Bob: Have you ever thought about intimacy and romance in marriage being a part of the glue that God created to help us stay connected to one another during hard times? Here’s pastor and author, Kevin Thompson.

Kevin: It’s almost as though God said: “Alright; I’m going to create this relationship, designed to transform these people’s hearts, which in order to do that I’m now going to have to reveal to them how broken and sin-filled they are. It’s going to be a tough process. What is it that I can create that could now make them have appreciation for one another / enjoy this process—this painful process? What is it that I can create that will keep them together, and glorify Me, and cause them to praise My Name?”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, May 17th. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. Kevin Thompson joins us today to talk about how husbands and wives can be better friends, and partners, and lovers. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. When we go out to one of our Weekend to Remember® marriage getaways, we notice that there is a part of the group that has gathered that checks the “Table of Contents” and they start looking for a particular subject. They want to know: “When are we going to get to the good stuff of the marriage conference?”

Dennis: The attendance in the afternoon, when you might think it would be lagging, is always high.

Bob: Yes; because that’s when we talk about sex in marriage. It’s when we talk about being lovers in marriage. But to get to that you have to lay a foundation. A lot of people just want to jump to that subject. You have to understand—there is a foundation that needs to be laid before you get there.

Dennis: There really, really is. We have with us a pastor, who has been talking to hundreds of married couples, both individually and as groups, challenging them to think in three categories about their marriage. He’s written a book called Friends, Partners & Lovers. And his name is Kevin Thompson, from the Fort Smith, Arkansas, area. Kevin, welcome back to the broadcast.
Kevin: Thanks so much. It’s great to be in Little Rock today.

Bob: Do you get over to Fort Smith very often—do you get over there?

Dennis: On my way—passing through, on my way to Colorado.

Bob: So you know that Exit 13 or Exit 5—that’s where the Braum’s are / the Braum’s Ice Cream—either Exit 13 in Van Buren or Exit 5 in Alma. That’s where you stop. [Laughter]

Kevin: The two things we’ve got.

Bob: That’s right.

Dennis: I’m a—I’m a bigger fan of Graeter’s Ice Cream. It’s a mid-western ice cream.

Bob: I understand. I’m not a respecter of ice creams. I can kind of go—

Dennis: You can tackle it wherever. [Laughter]

Kevin, you are a pastor of a large church. And I got to tell you—one of the statements you made in your book or the stories you told in your book that I’m just going—I’m going to cut right to the chase. It was like, “He’s a courageous guy!” because he was talking with his wife in bed about sex. You made the statement—you know what I’m talking about?

Kevin: I think I do. [Laughter]

Dennis: I’ll let you take it then, because you’re the one who originated this.

Kevin: Well, you get—there’s two stories that are possible here. One, I told Jenny, at one point, “I wish men had it as easy as women, because…” She said, “What do you mean by that?” in almost an entrapping kind of way. I said: “Generally speaking, with guys, you know what it takes to make us happy; that is, as long as we’re good lovers, we’re happy.” Jenny said, “Women have one thing too.” I said: “Really? What’s the one thing?” She said, “Clean the kitchen!” It reminds me of this idea of how partnership flows over into the intimacy level.

But then there’s another concept here I was thinking of—

Dennis: Yes! That’s the one!—the one you just mentioned; yes.

Bob: Are you going to go here?
Kevin: —that I was trying to avoid. But there is this concept—Jenny and I were talking one night after a very long day. This was the day in which we had planned on connecting, and we were both exhausted. In that moment, we were having a conversation. I made this statement, foolishly maybe—I made this statement that: “I understand some of the appeal of prostitution.” She said: “Oh really; how so?”

Then I just talked about this concept of both of us, all day long, have served; and we’ve given of ourselves for the sake of other people. And who does that more than a mother?—right? You get into the bed at night—and just this idea of somebody else serving you—and you not having to do anything. Having this cheap idea of love—I understand the appeal—it’s the appeal of easy sex. It sounds appealing in the moment, and it might even be pleasurable in the occasional moment; but the reality is that it’s not going to satisfy what we are truly longing for, which is an intimate connection with another person. Sex in marriage is not cheap; it is very, very costly.

