**Jill Savage**

You know, I've shared a lot about our marriage crisis over the years. And one of the things I have often said is that I did not cause Mark's affair, but I contributed to the dysfunction in our marriage. And one of the ways that I did that is I misused my strength. And that's what we're going to dig into today. And helping me do that is my friend, **Dr. Julie Slattery**. Julie is a psychologist. She's an author and a speaker with over 25 years of experience counseling, discipling, and teaching women. She's also the president and the co-founder of Authentic Intimacy, a unique ministry devoted to teaching God's design for intimacy and sexuality. She hosts a weekly podcast, Java with Julie, where she answers tough questions about relationships, about marriage and spiritual, emotional and sexual intimacy. Welcome, Dr. Julie.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Jill, it's always good to be with you. Thanks for having me on. We go way back.

**Jill Savage**

I was actually thinking about that this morning. I was thinking about when we first met. Help me if I remember right. It was the first time that you hosted a focus on the family broadcast right?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

That is correct. Yeah, yeah, you were. I think my first interview. So, yeah, so that was a long time ago that was even before I worked for focus. I think they were trying me out.

**Jill Savage**

Oh, that's right. So when would that have been?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Probably 2007 I'm guessing.

**Jill Savage**

Yeah. So yeah. And so it really that was a fun interview and we stayed in touch you eventually started working for focus and did their broadcast for a little while. And every time I was in Colorado Springs. We made sure that we did lunch or connected in some way. And now you live in Ohio and I don't come to Ohio nearly as much as I go to Colorado Springs. So I miss those lunches!

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

I know I'm a lot closer to you now, but nobody comes to Ohio to visit me. So yeah, so we have to just do Zoom calls.

**Jill Savage**

Yeah, I know it. And so thankfully we can do that. Well, I'm excited about our conversation today, and this is a book that you actually first wrote 20 years ago. But you used the same title, but you completely rewrote the book. Is that correct?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

That's right. Yeah, it's the same foundational principle, but everything is kind of rewritten from the ground up, so it's kind of like a new project.

**Jill Savage**

Yeah. So tell me why you did that.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Well, the book over the 20 years had sold a lot of copies. A lot of women would tell me that they'd read it really helped them in their marriage. But I was getting to the point where I was like, I don't know if I want to recommend it anymore because I still believe in the principles. But man, there's so much that has changed in the last 20 years. I've changed, I've learned, I've grown. I think women are dealing with some different things today than we were 20 years ago. And I just felt like all the concepts in the book are really solid, but I would say them differently today than I said them back then. So, yeah, so I'm sure you feel that way about some of your books, and we can't go back and do that with all of our books. But I really felt like this one is just a needed concept in our day and age. And so I tackled it.

**Jill Savage**

Yeah, I love that. So ultimately, what was it that prompted you to write the book in the first place? Talk about that journey because I know for me, anytime I write a book, it comes out of my own personal experience. So what was that for you?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yeah, they always say that research is really me search, right? So, yeah, so I first got the idea of writing this book when I was a young wife and I was really wrestling with How do I honor God in my marriage? I was in the middle of finishing my doctoral degree in psychology. I had been a Christian since I could remember my husband was a new believer. He was the laid back, fun loving guy. I was the driven, goal oriented person. And I would read the Bible and be like, God, what does it mean for me to trust my husband's leadership when I feel like I'm more equipped to lead than he is? And I really struggled with the Lord on that and then realized as I was counseling other couples and women, that that was a common theme that women didn't really know what to do with their strength with her influence, with the power that they have in marriage. And some of them would just kind of say nothing and bury their power and be weak. And that's not God's design. But others, probably more of us would just use our influence to kind of take over or be manipulative in marriage, and our husbands don't thrive in that situation. So that's really kind of how I was wrestling through that and began teaching that and learning it on my own journey and just sharing with other women.

**Jill Savage**

Yeah. So the title is finding the hero in your husband. But I think that you changed the subtitle this time.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

I did. Yeah.

**Jill Savage**

OK, and what's the new subtitle?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Embracing Your Power in Marriage.

**Jill Savage**

Yes, yes. And you know, if there is a change that has happened in the last ten years in our marriage, it has been this journey for me. Oh, and when I saw the new subtitle of your book, when I saw and I read your book a long time ago, the original a long time ago. But when I saw the subtitle, it really spoke to me because of my own personal journey and recognizing that God did not want to take my strength. I'm a strong woman, and God did not want to take my strength away, but he wanted me to steward it differently than I was stewarding it in our marriage. And I was doing a lot of damage with my strength. And I really had to learn how to use it for good in my marriage. And so when I saw this and I saw that subtitle and in the coaching that Mark and I do, we see this all the time as well. In fact, I think it's growing. I think it's growing.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

I agree with you.

