Bob: God’s design for marriage needs to be taught, and celebrated, and embraced in a local church; but as Michelle Hill points out, when you’re single, hearing that message over and over again can make you feel like an outsider.

Michelle: What the church is saying is that marriage is a picture of Christ and the church; it’s a great picture of the gospel. So I sit there and go: “What about me? Can I be a part of that picture? Can I try to paint some brushstrokes on that?” I do sometimes walk away, going, “What’s wrong with me?”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, October 18th. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. How can the church help single adults understand where they fit into God’s design for marriage and family and singleness and sex? We’re going to talk about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. We are headed into some real family life with the topic today.

Dennis: I wondered how you were going to get into this broadcast. This is a first.

Bob: Well, we’re going to be talking about—

Dennis: No, no, no. Let’s let the author of the book—

Bob: —tell us what we’re going to be talking about?

Dennis: —tell us what we’re going to be talking about.

Bob: That’s fair.

Dennis: Dr. Juli Slattery joins us again on FamilyLife Today. Welcome back, Juli.

Juli: Thanks so much for having me.

Dennis: We also have Michelle Hill, who is the host of FamilyLife This Week—on the team, here, at FamilyLife®.
Michelle: Yes; most definitely!

Dennis: Aren’t you excited about being here?

Michelle: I am! I’m very excited. Anytime I get to share the table with you and Bob, and now Juli—my new best friend.

Bob: Yes; tell the truth, though. When I came to you and said, “Hey, we’re going to be talking with Dr. Juli Slattery about her new book,” and you said, “What’s the book about?” and I told you—

Dennis: —and she faked that she was going to the dentist!

Bob: Yes; that’s right. [Laughter]

Dennis: That’s a lame excuse.

Bob: You wanted to get out of this.

Michelle: “I have to get out of here as quickly as possible.” [Laughter]

Bob: So, Juli, what’s the book about?

Juli: It’s called *Sex and the Single Girl*.

Bob: And Michelle—

Michelle: Yes.

Bob: —you’re a single girl; right?—

Michelle: Yes.

Bob: —in your 40s—

Michelle: Yes.

Bob: —never been married.

Michelle: No.

Bob: You ready to talk about this?

Michelle: Sure! [Laughter]
Bob: I like that! I like that!

Michelle: Let’s jump in!

Bob: Okay!

Dennis: Nothing like sitting around, talking about this book. Juli, thanks for writing it— I’m really glad. I think there needs to be a wholesome, healthy perspective addressed to single women today; because there’s a lot in the culture to distort it.

Now, in case you don’t know who Juli Slattery is, she is the cofounder, with Linda Dillow, of Authentic Intimacy, which is a ministry to women around sexual issues. She’s authored a number of books. She’s been married to her husband Mike since 1994 and has three sons. She is a minority in a fraternity.

Juli: That’s right! [Laughter]

Dennis: If she can survive that, she can write this book as well.

You talk about how a woman has something that really profoundly impacts her view of sexuality. What is it?

Juli: Well, there are a lot of things that impact it, but I’d say the big impact is the family they grew up in—you know, what they learned about male and female, and marriage and intimacy, and what they observed. That has a profound impact on how we think about our sexuality.

Dennis: Talk to us about your own family of origin.

Juli: I have a wonderful family of origin. My parents are both still living, still married, and I’m one of six kids. My parents came to saving knowledge of Christ when I was a year old. The knowledge of Christ and studying the Scriptures radically changed their approach to marriage and parenting, so I’ve been very blessed to be raised in a God-fearing home with healthy relationships / a healthy understanding of marriage and sexuality. But my parents would be the first to tell you that the ways that they equipped us, back in the day, is not enough for the ways we need to be having this conversation today.

Dennis: Michelle, what about you? Your family of origin—how did it shape your view of sexuality?

Michelle: You know, what is interesting is that—sex was a bad word in our home. It was a word that was never uttered, at all—even, I don’t remember my mom ever giving
me “the talk.” It was stuff that I found out through my friends. I mean, I found out everything through my friends; and my mom and dad just were silent about that.

**Dennis:** About how old were you when you did find out?

**Michelle:** Twelve or thirteen. I had a good friend who had ten older brothers and sisters, and so she knew *everything*.