Bob: And sadly, there are a lot of husbands—maybe even some wives—who think that’s really all we’re talking about here—is a sexual/a physical experience. They’ve settled for that, and they have not realized what God has created something much more glorious than that.

Dennis: That’s what the writer of Genesis was talking about when he said in Genesis 2:24 and 25: “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife. And they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed.” There’s the part of sex that we don’t talk enough about. It’s the idea of two people being totally transparent with one another—both as a friend, which we talked about earlier; as partners in life, which we talked about as well; and in this physical aspect of two people truly becoming one. We would think it would be a natural easy matter for this to occur, but the opposite is true; isn’t it?

Kevin: Oh, absolutely! The book, Friends, Partners & Lovers, is written from Genesis 2—from God’s design for marriage. Sin has influenced it / it has impacted it, but it has not redesigned it. That original design is still there. So, the beginning of the passage—whenever God’s going to create Eve, He says He is going to create a helper fit for Adam. That idea of “fit”—there’s something unique about her—that’s different than anybody else / different from the rest of the animals.

I think that is the friendship element. If it were an animal, there wouldn’t be true peer relationship. Eve was out of the side—a sense of equality that was there. “Helper” says that there’s task to be done—there’s a partnership to happen. Then at the end of that passage, what you just read, is this idea of being naked and unashamed—that intimacy that is there. This is one thing that distinguishes the marital contract / the marital relationship from all other relationships. These three roles all combined into one can only happen within God’s design of marriage. It’s no accident here!
We think and we live in a society that talks about the ease of love, as though it comes naturally: “It should be so easy. When there is any non-compatibility there, something must be wrong with you.” But whenever you think about it, of course it’s going to be difficult. The very first effect and by-product of sin was shame. Is it any wonder that, for many couples, the first place they can experience some struggles is within the bedroom—is within this concept of sexuality?—because shame plays such an integral role in what’s going on.

Bob: And you add to that the number of people who have begun a marriage relationship having been sexually active, either with one another or with other partners. They have believed the cultural narrative, which is: “That’s okay,” “That’s normal. You’ve just been indulging your appetites. There’s nothing to that.”

But when they get into marriage, their conscience bears witness to the fact that behavior was out of bounds. They’re starting to recognize there’s bitter fruit to what I thought was just free love before we got married. I think there are a lot of couples in marriage today who are experiencing difficulty in this area because they have never confronted the sinfulness of their past behaviors.

Kevin: I don’t doubt that at all. This is where we are grateful for the gospel—for God can forgive us; He can cleanse us from all those mistakes. But we have to confront it; we have to deal with it. We can’t just live in denial of what actually took place.

I see this playing out in multiple ways. I would say one of the biggest hindrances of marriage right now are couples, who are acting like they are married—enjoying the benefits of marriage without the responsibilities. They tend to get stuck. Like it or not, the reason many of them get stuck is—the woman wants to move ahead—the woman wants to get married; the guy doesn’t. Why should he? If he gets all the benefits of marriage and not all the responsibilities, why is it that he’s going to move forward?

I meet with many women, greatly disappointed; because their partner won’t ask them to marry them / won’t move forward in the relationship. I simply ask, “What’s the benefit, at this point, of commitment when he’s getting all these other benefits without any of the responsibilities?”

Then, I deal with couples who get in a relationship—and they’ve been living in this kind of free concept, thinking to themselves that sex is nothing more than a physical act. Then, they get into marriage; and they realize: “No; it’s not. Like it or not, our emotions / our spirituality—all of those things are engaged and involved.”

Isn’t it interesting?—this is one place that science, I think, is proving the Christian story. We were told in the ‘60s and the ‘70s and the ‘80s: “It’s just a physical act. Everything else is just a social construct. Don’t worry about it. Get over it. You’re so prudish in what you’re teaching.” Now, science is beginning to show us: “No; you cannot separate the
emotions / you cannot separate the heart from the physical act of what’s going on.” The Christian story is being proven true.