**Jill Savage**

Yeah. Why do you why do you think it's growing?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Well, I think if we look even a couple of decades ago, there was a sense that men had a stronger compass or a stronger sense of self where the average man would be like, "Hey, I'm here too". You know? We live in a culture that has been elevating the power of women and the voice of women and at the same time really denigrating any kind of masculine strength. And there's reasons for that. We could talk about like toxic masculinity and the MeToo movement and some of the abuses that have happened. But the pendulum is swinging to where the average sitcom or commercial, it's just normal to bash men. You know, you think about just a comment that a wife might make when somebody asked her how many kids you have and she'll say, I have, I have three kids, not including my husband or, you know, like, imagine a man saying that about his wife. You know, I have I have four kids, including my wife, how taken aback we'd be by that. But we've kind of adopted this attitude that it's OK to trash men. And so I don't think men have a sense of even setting boundaries, healthy boundaries within interpersonal relationship. And my husband and I have learned to do this like he's great at saying, Hey, you know, when you said this the other day like that, really that really, I didn't like that, that offended me. And I'm like, Oh, I'm sorry. Like, I didn't mean to say it that way. Or when you interrupted me when I was talking to the kids, like I felt disrespected. And I think a lot of men don't know how to give voice to that. And women are sensitive to it. So it's just kind of a snowball effect.

**Jill Savage**

Yeah. Or we don't receive it well. So then we make it unsafe for our husbands to say it.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yeah, that's true.

**Jill Savage**

I think I think that dynamic can play out as well.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yeah. It's almost like and I've heard women say this, like, why are men so sensitive? Like, why do we have to be so careful with our words? Which is kind of ironic because men have been saying for centuries, why are women so sensitive? But you know, God has made us sensitive in interpersonal relationships, particularly within the intimacy of marriage. And so it's very easy to wound each other without realizing we're doing that.

**Jill Savage**

Mm hmm. Yes. And boy, God has a lot to say about our words and the power of our words. And we're often very careless with them or even the words might not be inappropriate, but the tone is. You know, one of the big changes I've had to make is recognizing how often I emasculated my husband with my tone. Just my tone of voice would indicate that, you know, would send a message that he was stupid or that, you know, I would just degrade him in some way with my tone of voice.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

And it can even be nonverbals. It can be rolling your eyes or turning your back. Or, you know, like, I'm not even going to give you the time of day. So there's lots of ways we could do that.

**Jill Savage**

Yes. Yes, I agree. So you have a chapter in the book that's called a wife's greatest challenge. What do you feel like a wife's greatest challenge is?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Well, it's summarized this way. I want my husband to lead, but I wanted him to lead the way I want him to lead.

**Jill Savage**

And as Dr. Phil would say to most of us, and how's that working for you?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yes, exactly. And when I say that to men, they're like, "Yes!" You know? My wife is like, why don't you lead more? And as soon as they step into it, she's telling me everything I'm doing wrong and how I need to do it her way, which is really us leading. And then we get frustrated that he doesn't step into that gap. So that's the greatest dilemma is we want we want him to take steps. We want him to show initiative. But it also triggers in us fear, control, I do it better, sort of that pride. Yeah, I mean it just, you know, it dawned on me one day, I want my kids to have two moms , not a mom and a dad, because I keep trying to tell my husband to parent the way I do instead of being like, "You know what? He's just different." And I have to give him room and actually realize that that's a great thing for my kids to have two different parents and with two different perspectives and genders . And that's all a good thing.

**Jill Savage**

Yes, yes. But we keep trying to make them into something other than who God made them. Oh, I totally see that. You know, the dynamic that we had in our marriage and we see this in a lot of marriage. Mark and I now call the strong woman silent man cycle. And that's that's what played out for us. So I was a strong woman, and on the rare occasion, Mark would, you know, speak up, I would often kind of put him in his place or disagree or tell him that wasn't a good idea. And that was how I was misusing my strength. It was how I was emasculating him. And what often happens that we've seen is, you know, the man only handles that for so long and then he shuts down. But what happens is he becomes internally seething and simmering and grows resentful in the relationship. Do you see that?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Oh, for sure. And then I think the woman also is growing resentful because the more he shuts down, the more he's withdrawing. He's not interacting with her. He's not sharing in decision making. And so she becomes resentful. So absolutely. And as I know you share in your story, you know, that can come out in all kinds of behaviors that are dysfunctional, but they start somewhere. And a lot of times, it does start in these dynamics that we often don't know how to put words to.