**Bob:** She knew what was what; yes.

**Michelle:** She knew everything. In our family, it just wasn’t talked about; but that was the ’70s and ’80s, and I wouldn’t say that that was not normal.

**Bob:** But I’m thinking about this—if that was the case, and there was no conversation about this—going into your teen years and, now, all of a sudden, there’s an awakening happening—right?—and around you are girlfriends and boyfriends, who are coupling up and starting to have sex—did you have any thinking in your mind about what your boundaries should be?—or where you should go?—or what you wanted your sexual life to look like, as a young, single, Christian woman?

**Michelle:** All I knew was I couldn’t have sex—that’s all I knew. I didn’t know what the boundaries *should* look like; I didn’t know if there were any gray areas. I didn’t know anything other than, “You can’t have sex, because that’s forbidden in our home.”

**Bob:** So your thinking was just:

**Michelle:** “Hands off!”

**Bob:** “Put a fence around this, and—

**Michelle:**—“don’t even go there. Do not read Song of Solomon. Don’t even—I mean, you have to be as pure as possible.” So I didn’t even think about that.

**Juli:** I think that’s a story that I’ve heard over and over again. I think it represents—not only how the culture has twisted sexuality—but in some ways, how the Christian church has presented a less-than-helpful view of sexuality, which is what you’re kind of describing. I call it the purity narrative that, you know: “The highest goal is for you to not be sexual—to be pure—to not think sexual things or have sexual longings.”

Then, women and girls can’t make sense of their sexuality. They’re struggling with, “Why do I feel the way I do?” They feel tremendous shame about just the fact that they even have longings. You know, I think that’s sort of a paradigm we need to shift—that the purity narrative has some good things in it, but it’s also creating some problems.
Michelle: Well, and even as I was growing up, until—I don’t even know; 20s and 30s when it really hit me—was the fact that I was always told: “You remain pure until you get married,” and “It’s your husband, who you’re remaining pure for.” It wasn’t until just a few years ago, I was like: “No, no; no. I’m remaining pure for God.” I was never taught that, so I had to have a paradigm shift on my own—well, it was God who was shifting that paradigm—but it took a lot after that to even think through that.

Bob: I remember my daughter coming to me after—she was hearing the purity message—this was after she was married. She said, you know, “We hear that girls should be pure until they’re married.” She said, “So, what should they be after they’re married?”

Juli: Exactly; yes. [Laughter]

Bob: It was a great question; right?

Juli: Yes.

Bob: We have to make sure that what we’re communicating is God’s design for sexuality.

Juli: Right; and the biblical narrative is actually quite different than the purity narrative—and is much more comprehensive and helps us understand things that we’re dealing with in the culture today—like: “Why is gender important?” and “How do I address things, like pornography, that I might be struggling with?” and “What does this look like, going into marriage? Is having sex with my husband impure, then, or is there a way for that to be even tainted? Just because we’re married, does it mean everything’s okay?”

We have to be presenting an understanding of sexuality, then, that encompasses all those struggles and questions.

Dennis: There’s something else happening, besides the family of origin—it’s a culture that is predatory.

Bob: Yes.

Juli: Yes.

Dennis: I just want you to comment, Juli—and Michelle, if you want to comment as well, please feel free—“What’s happening to single women in this culture? Are they feeling like they’re being preyed upon? Are they being used, or what?”

Juli: I’d love to hear your response to that, Michelle. I think, from where I sit and the women that I talk to, they’re usually not thinking that deeply. It takes time for them to start connecting the dots and feeling like, “I am being treated like an object.”
What they’re doing, instead of being thoughtful about this, is just reacting—that “If I want attention / if I want to feel worthwhile in this culture, then I have to be overtly sexual, and I have to acquiesce to the demands of culture.” So they develop a lifestyle around that. Girls that are growing up in Christian homes—you know, “This is how I get a boy’s attention,” and then the tidal wave that follows is a lot of guilt and shame that they don’t know what to do with.