**Dennis:** Yes; what troubles me—and I get this / I mean, I understand—but 60 percent of all couples, who are getting married today, have begun their relationship by cohabiting. It’s become the preferred method of marriage preparation. You’re a pastor—you see folks come in to have you bless the union for a day and bless their covenant-keeping relationship, but they’ve already taken of the benefits and almost with disregard for what the Bible has to say. And now, all of a sudden, they are going to flip the switch and start living by the Book?

**Kevin:** You’re absolutely right! The thing that’s goes unspoken I think—I think the church does a decent job at speaking out about that and the need to do this in a biblical way—but there’s an equal way to disobey what the Bible has to say about sex; that is, once you’re in the marital relationship, to not give it the intention and attention it’s supposed to have.

I think we can very fairly say the street-walking prostitute, who is sleeping with everybody’s husband, and the good church lady, who refuses to sleep with her own—they are both sexual sinners. They are just doing it in radically different ways. One is very socially and church-wide acceptable; the other one is shunned; but in reality, they are both missing the mark of what Jesus has for us.

**Bob:** The Bible speaks to this—1 Corinthians, Chapter 7, says you are not to deprive one another, except for a period for prayer. And most couples, who are depriving one another, are not doing it for some season of prayer; and it’s not a mutual decision. It’s somebody, who says: “I’m not happy with how everything is going,” or “I’m tired,” or “I have other priorities,” or “I’m just not interested.” They don’t recognize that failure to attend to this part of the relationship is going to have implications to every part of the relationship.

**Kevin:** It’s going to ripple over into every scenario of what’s going on in their connection between them. I see this so often. Sometimes, there’s physical issues that are going on. One of the simplest things we can do, if we are having problems in the bedroom, is to go get a physical—to just talk openly with our doctor to see what’s going on. It could be age is happening; it could be disease; it could be several other things.

But generally speaking, physically, everything is okay; but the bedroom is kind of the first place the problems tend to arise, because there is a weakness in the friendship or a disrespect in the partnership. The first place that is seen is then in the intimacy aspect of what is happening. So you have to have that intention, even within the sexual relationship, in order to have the relationship flourish.

**Bob:** When we talk about this at Weekend to Remember® marriage getaways, one of the things we ask couples to evaluate is: “Let’s talk first about commitment. Is that
solid? Is that secure? If there’s any question about commitment, how can you freely give yourself to somebody when you’re not sure how safe that relationship is?”

Then we say: “You need to look at companionship. Are you having fun together?”—we’ve already talked about being friends and partners. And then we say: “You need to look at your spiritual intimacy. What’s going on in terms of how the two of you are engaging with God together?” These areas of commitment, companionship, and spiritual intimacy—these are a part of what makes the passion side of a relationship work.

Finally, the question of: “Has your passionate relationship become routine, where you’re just kind of in a rut and not giving any thought or creativity to what that looks like?” These are some of the common things that couples can start to go: “Oh, okay; now I can see why we are having some problems here, because it’s gotten boring,” or “…because I didn’t feel safe,” or “…because we’re not hanging out and being friends together.”

**Kevin:** Everything is foreplay—that’s just the truth. Everything is foreplay. Everything is going in to either making your relationship / your intimate relationship better or it’s making it worse. One of the things I hear, *all the time*, from wives is: “Yes! I’d sleep with him more often if he’d just picked up his socks!” It’s just this idea—what you’re hearing in that moment is an *exhausted* wife. If you were to look at what is probably the biggest issue that’s affecting intimacy between husbands and wives today, it’s probably exhaustion—that is probably it.