**Jill Savage**

Yes, yes. And so I think that's why this conversation is so important, because if we don't find, if we don't start to see the dynamics that are playing out and our role in it, then it really will just continue. And the gap between us, the intimacy gap in the marriage relationship will only widen. And so I know for me, I had to learn how to use my voice and my power in a more appropriate way. And I started that journey before Mark started his journey of learning to use his voice and speaking up and finding his power in a different way. So we can start to change the dynamics if just one of us begins to change.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Oh yeah, that's usually how it happens, Jill. It's very rare that both of them have like an aha moment that can happen, like at a marriage intensive or something like that. But usually it's one person God really getting a hold of your heart and showing you, Hey, I'm playing into some unhealthy things in my marriage. And I want to be different. And a lot of women will get discouraged because they're like, why do I always have to be the one to start? And it is true that it seems like a lot of marriages. Women are the ones who are reading the books, who are going to the conferences, and they feel like they're working harder at their marriage. We're just more generally geared towards building intimacy, which makes us more interested in it. But some of it is realizing that you can work really hard at your marriage, but not be working wisely. And that's really the heart of this book is teaching women how to understand their power and how to work hard at their marriage in a way that actually is going to yield fruit in just building intimacy in their marriage.

**Jill Savage**

Yes. Yes. And I would say that, well, of course, I started paying attention to this in the middle of our marriage crisis, which lasted a year. But it was actually the dynamics of me changing how I used my power in our marriage. That ultimately was an important part of Mark. It was an important part of returning hope to Mark because he had become very hopeless that things could ever be different. And so when I actually began to bring a different me to the relationship and I began to interact differently and use my power differently, it was, it actually instilled hope in him.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

So what did that practically look like? I know you're supposed to be interviewing me, but I'd love for you to put flesh on that.

**Jill Savage**

Well, that's funny, because I was going to ask you the same question about: "Let's talk about what power looks like in marriage". Yeah. What did it look like for me? I started using my voice and my my power to lift him up and to talk about who he was instead of who he wasn't. So I stopped the critical spirit and I stopped the critical words. And that was hard because I mean, for four months of that, we were separated. So there was a lot to be critical about at that moment. And he had left and I hadn't, you know, and there was infidelity involved. So there was a lot to be critical about. But I stopped using it for criticism and I started using it to lift him up. I, you know, I remember when I was growing up, my parents would say they would say, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." Well, I started applying that, you know? But the second thing and I will never forget this, Julie, is I stopped telling him what to do. And one day that we were separated, he had not made a U-turn. He had not committed to our marriage, but we were having a conversation and somehow he came back and he asked me about, like, what would something look like like if this were to happen? What would this look like? And the old me would have said, well, this is what it would look like and you would do this and I would do this and blah blah blah blah. But that day I just stopped and I was really weighing my words out. I was spending a lot of time saying, Lord, what do you want me to say? How do you want me to respond? So I was like measuring my words a lot. And when I finally answered, there was there was quite a bit of silence there. And when I finally answered, I said, "Mark, I'm not going to tell you what to do because I believe that you and God can figure it out." And he told me later, that was the most powerful thing I'd ever said to him in his whole life.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

You really empowered him and you really believed in him. And in God's power, in his life. That's a great example.