**Dennis:** There was an article, recently, in *The Wall Street Journal* that says, “There’s an app for that.”

**Juli:** Yes.

**Dennis:** And it’s an app—

**Juli:** Oh, yes.

**Dennis:** —an app for single women and single men to remove the “Hashtag Me Too” threat—

**Bob:** Yes; to give consent to one another for—

**Dennis:** —for legal purposes.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Michelle:** Wow.

**Bob:** Michelle, I’m imagining what it might feel like—to be a single woman, in her 30s, never married, who has said: “I’m going to do this God’s way—that’s what my parents taught me, growing up. I’m not going to be sexually active until I’m married.”

But all around her, here’s what the culture’s saying back to her: “Guys aren’t going to be interested in you; in fact, they’re going to ignore you. You have to be sexual to get a guy.” Secondly: “That’s outmoded and outdated; that’s just old thinking,” and “God made you sexual anyway. Why would He give you these desires and then you just have to sit on them and stuff them?”

You’ve had to wrestle with these things through your 30s and into your 40s; right?

**Michelle:** Oh, yes. And it has been hard; because the guys are sitting out there, going, “Hey, we have to figure out if we’re compatible.”

**Bob:** Yes.
**Michelle:** You know, “If this thing’s going to go anywhere, we…”

**Bob:** And they mean sexually compatible; right?

**Michelle:** Oh, yes!

**Bob:** So, “We have to try before we buy.”

**Michelle:** Oh, exactly!

**Bob:** Right.

**Michelle:** And you say, “No,” and they’re like: “Ohhh; well, you know what? Maybe we’re not at all.”

**Bob:** I mean, that’s happened to you—in that kind of direct—

**Michelle:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —seriously!—from the church?

**Michelle:** Yes; everyone’s broken—inside the church and outside the church.

**Bob:** Have you had the internal dialogue, where you go: “Okay; I’m sick of this. I’m sick of playing by the rules. I’m just going to chuck it all and do what I want to do”? [Laughter]

**Dennis:** Now, you asked that question; huh?

**Michelle:** Do you want the good-girl answer, or do you want the honest answer?

**Bob:** I want the honest answer on this. [Laughter]

**Michelle:** Yes; I have thought that. In fact, I had a conversation, just not too long ago. I called up a friend and I said: “You have to keep me accountable; because right now, I do not know what’s keeping me, other than my job at FamilyLife and the accountability that I have there, that’s keeping me walking this life,” because I wouldn’t mind—sorry to say this—finding a guy and hooking up, just because I want that satisfaction.

Do I know what satisfaction I’m looking for? I think I do; but the Michelle that is walking in the Word and walking with God is sitting there, shouting at me and saying, “You do not want to go there.” The other Michelle is sitting there, going, “I need something!”
**Bob:** And Juli, the average single young woman in the church is listening to the other Michelle and saying: “Okay; I’m sick of playing by the rules. I guess this is what I have to do.”

**Juli:** And it’s not only about satisfaction; it’s about our definition of maturity. You know, I think this is a large piece of this. The culture’s telling you that: “If you have not experienced sex, you’re not a complete person; and you’re not a mature woman.” That’s just a lie from the enemy. You’re right, Bob.

I mean, Michelle, I’m so grateful that you were that vulnerable and honest; because that’s the internal dialogue—and very few women are not going to give into that dialogue and just say, “Let me, at least, try it to say that I know what this is and I’ve done this.”

**Dennis:** Juli, I have to ask this question, at this point; because there are a lot of women, wondering, “What is a healthy, God-honoring way of expressing my sexuality?”

**Michelle:** Oh yes; please! I’m all ears; I’m all ears.

**Juli:** Yes.

**Dennis:** I mean, seriously; we look at this—we’re image-bearers, male and female.

**Juli:** Yes; yes.

**Dennis:** God made a woman to be a beautiful thing! How does that get expressed?

**Juli:** Part of the confusion here is that we equate our sexuality with being sexually active; we equate intimacy with being sexually active. There are all these different aspects of what it is to be a woman, what it is to be an image-bearer, what it is to connect with people on an intimate level that really have been sabotaged in our culture. Everything is being placed in this basket of sexuality, which is why it’s such a watermark event in our culture of maturity, and self-exploration, and finding out who you are.