**Dennis:** I think you’re right.

**Kevin:** Generally speaking, the intimate moment is saved for the end of the day. We are giving of ourselves, all day long, to everybody else; and then, if something is left over at the end, our spouse gets that. Now, I understand that. There’s an aspect of it—I have a church; I have a couple kids; my wife has a business—I understand that, but if that’s all we ever give each other—

One of the great recommendations I give to couples is: “Have sex more often in the daytime.” You’ve got to find ways to make it happen—maybe running home for lunch / maybe you’re dropping the kids off to school then coming back home. But if you can create those times—it’s not going to be the norm, by any means—but if you can create those times, in which you are giving your best to your spouse, and then those other moments will have more meaning and more value. But if all you ever do is give your spouse your leftovers, then pretty soon, one of you is going to leave; and it’s going to be over.

**Dennis:** What we’re talking about here is good communication between a husband and wife around their feelings, their expectations, how they get hurt. One of the problems is—we talk at the end of the day, like you’re talking about, when both of us are
exhausted. Then you light a match; and it’s like pouring kerosene on top of it, and it explodes. It’s not going to be a time of coming to great understanding and great communication.

Couples do need to just have a date and, without accusing one another of anything, just have a conversation of: “How are we doing here?”

**Kevin:** Yes; absolutely! This is where you see how friendship plays into this. If you’re friends, you can talk about anything. You can talk about anything with your friends—it doesn’t matter—you can talk about it.

So think about this—if we go back to our first recommendation—to strengthen your friendship, take a walk. What a great time to talk about sex—outside the bedroom, outside the expectation of the moment, outside the pressure of what is going on. But, then, as you are taking a walk—and again, you’re not necessarily looking each other in the eye—as you’re taking a walk, you can have this conversation of: “Is this satisfying or not?”

Very interesting to me—whenever I do marriage conferences, I tend to take ten points. I wrote an article one time—just kind of a checklist of ten things of: “How Healthy Is Your Marriage?” One of them just simply says: “True or false: Our sexual intimacy meaningful.” Think about how low of a bar that is—it has no details in it; it just means that, to you, it is meaningful.

I expected, whenever I wrote that, for most people to be able to say, “Yes!” Without fail, it is the number one thing listed as I have them list one or two things on there that are a problem. Without fail, that’s number one. The majority of couples that come to a marriage conference that I lead will say their sexual intimacy is not meaningful. That’s a problem.

This is the very thing, I think, that God created with design/with intention. Think about it—marriage is the coming together of two sin-filled people. It’s going to be difficult. I mean, literally, it is opposites, now coming in, living together. Nobody is going to see my weaknesses more than my wife—my brokenness / all these things. We’re coming together.

It’s almost as though God said: “Alright; I’m going to create this relationship, designed to transform these people’s hearts, which, in order to do that, I’m now going to have to reveal to them how broken and sin-filled they are. It’s going to be a tough process. What is it that I can create that can now make them have appreciation for one another / enjoy this process—this painful process? What is it that I can create that will keep them together, and glorify Me, and maybe even, at the climax of that moment, cause them to praise My Name?” He designed sex for that—for that very moment.
**Dennis:** Kevin, as you were talking about that question, I thought: “I wonder if there is a difference—and I’m smiling as I say this—I wonder if there is a difference in how women answer why it’s not meaningful and how men answer that same question?” Can you summarize what you’re seeing and hearing from these surveys and interacting with hundreds of couples?

**Kevin:** I think that’s a great question. I haven’t gone into depth with that. Maybe I need to on my next survey. That’s a great idea, but I do have some general ideas of what’s going on. I think, generally speaking, for men—if it comes down to an issue: “If she understands and recognizes my sexual need, she knows me, and she loves me, and she appreciates me.” I think for women—it’s the idea of: “If he knows me, and sees me, and appreciates me, then I’m going to be opened up to the sexual union together.”

I think the fact that we start in two radically different places. I think for men—it’s the idea: “She doesn’t prioritize it enough. Everything else comes before this, so I have to wait for the end of the day for this to happen. And then she might be too tired. I’m the one who gets checked off the list, not something else. She’ll do the PTA; she’ll make sure the lunches are made; she’ll make sure she’s at work; but I might be the one that risks, this day, not being on the to-do list.” Whereas, what women tend to say, I believe is: “He doesn’t respect me. He doesn’t love me. He doesn’t know me, and now he wants me to do this.”

