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Stinkin' Thinkin'

Guest: Sheila Wray Gregoire
From the series: Nine Thoughts That Can Change Your Marriage (Day 1 of 2)
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Bob: So how's your marriage? Well, however you answer that question may have more to do with how you're thinking about your marriage than how your marriage actually is. I mean, the Bible says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." Here's Sheila Gregoire.

Sheila: When we start taking control of our thoughts—taking every thought captive—like Paul says in 2 Corinthians, and saying, "Okay, I'm going to look at this the way that God looks at it instead of just focusing on my own hurts," *then* we can start doing something. But when we see ourselves as always victims, we're never going to get anywhere.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. Sometimes the first step you need to take for your marriage to get better is for you to change the way you think about your marriage. We're going to talk about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. I don't think we fully appreciate, regularly, how much what we think affects everything about our lives. I'm thinking back to—you remember Zig—[imitating Zig]—Zig Ziglar, who used to talk like this. [Laughter] Zig with the big southern accent. He'd smiiiiiiile, and he'd talk about "You've got stinkin' thinkin'!"

You remember that?

Dennis: I do! [Laughter]

Bob: [imitating Zig] "You need a check-up from the neck up." [Laughter] Those were Zig's big things that he'd talk about. But really, how we think—well, the Bible says it this way—it says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he."

Dennis: And that's what our guest on *FamilyLife Today* also thinks, Bob. Sheila Gregoire joins us on *FamilyLife Today*. Sheila, welcome to the broadcast.

Sheila: Thank you! It's great to be here.

Dennis: She is from the north side of the border—Canada.

Sheila: That's right, so when you hear me say, "Eh," you know why. [Laughter]

Dennis: That's exactly right! And if you hear us say, "Y'all,"—yes! You've been down here a bunch, so you know how to interpret all of us.

She's written a book—back to the thinking theme that you pointed out, Bob—*Nine Thoughts that Can Change Your Marriage*. She and her husband Keith have two daughters. Sheila has written a number of books, including *The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex and Love*. Is it the rest of the words, too? [Laughter] *To Honor—Love, Honor, and Vacuum?* [Laughter]

Sheila: Yes, yes—*To Love, Honor, and Vacuum* was my first one and *The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex* is the big one.

Dennis: Oh!

Bob: And that's your blog, too. A lot of people follow you on To Love, Honor and Vacuum—the blog, right?

Sheila: They do, yes.

Dennis: You [Sheila] taught me something I didn't know. Barbara and I like to grow flowers. In fact, right now, our front yard is just *exploding* in color because of my wife's talent. Yours truly is labor, okay? [Laughter]

Bob: She's talented, and you do the grunt work? I get it! [Laughter]

Sheila: That's a good partnership there!

Dennis: She's never met a plant she didn't like to move at least two or three times. [Laughter] I mean, it's just the way—it's just the way it is.

Sheila, you taught me something in your book. I didn't know that there was a sex flower.

Sheila: [Laughing] Yes, indeed! There are!

Dennis: That has to do with your story of where you and Keith came from.

Sheila: That's right! When we first got married, I felt like sex was just the biggest rip-off that God had ever made because it hurt, it wasn't that comfortable, it was awkward, and he wanted it *ALL* the time! I thought, "What is wrong with my husband?" I thought sex was the *whole* problem in our marriage. I remember—the sex flower thing—one night, we did make love.

He had a good time, and the next day he brought me flowers, and I was really ticked off! I thought to myself, “Okay, so you’re just giving me sex flowers. You’re giving me flowers because I gave you what you want. So, now, you’re going to try to reinforce this like, ‘Okay, if I’m nice to her after she has sex, then maybe she’ll have sex more.’” I was—

Dennis: Do you realize how confusing that is to us, as men?

Sheila: Well, I know, because it *finally* occurred to me—it finally occurred to me, “Now hold on a second! The reason he bought me flowers was because we made love and now he feels closer to me, and he just wants to reach out.” When I finally *got that*, it changed everything.

Bob: So, what you were thinking about flowers, about your husband, about his motives—

Dennis: Flowers were stinkin’ thinkin’. [Laughter]

Sheila: They were! Yes, and I think it’s not just that. It’s also what I was thinking about God, because, for the first two years of my marriage, I made it my mission in life to turn my husband off, because I thought, “If I can just make sure he never wants it, then we can go back to having this great relationship that we had before we were married!” We were best friends; we got along great, and so sex was the whole problem!

Dennis: Sheila, have you heard of gravity? [Laughter]

Sheila: You can’t reverse it? [Laughter] It’s a law? [Laughter]

Dennis: It’s a law of the universe!

Sheila: I tried! I wasn’t really successful! Can you believe that, Dennis?