**Jill Savage**

So talk about practically what it looks like because really finding the hero in your husband is about the power of women. And so what does that power look like and where does it come from, Julie?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yeah. Well, we have to understand that there's the power of women in general, but this is specifically geared towards the power that women have in marriage, an intimate relationship. Mm-Hmm. And power always comes from what the other person needs. And so, Jill, let's say I have an illness and it's a really rare illness and you have the antibodies. You're the only one that has the cure. You can ask for anything. And I would give it to you pretty much because you have power, because you have something that I need and you exclusively have that. And so God has designed intimate relationships, particularly marriage, so that the husband has needs that really only the wife was designed to meet and the wife has needs that only the husband was designed to meet. And so this gives them power. And this is where relationships just go haywire in the early years because we don't know how to put words to those needs. We just know we don't feel safe. So when we look at a woman's powered marriage, we have to look at what does the husband need? What has God given men in terms of their vulnerabilities and their needs that I'm supposed to, as a wife, be the provision for? And so one of the critical ones, and this is something that we don't like to talk about today, is this word respect that husbands will always tell you that they want respect more than they want love. And we want to argue with them and say, you know, that's crazy, but it's what they say. And so we have to understand that husbands need for respect really gets into the fact that men battle a fear of incompetence and that they're always kind of walking this tightrope of Am I the guy? Am I going to come through? Or am I going to fail? And we can see this in the stories that men like, like the superhero stories, even the drama of sports. Am I going to be the guy that hits the home run and wins the game for the team? Or am I going to be the guy that strikes out? And so it's really understanding that every day your husband wakes up with kind of an unconscious question of: "Do you believe in me?" Like, You have every reason to not believe in me? You know my weaknesses, you've seen me fail. But do you still believe in me? And so when God tells a wife to respect her husband, what he's really saying is be careful with your power, because if you don't speak life into your husband, he really cannot be the man that God created him to be. And so, so that's the first area that is so important for women to understand, and it's probably the most important area.

**Jill Savage**

Well, and ultimately, the story I shared with you, I communicated to him, I believe in you. When I said, I'm not going to tell you what to do, I believe you and God can figure that out. So yeah, you really see how. And he I mean, to this day, he tells me that is probably the most powerful thing you've ever said to me in my marriage, in our marriage.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

And then you've got to think about all the ways we subtly say, I don't believe in you. And that's where we get convicted is when we second guess or we just take over or we become manipulative, or we constantly remind our husbands of the ways that they fail or that we do things better. So it's that constant chipping away that really can deteriorate trust in a relationship.

**Jill Savage**

Well, and it's sometimes even in the tiniest things like, you know, we get ready to go out to dinner and we say, you know, "You pick the place tonight. You pick the restaurant." And then he says, "OK, all right, I'm in the mood for Mexican, let's totally do Mexican." And then you're like, "Oh, we can't do Mexican, it's entirely too many calories." And right there that little interaction, which we most of us would say, Oh, we're just having dialog and we're just. But you threw the ball to him and then you took the ball away. Sometimes it's just the tiniest things. But each of those start to chip away and you keep taking the power back, right?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yeah, yeah. I share a story in the book that was really an aha moment for me. This is years ago when we lived in Colorado and we went skiing with our three boys. And I was, I'm the only skier, the boys and Mike snowboard. So we got to the top of this beautiful mountain in Colorado. And Mike said, "Hey, you choose the run." I'm like, "Are you sure?" He's like, "Yeah, just choose a blue run." So I chose one and it had all this, these moguls. Well, when you're skiing, moguls are not that hard, but when you're snowboarding, they're really hard to navigate. And of course, I didn't know it had moguls, so I just picked one. And then we got to the bottom of the hill, and Mike was like, "Why did you choose that it had all these moguls? You know how many times we fell?" And I was like. "But you asked me to choose like I didn't want to choose. So you choose from now on", you know? And as soon as I said the words, I thought, Man, this is probably how my husband feels a lot where, you know, I say, Hey, you know, would you step in and discipline the kids or what do you think about this? And as soon as he steps up, I'm like, No, no, not that way. And you get to the point where it's like, Why did you even ask me?

**Jill Savage**

Yes. Oh, my goodness, I totally see that and how unique that you saw it from the other side, you were on the receiving end.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

It wasn't fun.

**Jill Savage**

I understand.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

I mean, I get why, why guys just sit back because there's no risk. If it's like hey, you know, you make the decision. And if it doesn't go well, you can't blame me. I understand it.

**Jill Savage**

Well, and if you put your hand out there enough times, then it gets slapped. And if times you stop putting your hand out there.

00:25:48:07 - 00:25:48:18

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Right.

