can imagine—if an eight-year-old boy looks at that and goes: “This is contrary to the will of God. This is not what my mom and dad have trained me to desire or engage.” The problem is the relationship between that ten and eight-year-old is already strong enough that the eight-year-old doesn’t want to offend or lose the relationship. So they comply or they endure, but they’re also intrigued / they’re also somewhat aroused.

Bob: This is the thing that—I remember the first time we talked about this—that I’d never put together until I heard you explain this. Imagine that eight-year-old boy looking at that picture on the computer. You said two things are happening simultaneously—there’s something in his conscience that says, “This is shameful,” / there’s something in his body that says, “This is delightful.” Those two things are happening simultaneously. He has shame and delight attached to this experience— that’s now a part of his soul— that he carries with him for the rest of his life. Whatever future sexual experiences he has—even in marriage, 30 years later—there’s some sense of both shame and delight happening, at the same time; and he’s not sure where all that came from.

Dan: Right. That initial spark—you must know that the kingdom of darkness loves trauma. It anticipates trauma, and it’s going to be blowing on those embers to create a fire. So that one event is not going to be singular. In most occasions, it’s going to now be in my mind, it’s going to be in my dreams, it’s going to be in my interactions with my eight-year-old and ten-year-old peers. Where’s it going to go? Evil is so patient / so pernicious; but in that, it will flame, always, those sexual designs and desires. Shame and contempt is the language of the kingdom of darkness.

Bob: We’re talking to Dr. Dan Allender, who has written a book called *Healing the Wounded Heart*—that is a follow-up to a book he wrote, more than 25 years ago, called *The Wounded Heart*.

I hear you saying in this that just about everybody in our culture today has experienced sexual abuse.

Dan: Let’s put it—this bluntly: “Everyone’s been sexually violated to some degree.” It also says that: “Many of us have sexually-harmed other individuals.” This is an issue where evil is going to work to bring shame from being a victim or from being one who has brought about harm to another—to a point where we don’t talk about it, and then, we shelve it. As a result, it continues to linger in our body and in our heart.

Dennis: Dan, I’m just reflecting on what’s taking place in the culture—because a couple of nights ago, I spoke to about 60 young adults, for the most part. I spoke about what’s happening—the assault on marriage and family today, both spiritually and culturally. A couple of things I mentioned—I talked a good bit about pornography / I also talked
about the hookup culture. What we’re talking about here is a culture that is spinning out of control—that’s impacting our lives / that is trying to prey upon our children and grandchildren. It just seems like: ’Wow! What the ‘good ole’ days looked like, back when you wrote the original book—today is / is catastrophic in terms of the damage being done to young people today!’

Dan: If you think that it is average—that it is fourth grade that our young nine-year-olds and ten-year-olds are first encountering pornography—and not the kind of pornography that we might have been acquainted with what is so-called soft-porn like Playboy. We’re talking about the kind of pornography that would have been the XXX and beyond—available, digitally, at fourth grade—that’s the average age that it begins.

Dennis: So it isn’t a matter of if your son is going to be exposed by the time he graduates from high school—it is a matter of how early, how soon, and how much he sees—

Dan: Right.

Dennis: —or she sees—because now, there are a number of women/young ladies who are getting hooked on this as well.

Dan: The research would indicate that about 89 percent of men are encountering or have encountered pornography, and it’s about 72 percent that women—so the range is just / only a slight difference in terms of women and men both being confronted / being put in the position of being violated by those initial experiences. Often, those initial ones are the context of abuse.

Bob: I want to talk to you about how we deal with this personally, but I’m just curious: “Do you think a culture can get to where we are and ever get back from where we are?”

Dan: I do—I do believe. I wouldn’t be doing this without something of the heart of writing on behalf of my grandchildren; and I would not be willing to continue to do this until the day I die—

Dennis: Right.

Dan: —if I didn’t believe that individuals, and families, and a culture can eventually come to see: “This is madness!”

Dennis: Yes; and the madness of it—here’s the thing that gets me—parents can do their job, and do it well. They can protect their children, in their homes, from the screens that would serve up pictures that are enticing and take them to a place they’ve never been before and images they’ve never seen; but what you can’t control—as a parent in this culture—are all the other children who have screens in their pockets and screens in their backpacks to say, “Hey, take a look at this!”
I’m thinking back to a conversation I had with one of my sons when he was—I think in the eighth grade / maybe ninth grade. He was having lunch one day in the English room and was eating his sack lunch. A couple of guys brought a Playboy up front, and put it on the teacher’s desk, and were looking at it. They said: “Hey, Ben! Hey—come look at this!”