Dennis: That’s back to gravity again.

Sheila: I know! Then finally, one day, it occurred to me: you know, I had been praying to God to change my husband and to make my husband love me just for who I am and not what I can do for him. I was pouring out my heart to God, because it says that God is close to the brokenhearted. I was brokenhearted, so God must understand my pain.

Then, one day, God gave me this thought: He said, “Sheila, if I made sex and if I made sex to be really, really good, and sex isn’t good for you, maybe the problem isn’t Keith; maybe the problem is just sex. If I made it to be wonderful, why would you want to miss out on that?” I thought, “Oh, my goodness, yes! Why would I want to miss out on that?”

So, we turned it into the best research project we've ever done in our marriage, trying to figure it out and make it great! [Laughter]

But it started with me realizing, "I need to stop seeing *myself* as this broken-hearted person that my husband is hurting and start saying, 'Okay, *wait*—if God made marriage and sex to be *great*, then why would I settle for anything less?'"

Dennis: So I have to go back to the beginning of your marriage and ask you, "Did you ever think—speaking of thinking—did you ever think about divorce?"

Sheila: No, I never thought about divorce, but I thought that probably I was going to be miserable for a long time. I think that sometimes we Christians do that—we say, "Oh, yes. I made that vow, and I'm staying in this marriage even if I have to make everyone around me miserable for the rest of my life. I'm not going anywhere!"

That's not really committing to staying, because I think if you're committing to staying, you've got to commit to make the marriage the best it can be. A lot of us are committing to not leaving, but that's not the same thing as committing to the marriage.

Bob: Sheila, I appreciate your candor in this whole subject. It shows up in your blog and in your books.

So I knew ahead of time that you're very transparent about all of this. I don't want to be asking inappropriate questions here, but you had to be going into marriage looking forward to intimacy, weren't you?

Sheila: I was! But you can never really know what it's going to be like. We were both virgins on our wedding night. I know that many Christians aren't. What I have found is, whether you are a virgin or not, sex changes so much once you are married.

We don't always know what it's going to be like. For me, I had physical issues. Like I said, it was awkward. I was going into my marriage with some trust issues and a lot of baggage. All of that impacted sex in a way that I could not have foreseen.

I think a lot of women, especially, get married *thinking* that it's all going to be fine, but we don't realize how *truly* intimate this is and how all of our baggage can impact sex. We don't understand even the physical aspects of it.

If you don't get to the root of it, which is that God *did* make it to be wonderful and it doesn't need to be like that, then I think a lot of us tend to distance ourselves from our spouses, because we're so hurt.

Dennis: Over the years, you've spoken to groups all over the United States and Canada. You've undoubtedly found you were not alone in some of your stinkin' thinkin',

as well as just the dark days of your marriage. You've found other women struggling as well.

Sheila: Absolutely! And it isn't necessarily just about sex. I think it's that thought that often just gets us *stuck*, which is, "I am miserable. God knows my heart, because God is close to the brokenhearted. He doesn't want me to be miserable, and He just *feels* my misery."

We go to God like, "Oh, you must know exactly how I feel." And yes, God knows how you feel, but God also knows how your husband feels. I think, too often, we picture God as being completely on *our* side. We don't realize, "God isn't on my side. He's not on my husband's side. God's on His *own* side."

When we always think of ourselves as, "Oh, I'm brokenhearted. I just need to pray, and God will fix my husband," we're in totally stinkin' thinkin', because we can never get out of that until we *stop* focusing on *us* and start looking at, "What is God trying to do in my marriage?"

Dennis: So, out of all this, you began to analyze how your own thinking was taking you in the wrong direction in your marriage. You turned that around and then kind of pulled back to the big picture and said, "There are nine issues; there are nine thoughts that women need to capture and grab hold of." You crafted this book, *Nine Thoughts*, to help women become better wives.

Sheila: Exactly! I think that is the key because, when we start taking control of our thoughts; taking every thought captive like Paul says in 2 Corinthians and saying, "Okay, I'm going to look at this the way God looks at it instead of just focusing on my own hurts," *then* we can start doing something. But when we see ourselves as always victims, we're never going to get anywhere.

Bob: And whatever the issue is, we all face disappointments in a marriage relationship. Husbands and wives; we disappoint one another.

Sheila: Yes.

Bob: We all have something less than the ideal; something less than what our expectations were. Maybe it's about communication. Maybe it's about what the house would look like, or who was going to do what in the house. There are all kinds of things that you carry into a marriage. When we disappoint one another, we do face a choice at that point to either say, "The problem here is outside of me," or "The problem here is inside of me." If you keep focusing on it being outside of you, you're probably focused on the wrong thing.