**Jill Savage**

OK. So you said that one of the biggest you know, you just shared one of the biggest reasons or ways that women have power and in a marriage and that is what we just talked about, what is a second way that we have power?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

So yeah, that first way is he need your respect or he needs you to believe them. The second one is sometimes it feels like a competing need, but it's says he needs your help. And when we look at the scripture and we see that God created man, he said, man's not good alone. I need to make a helper. And we don't like that term either, because it seems derogatory. But really, the Hebrew word for helper is the word ESER, which is the same word that the scripture uses to describe the help of the Holy Spirit. So, God creates woman as this compliment as this helper. And really, the way to think about it is your husband can't be the man God calls him to be in marriage and family without you, without your perspective, without your insight, without your accountability. And so people that only talk about the respect need a wife would think, What does that mean that I always just have to say, you're the greatest and always encourage and never step in? And I'm like, No, like, that's not the biblical teaching at all. And that's not healthy. You're also bringing power in that your husband needs to rely on your insight, needs to rely on you as a teammate who can confront you and set boundaries when needed. And so he desperately needs you to be that trusted teammate. And Jill, I think most of us as women, we either are really good at the helping part and not good at the respecting part or are really good at the respecting part and not good at the helping part. And it's kind of like two wings of an airplane. It has to be balanced in order for you really to be building intimacy in your marriage.

**Jill Savage**

Mm-Hmm. Yeah, I can see that. So that's almost like the power of perspective. Like, he needs your perspective. He needs that help.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

And there's so many different applications of that, you know, even just think about family life. The mom is often the switchboard communicating between the husband and the kids. And so like, you probably do this, too. But I'm constantly like explaining my husband to my kids, my kids, to my husband and and nurturing that relationship through some of the insights that I bring. And even as a woman. But it's also accountability, and this is so key. You know, it seems like a lot of people will feel like once you get married, you're just husband and wife, but you're also friends, your brother and sister. If you're both Christians, your brother and sister in Christ, which means that all the verses that apply to those relationships also apply to marriage. And so it's appropriate for us to confront each other and love faithful are the wounds of our friend. And so women that will say, Oh, out of the spirit of respect, I'm not going to confront my husband's pornography use or I'm not going to confront this attitude I see. That's not biblical. And so really understanding that we build trust through that respect. But then God also calls us, when appropriate, to use our power in ways that really help our husbands grow.

**Jill Savage**

Yes. Yes. And I love that. I think that it's often not fully understood. The problem is sometimes how we do the accountability.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yes. Yeah.

**Jill Savage**

Because that's when we leave out the respect, right?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Right, right. And so like, I'll describe it, like it's like you're walking on a bridge and you can only walk as far as you built. And so when we respect our husbands, we're putting down planks to walk on. And so a woman that's been in a marriage where she hasn't at all respected her husband, he just feels like, man, she's always criticizing me. She doesn't believe in me. When she goes to try to confront, that's not going to be well received.

**Jill Savage**

Even if she does it well in that moment.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Right. Because he doesn't trust her. Yeah. But if you spent years building that relationship together, now when you say "Honey out of love, I need, we need to have a serious talk." He really cares about what you're saying, and he knows that you're not doing it to tear him down. He knows you're you're speaking it because you love him and you really want to get help.

**Jill Savage**

Yes. Yes. That makes so much sense. Yeah. So women have power in marriage. Do men have power in marriage?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yes, of course they do. Women have needs. They give men power. So, so while a man is waking up every day saying, Do you believe in me? A woman is waking up every day saying, Do you still love me? And it's just how God's wired us. I think in our society wanting to discount gender, but it's wired in us. And so men have power in how attentive they are to their wives. Are they nurturing her? And do they let her know like, I care about you, I see you. I like listening to you. It can be like if even if you play the five love languages, you know, is it gifts or acts of service? What really makes your feel seen and loved?

**Jill Savage**

Yes.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

And that's why infidelities or pornography use are so wounding to a woman because those activities say, I choose somebody else, which is just devastating to a woman. So that would be one area of power. Another area of power. And this is one that we can talk about because it's not very culturally relevant, not relevant, but accepted is that I really feel like within intimate relationships, women want to be protected that we need to be protected, that women are more physically vulnerable, they're more emotionally vulnerable. You even think about the domestic violence and sexual violence that's perpetrated against women. It's way, way, way more than men.

**Jill Savage**

Yes.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

So God has made women with vulnerability. Peter would say. It's like, in some ways, more fragile vessel. And so we need to feel like our husband is going to step into that gap and protect us spiritually, protect us financially, protect us emotionally. So those would be the areas that give husbands power.

**Jill Savage**

Mm hmm. You just gave me some interesting insight. So at night, when we get ready to go to bed, I am often the one who locks the doors and I've asked my husband to do it. But oftentimes he misses one. And that protection piece is so important to me. And then I don't understand why it bothers me so much. Yeah, interesting. I think we'll have a conversation about that.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

All right. That's good.