I said, “What’d you do, son?” He said, “Well, I took my sandwich, I wrapped it up in the paper, put it back in the sack, and I walked out of the room.” Yes; and I remember standing in our kitchen—and, it was like we’d won the Super Bowl. I cheered him / I said, “Way to go! That’s absolutely awesome!!” Had he told me something different, hopefully, I would have been a father of grace to have said: “Well, let’s talk about that, son, if you did look, and how that’d impact you,” and “Let’s continue to talk about images like that and what that does to you, as a man.”

Dan, we’ve got to engage in this with our children; don’t we? This silence is, I think, going to be used by the enemy to destroy a generation.

Dan: We can’t wait until adolescence, which was the pattern I operated with my own children—11, 12, 13 was where we began these long, several-year conversations about sexuality—but it / you’ve got to begin in a world that is out to harm your children. If you’re not comfortable, because of your own history—either of harm to yourself or others / you bear shame, you bear confusion, you are afraid—well, I’m sorry! This is a burning house; and somebody’s got to run in, truly, to engage the fact that there will be death if you do not.

Dennis: As I was preparing for our broadcast today, I just kept thinking of this passage—Bob knows I have quoted this several times; here on FamilyLife Today. It’s at the conclusion of Paul’s letter to the church at Rome. In chapter 16, verse 19, he says, “For your obedience is known to all; so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.”

What I think, as a parent or as a grandparent, we have to be appropriately preparing and warning our children for the evil they are going to be facing multiple times as young people, but certainly, over their lifetimes. Proverbs, Chapters 5-7 is talking about a woman / a prostitute luring a young man into her bedroom. It’s not just for 18-year-olds. These discussions, as you said Dan, have to start young; and they need to continue all the way into adulthood and beyond.

Bob: We have a lot of resources available in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center that speak to the preventive side that help parents know how you can have the kinds of appropriate conversations with your child at various ages and stages of their development around sexual identity / around what’s appropriate behavior—helping you walk through that whole journey with your son or your daughter. I’m thinking about things like Passport to Purity®, and Passport to Identity™, past FamilyLife Today radio programs, articles we have available online, other books and resources that are
available. All of those can help a parent with an intentional proactive strategy when it comes to dealing with your child’s sexuality. In fact, I’d encourage parents to check out Justin Holcomb’s book, *God Made All of Me*, which is designed to be read aloud to young children to help them understand how to protect your body from sexual harm.

For those who are now adults and have experienced sexual abuse as a part of their childhood, we have copies of the new edition of Dan Allender’s book, *Healing the Wounded Heart*, along with the *Healing the Wounded Heart* workbook that Dan has put together. This is the updated version that we’ve been recommending, for more than two decades, to folks who have had sexual abuse as a part of their experience, growing up. You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com for more information on the resources we have available. Again, our website is FamilyLifeToday.com. You can order, online, if you’d like. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com.

I have been sharing with our listeners over the last weeks about a special opportunity that was made available to us, here at *FamilyLife*. We had some friends recently who came and said, “We know that summertime is a particularly challenging time of year for ministries like *FamilyLife Today*,”—there’s often a decrease in donation response for ministries, like ours, during the summer. They wanted to help us out—they wanted to get us into summer in a good position. They agreed that, during the month of May, they would match every donation we receive, here at *FamilyLife*, on a dollar-for-dollar basis, up to a total of $350,000.

Of course, tomorrow is the end of the month. If you have considered making a donation to *FamilyLife*, or maybe this is the first time you’re hearing about the matching-gift opportunity, would you consider going to FamilyLifeToday.com and making an online donation, right now, so that we can make sure that your donation unlocks for us the matching funds that are available to us?

Again, go to FamilyLifeToday.com to donate online or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate. If you mail your check to us—as long as it’s in the mail by tomorrow, it’s still eligible for the matching funds. Mail it to *FamilyLife Today*, PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223. Let me just say, “Thanks,” in advance, for your help and for your partnership with us, here at *FamilyLife Today*.

As we wrap up today, “Congratulations!” to our friends, Pastor Curtis and Donna Mathis, who live in Seven Points, Texas. They are celebrating 35 years together today—so “Congratulations!” to Curtis and Donna. Hope you enjoy your anniversary celebration today.

I hope all of you can be back with us again tomorrow when we’re going to continue our conversation about the issue of childhood sexual abuse with Dr. Dan Allender.
I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with 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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