Sheila: Exactly! And sometimes in the church we make it *worse* because we tell women, "You know, if you're hurting, you just take it to Jesus. You just put it at the foot

of the cross and you leave it with Jesus.” It’s not that I don’t believe that—*I do*, but maybe God wants you to *do* something about it. Maybe God wants you to pray to strengthen yourself so that you can *do* something.

I think we often make women very passive, instead of saying, “Okay, honey! Look! God gave you all these gifts—the Spirit, God gave you your personality, God put you in this place—because He wants you to *do* something to make your marriage great.”

Bob: Was there a point where you came to Keith and you said, “I need to talk to you. I have been thinking wrongly about this. I have been—the issue’s been in my own heart and my own thinking. I want to do things differently.” Did you have that kind of conversation with him at some point?

Sheila: [Laughing] I think we’ve had that conversation at many points.

Bob: Many times? [Laughter]

Sheila: But yes, certainly, in the first few years, about sex we did. God was working in Keith’s heart at the same time. We both had to come to the point we were saying, “I love you for who you are,” and “I love you no matter what,” and “We’re going to get through this together,” and we did.

Even in the last few years, we’ve had a difficult couple of years, because my husband’s work schedule was so busy and mine was so busy that we just didn’t see each other a lot. Then you start growing apart just because of the drift; not that there was anything *wrong*, but sometimes you start rehashing old wounds and things like that. Again, we had to have that conversation, where I said, “I’m still bringing stuff up from 20 years ago, and I need to put it away.”

Bob: So let me make the issue generic. Whatever the gripe is—because there are people, who are listening right now, and they’re going, “We’re doing fine in this area, and fine in that area, but my gripe is this...”

If a woman came up to you and said, “Here’s my gripe about my marriage...” Again, it doesn’t matter what it is; if you’re going to counsel her on how to address that gripe, whatever it is, you’re not going to say, “Take it to the cross and leave it there.” Or maybe you will, but what are you going to add to that?

Sheila: I’m going to say, “Take it to God. See it the way God does, and then ask God what He wants you to do about it.” Sometimes, God just wants you to wait and pray and that’s fine, but sometimes God wants you to take action. Sometimes that action is about *yourself*, and sometimes that action is about talking to your husband; doing things differently; even bringing in a third party to talk or getting a mentor couple. Whatever it might be, but the thing is, you need to see it through God’s eyes *first*, and then ask God,

“Okay, what can I do?” Not, “What can my husband do?” Not, “What can someone else do?” but “What can *I* do in the here and now?”

Dennis: There is an enemy of marriage. He is trying to divide a husband and a wife and cause them to be isolated from one another.

Sheila: Yes.

Dennis: One of the ploys that he has is to create circumstances where one spouse gets angry at another. You use the sex flower [Laughter] as an illustration. He brought you flowers, and you got angry. It’s interesting—one of your next chapters in the book is “Don’t Let Your Husband Make You Angry.”

Sheila: Yes.

Dennis: “Live above your circumstances.” Unpack what you mean by that.

Sheila: Yes, what I said is, “My husband cannot tick me off,” because so often I think, “Oh! My husband does this, and I get so angry.”

But let me give you two scenarios. One night, your husband comes home 22 minutes late—okay? It doesn’t bother you at all; but five nights later, he’s 22 minutes late, and you have been standing at the door for the last—

Dennis: This is the wife of a pediatrician. [Laughter]

Sheila: Right. And you’ve been standing at the door for the last 17 minutes, looking for his car. You’ve been texting him, and you’ve been phoning him, and, “Where is that man?!” He did the exact same thing both nights, but only one night you got ticked off. Maybe it was because that night that you got ticked off, one kid needed to be at karate at 7:00, one kid needed to be at gymnastics at 7:05, you had homework you needed to get done, and you just had too much on your plate.

So the issue *wasn’t* that he was late; the issue is that *you* were overwhelmed, and then when he did something, it caused everything to come crashing down.

Quite often—in fact, I would say the *majority* of times that I get ticked off at my husband, it is not something big. It really isn’t. It’s just little things, and it’s that combination of—he does something at the same time as I’m being affected by not getting enough sleep last night, even being hormonal, being exhausted, being overwhelmed—and the *combination* causes me to get ticked off.

Bob: So do you have a process now, in your own thinking, where if you start to feel, “That really ticks me off!”—does that trigger for you, “What’s going on inside of me?” I mean, do you start to think that direction?

Sheila: Yes. I love the word “trigger,” because I actually use that in the book: “What are you triggers for getting ticked off?” I encourage women to say, “Okay, even keep a *diary* if you have to, but every time you got ticked off in the last week, ask yourself, ‘What was going on with *me* right at that minute?’” It’s amazing, when you start to do that, you can see patterns.

Dennis: So what are your top three triggers?