**Jill Savage**

It'll be a respectful conversation, one where I share something that I've come to understand about myself.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Good. You know, even if you think about chivalry, which again, isn't a very popular in our day, but that feeling of a man opening in the door for a woman. My husband's so great at this, when we walk on a sidewalk, he'll always make me walk on the inside because he's like, I want them to hit me first. You know, or I'm a bigger target. And it's a small thing, but it's showing that he's always looking to protect me.

**Jill Savage**

Yes.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

And that's romantic. It's it's written in our hearts. And so I think that gives men a lot of power that they they might not know how to use because at the same time, we're saying, but I want to be my own person like I'm independent, I don't need you. And so we send we send men mixed messages often.

**Jill Savage**

Yes, yes, I agree. And I think that's also where, you know, because we do see ourselves as strong women. I don't need that. But at the same time, we're just missing out on the unique dynamics between a man and a woman. So we can still have the need to be protected and still be strong women.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Right for sure. Yeah, yeah. And it's a it's a dance. And there are some areas in marriage where it's like, No, I want to do this myself or hey I don't need your help here. But there has to be areas of marriage where we allow ourselves to be weak. And I've met so many women and I've experienced this early in marriage where I didn't feel like it was OK to be weak and just melt into the strength of my husband. And actually, if you're never weak, then there's never a need for a hero. And so that's a very important part of the marriage dynamic.

**Jill Savage**

That's very true. Well, and even learning, you know, one of the things that we've certainly found in our relationship, but we see it in others is that we don't know how to comfort one another. Many of us grew up in a buck up mindset where we learned to not need to be comforted because it wasn't there. And so sometimes husbands need to comfort wives. Wives need to comfort husbands. Sometimes we need to ask for comfort from each other. You know, I need a hug. It's been a hard day. I need a hug. But instead, we seek comfort from food or alcohol or pornography. Other things that we turn to because there weren't people to comfort us. And so I think a lot of times in marriage, that's a soft side that both of us need to bring . And that's a vulnerability that's a little scary for most of us,

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

For sure. And it's scary for, I think, even the spouse that's being asked to comfort like, what does that look like? How do I do that right? Especially, as you said, if you haven't grown up with a model for what that's like?

**Jill Savage**

Mm hmm. Yeah. So you have a chapter in the book, it's on conflict, and I want to talk about that because conflict is such a big part and the name of the chapter is your last fight. So talk about that and talk about the difference between what's healthy conflict and what's fighting.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yeah, I think most of us would at first glance think that conflict and fight are the same thing. And so there are people that would just say, I hate conflict and I'll do anything to avoid conflict. But some of what I've learned through even like the research of Dr. John Gottman, who's a very well-known marriage expert, is that conflict in marriages is inevitable. It's right. It's part of any relationship. And it's not because you're sinful or not, because you're wrong. It's because you're two different people. And conflict isn't the same thing as a fight. So conflict is, as you shared the example earlier, your husband wants Mexican food. You want to get a salad. OK, so that's a conflict. You have hundreds of those during the day. You get used to them. Like, I don't know about you, but I like the house. Warm my husband likes it cold. My husband likes to, like, see if he can get somewhere just on time, you know, and leave late. I like I feel like I'm late if I'm five minutes early, it's just those are inborn differences that we will have conflict about until we die. And we have different parenting styles. We have a different approach to our relationship with God. So all of those are conflict. But what we don't realize is that when we don't know how to live with conflict and address it in a respectful way, we will fight. So conflict is us against a problem navigating difference. A fight is now it's me against you. My way is right, your way is wrong. You're not hearing me. You're triggering me because of how you're interacting with me. And now our relationship starts feeling unsafe. And one thing I've learned within the last year so that I found fascinating when we get triggered into fighting and it feels like my husband's coming after me or he's not listening to me. I actually start reacting from a different part of my brain, so I'm reacting from my prefrontal cortex. Then it's more fight or flight. And we've all had fights where we're like, Man, I wish I could say those words differently, or we did so much damage in ten minutes. What happened? I didn't want to say what I did, but you actually get into a survival mode where you're not able to have empathy for your spouse. You're not able to even be rational or logical. So that chapter's about learning to recognize conflict and not see conflict as the enemy, but learning to navigate it in a way that doesn't trigger fighting. Because yes, you're always going to have conflict, but you literally never have to fight again. If you can figure out how to navigate conflict, well,

**Jill Savage**

Because this is also when our strength is often misused.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Right? Exactly. Because when we feel vulnerable now, we're going to use our power to be the safe one and to make him feel vulnerable.