Some of it is, I think, really going back to the beginning and define: “What is our sexuality?” because it’s much more than just being sexually active. When a woman begins to understand that “I am—by nature, by God’s design, by God’s intent—a sexual person, even as a single person / even as somebody who’s not being sexually active, that there are aspects of my sexuality that don’t involve sexual intimacy,” then all of a sudden it’s like: “What does it mean to be female? What does it mean to long for intimacy?—and pursue intimacy in community, and relationship, and friendship—to express love?”

We have to broaden our understanding—that all of that is driven by our God’s design of our sexuality.
Dennis: I heard you talking about relationships being one of the primary ways a woman can express her sexuality.

Juli: Yes; absolutely. A relationship that is intimate doesn’t have to be sexual. I’ve had women come up to me and say to me: “I don’t know the difference. Every time I’ve ever experienced intimacy, it has been sexualized.”

Dennis: And here’s the caution that I think you would give at this point too. As a woman does become intimate, relationally—with someone of the same sex or the opposite sex—because of this culture that these relationships are taking place in—and because of homosexuality / because of a culture that wants to include everybody—a woman needs to guard her heart; doesn’t she?

Juli: She does, and she needs wise counsel in terms of understanding that feeling close to someone / wanting to share with someone does not mean that you’re same-sex attracted—does not mean that that relationship has to be sexualized.

We didn’t have to, again, have this conversation 20 or 30 years ago; because we experienced intimacy, and family, and friendship in a way that was healthy and not sexualized. But today, everything seems to be sexualized, which is just adding to the confusion of “How do I be a sexual person without acting out sexually?”

Bob: You know, Juli—that a single woman; or a single man, for that point—would look at their life and say: “Okay; I hear what you’re saying about emotional intimacy, and being close, and having a real close friend. That’s all fine; but at the end of the day, I still feel like there’s something missing. I feel like I’m being cheated out of something.” It’s like, “Well, that’s nice; but that’s like saying, ‘Okay; you can’t have cake for dessert, but I’ll give you a candy you can suck on,’”—right? It is like, “No…”

Juli: It feels empty.

Bob: Yes!

Juli: Yes; and you know—some of it is that, unfortunately, I think single men and women are being told both—by the culture: that they’re missing out on something / the experience of sex—and by the church: that they’re missing out on something / that you’re not a complete person if you’re not married. That message is constantly coming at them from both places. The feeling and the belief is, “I haven’t arrived if I’m still single, and I’m not sexually active.”

Both of those are lies. There’s nothing in the Scripture that tells us that marriage completes us—that’s what Hollywood tells us. As a matter of fact, the Scripture would tell us that intimacy with God and intimacy in community, in some ways, was meant to be far more powerful in our lives than intimacy in marriage. But we don’t talk about that
enough; so I think that women that are single do feel like, “I must be missing something.”

**Michelle:** Well, and in fact, I think what the church is saying—at least, what I am hearing—is that marriage is a picture of Christ and the church / it's a great picture of the gospel. I sit there and go: “What about me? Can I be a part of that picture? Can I try to paint some brush strokes on that? What am I?—chopped liver?”

I do sometimes walk away, thinking that, until I go: “No; your identity is not in that. Your identity is, as a daughter of the King; and you have to keep that in perspective,” because if I don't, then I go down the way of being empty, and lonely, and going, “What’s wrong with me?”

**Dennis:** Juli, I want to go back to the statement you made, because I’ll bet there are some single women—and for that matter, single men—as well as married people, going: “Wait a second. Marriage doesn’t complete you?”

Back before the Fall—before sin entered—it was the God of the universe who created them male and female, who said: “It is not good that man be alone. He needs a helper to come alongside him.”

**Juli:** Really good question. I look at the life, for example, of the Apostle Paul. Here we have a mature man, who had an encounter with Christ that was so revolutionary that his advice on marriage—he gives a full picture of marriage in terms of being that picture of Christ and the church and the roles of marriage—but he also, essentially, says, “It is better for you not to marry,” and he says, “If you burn with sexual passion, then get married; that’s better than sinning sexually. But in the long run, it's just better for you to be free to serve Christ.”