Sheila: For me, definitely being overwhelmed and busy. I think that eclipses everything else.

Dennis: So just the pressure of juggling a family and the demands of life coming at you.

Sheila: Yes. It’s stress from work; stress from all of that.

And then, I think, being tired is a big one. And, to be totally honest, at the age I’m getting to be, the hormones are just crazy. So I warn my husband, “Okay, there are certain days you’ve just got to just—we’ll get take out, we’ll watch a movie, we won’t talk. It’s just safer!”

Dennis: I understand that. I’m kind of glad those days are past right now. You mentioned number two, about being tired. I said to Barbara, “You know, I wish I had a \$10 bill for every time you’ve said, ‘I am just so tired.’”

Sheila: Yes, yes.

Dennis: Help a husband understand how he can minister to his wife around this.

Sheila: When your wife is tired, sitting down with her and saying, “Honey, I don’t want you to be like this. I want you to enjoy life. Can we take a look at everything that’s on your plate and figure out if maybe there are some things we could take off your plate? Maybe there are some things that I can do to help you.” Or, “Maybe there are some things we can do to work at getting to bed earlier,” because that is a huge thing!

Especially if you have children under the age of five, figuring out how to get a good bedtime routine—that is worth its weight in gold! So many people spend two-three hours trying to get their kids settled at night, and that’s wasted time. You need to figure out how to get kids settled easily. It can be done. It just takes some time.

Dennis: You and Keith, admittedly, married one another because you’re different. It’s interesting that the thing that attracts us to one another prior to marriage is our differences. After marriage, they can repel us. What is the number one—the biggest—difference between you and Keith? Now, for 25 years, you ought to be an expert on this.

Sheila: I'm spontaneous, and he likes to have everything planned. We bought an RV this year; we've been living a lot in the RV. I don't like making reservations, because what if we're some place we really like and we want to stay there an extra day? But he likes knowing where we're going to be each night. This year, he decided to do things my way and he didn't make the reservations. It was hard for him, but we had a great time!

There was only one night that we panicked, because we didn't have a place to stay!
[Laughter]

Bob: I wondered about the one night where you were going to get caught, because there's one of those coming for everybody!

Sheila: My daughter is—my daughter just got married. She married someone who is so *relaxed* and who's just always happy. My daughter is a type-A, very driven personality. One of the things that she loves about her husband is that he helps her to *relax*. I hope they stay that way—that it stays that it's a good thing.

I think it will, because they've talked about it a lot. I think that's the key—talking and identifying it *early*. It's not that he's wrong or that she's right; it's that we're different, and those differences are good.

Bob: See, we've had this conversation—Mary Ann and I have said to one another, "Differences aren't always wrong. Sometimes they're just different." And Mary Ann's quick to add, "Sometimes they're wrong!" And I say, "Okay! Sometimes they're wrong, but sometimes they're just different." [Laughter]

But here's the other thing—to take it a step beyond that and say, "Sometimes, those differences change the color from black and white to technicolor. Sometimes, those differences—"

Dennis: No question!

Bob: —"give you a better, healthier, more robust—it's a whole lot better to have differences than to have sameness."

Dennis: Well, you've heard me say it about Barbara, here on *FamilyLife Today*. You haven't, Sheila, but I have said to Barbara, "Wherever you go, you make things beautiful," because she is beautiful; but secondly, she's always designing.

The flowers in the front yard; she's designing rooms; she's constantly creating. She likes to move from disorder to order—to beauty. That is part of what attracts me most to her. She's brought a lot of beauty to my life, to your point, Bob.

Bob: She makes things beautiful, but she has you do the work to make those things beautiful. [Laughter]

Dennis: That's exactly right!

Sheila: I think that's interesting how much we change as we get married, but we change *together*. I know, when Keith and I got married, I've always liked exercise. I don't have a big craving for fatty foods; whereas, my husband once drank a whole glass of bacon grease on a dare. [Gasps and laughter]

Dennis: A pediatrician did that?

Sheila: Oh, he did! He has genes—like his genes would naturally make him about 80 pounds heavier than he is right now, but because he's married to me, he's kept smaller than he would have. Because I'm married to him, I now know the joys of real butter! So, I think that it all evens out, and it's a good thing. [Laughter]

Dennis: God made biscuits to be carriers of butter. [Laughter]

Bob: Well, here's the point we're starting with: most of the issues we're dealing with in a marriage are influenced by our thinking. Maybe that's the issue itself: how we're thinking about it. It's not what's actually going on, but it's our thinking on this issue.

Dennis: And if that's the case for you, as a wife or as a husband, this book would be a great read together, as a couple. I'm sure you've had some folks who both the husband and the wife have read this, and it has created some stimulating discussion.

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