**Jill Savage**

Right? So what are some practical ways, just a few just to give us some ideas of some changes that we can make when we're dealing with conflict?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yeah, a few practical ones. first of all, most conflicts should not and don't need to be solved in the moment. And so that's one of the biggest mistakes we make. And people even quote Ephesians. And let's say the Bible says, don't let the Sun go down in your anger. Therefore, it can be two in the morning and we're furious at each other, but we're not going to sleep until we hash this out. That's terrible advice. What Paul is actually saying there is don't let there be any anger between you and God before you go to bed, like confess your sin. It doesn't mean resolve every disagreement in your relationship and even understanding that if I wait and I spent some time praying and I get some sleep, I'm actually going to be better at understanding my husband, hearing him, articulating my perspective than if I try to have a conversation right when I'm feeling it. That would. That would be the first one. The second one, I'll just name one more. That I think is so critical is and this again comes from Dr. John Gottman, but get used to and be good at having a repair. And he calls these things repairs. But they're basically ways that you stop the escalation of a conflict. So you're talking about something that's heated, you're talking about, do the kids get cell phones and you have one opinion your husband has another and it started out as a good discussion, but now you're getting defensive. And now he's getting defensive. So what are you going to do to stop that before it? Snowballs into a fight, and there are a number of things you can do. You can say something like, Hey, let's remember, we're on the same team. Like, I didn't wake up this morning wanting to have an argument with you or fight with you like, I love you. So right there, that's a reset. It can be appropriate humor that you just, you know, like kind of defuse the situation. It can even be like, Hey, this is getting a little tense. Let's just take ten minutes, get a cup of coffee, or let's stop and pray together. You know, I think one thing Mike and I have learned is even to recognize that the enemy would really love to divide us. And their spiritual warfare here. So let's pray. And those kinds of things really can help you then reset and say, How do we address this important issue in a way where we're really on the same team?

**Jill Savage**

Yes, yes. Boy, I can see that in so many ways because, you know, spiritual warfare is real. The enemy comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. And oftentimes, when we start fighting rather than navigate conflict, when we start fighting, it's that's really when the enemy is, is doing what he does best and that's trying to destroy and kill and steal from us and divide us.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yes. Yeah, absolutely. He's against unity and certainly against unity in your marriage.

**Jill Savage**

Yeah. Yeah. OK, now before we bring this to a close, we can't have a conversation about marriage with you unless we talk about sex. It is your topic. Your specialty, right?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yes, it is.

**Jill Savage**

So let's talk about this whole thing from the power perspective and the conflict perspective and sex. And you know, why is and sex is often a point of conflict?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Why is sex such a point of conflict in marriage? Well, for a few reasons, first of all, it is an exclusive need. I mean, I use that word lightly. But if you have sexual desire, God says the only appropriate outlet for that or application to that is your spouse.

**Jill Savage**

Mm-Hmm.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

And so whether you're the one with the higher desire and you're saying, Wow, I'm not getting my desires met like I hoped they would be or the spouse saying, why do I always feel like I have to have this duty? You know, like, I'm not enjoying this because it's a demand that that's going to create conflict and that in and of itself is enough conflict for couples to navigate. But then you add to it that sex represents so such deep aspects of who we are like sex represents and taps into our shame, our longings, our feelings of being loved, our identity. And so when we have conflict around sex or just even different desires, for example, we're triggering all this stuff that is really not even about sex, but sex represents it. So it can represent your masculinity, your femininity. It can represent the shame from your past that you never dealt with. So rejection feels like. Yes, I'm totally unlovable. And so most couples are trying to navigate this conflict or conversation without any awareness or acknowledgment of the things that are being awakened, even as they try to talk about.

**Jill Savage**

Yes, yes, oh my goodness, I can see that, you know, when we do marriage intensives, one of the things that we do, we put up these great big post-its and we have one for the husband and one for the wife. And as we talk throughout the weekend, we begin to identify their messages like they're the place that they have believed something about themselves or about the world or about. And then as we're navigating the places, they get stuck. It almost always goes back to one of those messages in and we can connect the dots back. And boy, that rejection message is really big. I think that one is a big one that we often see, and I think that plays out in sex a lot.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Oh, for sure. It's the message. I'm not good enough. I'll never be enough. I'm not lovable. I'll be forever tainted because of what I did or because of what happened to me. And so you're really talking about like the strongholds that the enemy can have in our life are so often represented in the sexual area. And so couples enter into marriage and they think, Oh, this will be a fun part of marriage and they get into this and they're like, Wow, like, we're in the deep end and we don't know how to swim.