Here is a man that understood the gospel far more than we could ever understand it, and understood God's design, and essentially is saying that “Let’s remember that marriage is just the picture.” If we start only pursuing the picture, without remembering that a picture is supposed to point us to a greater reality and a greater intimacy, then we miss the whole point of the picture.

Paul had the completion of that. He didn't need the metaphor anymore, because he knew what true intimacy with God was and what encountering Christ was. I think, in his life, we see this tension of: “Yes; we need to all value the picture. The picture is so important. But let’s remember—the picture’s, ultimately, supposed to point us to a greater longing, which is intimacy and being completed in the body of Christ.”

**Bob:** Well, and the guy who wrote that—some scholars think he may have been married, at some point in his life—the Apostle Paul—but certainly, on his missionary journeys, he’s a single man.
Juli: Yes.

Bob: So, he’s writing about the blessing of singleness, experiencing it himself; because he can be wholly devoted to the ministry that God has called him to.

But still, in this culture, you can feel like, “There’s some aspect/some good gift of God that is being withheld from me.” Michelle, how have you processed that in your own heart and life? How do you deal with that idea that, “I feel like there’s a good gift and I can’t have it”?

Michelle: Bob, that’s been a question that I’ve been wrestling with lately. I heard a sermon recently; and the pastor was talking about “Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father,” and He is a good, good Father.

He was talking about how even the good gifts that God gives could hurt and sting his children, but they’re meant to pull them to the cross and pull them daily into His love and in to, basically, begging for Him and saying: “I need You, God! I need You every single hour.” That’s where I’ve been wrestling right now—in my singleness and in wanting to be married—is the fact that I need God every single hour. In my earthly need, I need Him more; and that’s where I’ve been wrestling and where I’ve been.

Dennis: I want to join you, Juli, in thanking Michelle for being honest and letting us into your life, as a single woman.

Juli, I appreciate you addressing what has to be a gargantuan need in our country, especially within the Christian community/within the church, because we kind of sweep it under the rug—and it was our God who made us male and female! There’s such a need today to know, “What is a godly view, a biblical view, a wholesome view of my sexuality if I’m a single woman?”—and for that matter, if you’re a married woman—I mean, you’re speaking to both.

I just appreciate how you’ve done this. I want to encourage maybe some grandparents to get this book / some parents to get it and to read it—and think about how you’re going to pass this on to your kids and your grandkids—because Juli has a concept we don’t have time to get into right now; but it’s called—not sex ed—but sexual discipleship. Honestly, I think that’s a great concept—to be discipled in the Scriptures, with God’s viewpoint, of why and what He was up to when He made us sexual beings.

Bob: Well, and Juli, you’ve designed your book to be a six-week journey for a single woman to go on, where she has a chapter a day to read through, think through, pray through to help shape her thinking as she goes on her journey. We have copies of the book, *Sex and the Single Girl*, in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. You can order the book from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call 1-800-FLTODAY. Again, the website: FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to order Juli Slattery’s book, *Sex and
the Single Girl: 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

You know, we think these are important conversations that need to be had—these are things that need to be talked about. We try to make sure, when we talk about these issues, we’re doing it appropriately; we’re thinking biblically; we’re honoring the Lord with how we have what are arguably very difficult conversations to have at times.

We’re grateful for those of you who make this program possible for your fellow listeners. When you donate to support FamilyLife Today, you are making it possible for this program to be heard by hundreds of thousands of people every day on radio, via the web, on the FamilyLife mobile app. There are a lot of people who are now telling Alexa to “Play FamilyLife Today.” You can train your Alexa device so that FamilyLife Today is just a voice command away. We’re grateful for those of you who make all of this possible when you donate to support this ministry.

If you can help with a donation today, we’d like to say, “Thank you,” by sending you FamilyLife’s new 2019 calendar. It’s all about building family togetherness, and there are activities in the calendar designed to help you do just that throughout the year. The calendar is our gift to you when you donate today. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to donate online, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make a donation. You can also mail your donation to FamilyLife Today at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to talk about what’s at the root of this desire for sexual intimacy and “How do we deal with those root issues so that we can maintain purity in our relationships?” Juli Slattery will be back with us; Michelle Hill will as well. I hope you can be with us.

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.

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