It’s just not going to work in that way. I think you have to have a different perspective. I think women need to understand the value of sex to men—that it is not just a physical act—it is a connection that he wants with you. But I think men have to understand: “I have to woo her heart in order to have her body.”

**Dennis:** That’s correct.

**Kevin:** Generally speaking, when couples have a problem in the bedroom, the problem is—they don’t know how to communicate. That’s the issue—the issue is not the intimacy. The issue actually goes back to the friendship and to the partnership: “Have they learned how to navigate/negotiate how to work through problems?” If the answer is, “No”; they are going to have a problem in the bedroom they can’t fix.

**Dennis:** I think you mentioned the issue of fatigue and no margin. I think, with the advent of children upon a marriage, and a bunch of them, things change in a marriage relationship as we get older. I make this statement repeatedly: “Your marriage has to be built to outlast your children. It’s got to be intact when the children begin to leave and you begin to release them to become their own men and women in the marketplace. You’re going to be left with each other. You’re going to turn around and find your wife’s hand to hold it, or you’re going to turn around and find her back away from you because you’ve not paid attention to loving her and caring for her in the midst of growing old together.”
Bob: I’m thinking we need an app—24-hour app—don’t you think that’d work; right? You can set the timer.

Kevin: Oh, that—that’d speak the love—

Bob: It’s a genius idea; isn’t it?

Dennis: That’s a man’s answer to the problem! I can see women, right now, going, “That isn’t going to work, buster.” [Laughter]

Bob: Okay; maybe just copies of Kevin’s book—maybe that would be better than the app.

Dennis: I think so!

Kevin: I think Jenny would say: “Get all the apps you want. It’s not going to matter.” [Laughter]

Dennis: That’s exactly right!

Kevin, thanks for writing this book—great job. Keep on encouraging marriages to excel still more in honoring Jesus Christ.

Kevin: Well, thanks for your legacy of teaching us about this.

Bob: We’ve got copies of your book in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. The book is called Friends, Partners & Lovers. If you’d like to order your copy, call 1-800-FL-TODAY—that’s 1-800-358-6329—1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

If you’d like more information about our Weekend to Remember marriage getaways, you can find that, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or if you are interested in hosting an Art of Marriage® small group or an Art of Marriage event in your church or in your community, find out more about how you can get involved in helping to strengthen the marriages of other couples in your sphere of influence. The information is available, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. Let me just say: “The Art of Marriage is great content / great material. It has been seen by more than a million people. Folks really have been impacted by this series, so we hope that’s something you will check out.”

Let me ask you a quick question: “If I told you that you could have a powerful impact in the lives, and marriages, and families of thousands of couples in your community, and all it would take is $25 or $30 a month, would you be willing to do that?” That’s what FamilyLife Today Legacy Partners are doing. They are investing in this ministry so that this ministry can reach more people more regularly with practical biblical help and hope. Your investment as a Legacy Partner means that more young couples are going to have
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you’ll get a certificate you can use for yourself or for others to attend a Weekend to
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being part of the team. Then, we’ve had some friends of the ministry, who have agreed
they are going to match every donation we receive from new Legacy Partners, over the
next 12 months, dollar for dollar. Every donation you make for the next 12 months will
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You can easily sign up today, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY
to sign up. By the way, if you are interested in making a onetime donation in the month
of May, that onetime donation will be doubled as well, up to a total of $500,000. We
hope to hear from you this month. Go online to FamilyLifeToday.com, or call 1-800-FL-
TODAY for more information about becoming a Legacy Partner or making a financial
gift to support FamilyLife Today.

We hope you can join us back tomorrow. We’re going to talk about what it’s like to grow
up in a family where mom and dad split up. We’ll hear from two adult women who reflect
on their experience in their childhood and the impact of their parents’ divorce has had
on their lives. I hope you can tune in for that.

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 tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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