**Jill Savage**

Yes, yes. So if somebody is having a struggle with the sexual intimacy part, what would be a some things for them to consider or to look at?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yeah. Well, first of all, I really think that every couple struggles with this. So it's not if it's we all do. And I think that's important to say because I think in the past, we've talked about sexual issues as if most people are healthy and thriving. But there are few people that are struggling or couples that are are really experiencing brokenness. And I've really learned, like, we all have brokenness in this area. We all have ways that the enemy or the world has really tainted our understanding of sexuality. So my first thing would be just the challenge, and it's a weird question for some people. But have you ever invited God into your sex life? And people are like, what does that mean? He's everywhere. So whether you like it or not, it's not like he leaves the room.

**Jill Savage**

It was his idea in the first place.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

It was. But even the simple step of praying together as a couple about your sex life acknowledging God's presence, asking for his help is, can be can really be a game changer.

**Jill Savage**

Yeah, even if your spouse isn't a believer, even you praying before.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yes. Yeah. And not only before, but after, even during. God help me to focus on what I need to focus here on here, Lord. Take away these thoughts and just bless our time together. Another piece of that is getting God's perspective about sex because we've learned about sex in such warped ways. Most people have learned about it from a combination of kind of the pornographic messages of our culture that sex is about what you can get and you deserve pleasure all the time. And that's mixed in with sort of legalistic church messages of sex is somehow shameful and dirty and don't enjoy it too much. And so you're trying to navigate sexual problems without even knowing what is a healthy sex life supposed to look like. And so that's as you know, Jill, what we do at our ministry a lot is just helping people get a biblical perspective of why God created sex and how to build healthy sexual intimacy.

**Jill Savage**

Yes, yes, I. And that is so very important for those of you that are listening and tuning in. I do encourage you to check out authentic intimacy and the Java with Julie podcast. Julie, what would be a number one? I mean, obviously, I want to encourage those listening to read finding the hero in your husband. But if that sexual intimacy piece is a place where you know that you need to do some reset in your head, in your heart, what would be a resource you would recommend?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yeah. Well, I just finished writing a book that comes out in June that is really specifically for this. It's called God sex in your marriage. But if you're looking for something before that. A book I wrote called Rethinking Sexuality can be a good start. And there's also so many great resources out there. Dr. Doug Rosenow's a celebration of sex is a great handbook. Cliff and Joyce Penner have written so many great resources as well. And then if you're not a book reader, we've got webinar series, podcast series blogs, at our website that might be just a good way to start. that conversation.

**Jill Savage**

Yeah, and that's authentic intimacy dot com.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Right.

**Jill Savage**

And I also have a book called Is There Really Sex After Kids. We'll put a link to that in the show notes as well, so that would be another option if that's a next step. So, Julie, this has been such a great conversation. Thank you for taking the time and and just helping us to better understand what it takes to find the hero in her husband. If somebody was wanting to take a first practical step, like they're realizing that I, I haven't seen that hero, I have squashed the hero. I don't even know where to start. What would be one first step for somebody that says, I've got to get to the place where I find the hero in my husband?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Yeah, a great first step is just confession. You know, God always provides the opportunity for us to start over again, which is a great thing. And I've had to do this in my marriage where I just confessed to the Lord. You know, I haven't done this well and I've done a lot of damage and then confessed to my husband like I, I have not been the kind of wife I want to be. And would you just please have grace for me because it's my desire to learn to be the kind of wife that that really loves you and believes in you and is building into an intimate relationship with you. So that would be a great first step.

**Jill Savage**

I love that. Would you be willing to close in prayer and just pray for those that are listening and that want to move the needle in their marriage in this area?

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

I would. Yeah, thanks. Lord, we just do thank you that you always offer us not only a chance to start over, but you also give us the wisdom through your Holy Spirit and through your word to know how to do that. And I just pray for the men and women that are tuning in right now and hearing these words that you would just provide encouragement and courage. Yes, it takes courage, God to confess our sins to you, and it takes even more courage to confess are sins to one another.

**Jill Savage**

Mm-Hmm.

**Dr. Julie Slattery**

Thank you that you promise that you bring healing. And I just thank you for Jill and Mark and for their story that demonstrates that and for the coaching and encouragement that they are to so many couples. And Lord we just pray for restored relationships and restored marriages for your glory in Jesus name. Amen.

**Jill Savage**

Amen.