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Building Up Your Man

Guest: Barbara Rainey
From the series: Letters to My Daughters (Day 1 of 2)
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Bob: See if you can spot where the challenge is here. You're a wife and a mom who wants things to go right. Marriage and family is messy, and your husband isn't perfect. You see how that can be a problem? Here's Barbara Rainey.

Barbara: One of the things that is true about us, as women—I had a conversation with my daughter just yesterday on the phone about this—is that it's so easy for us because of our emotional makeup to get very overwhelmed by the circumstances of life. So a woman who is married and is discouraged by her relationship with her husband—she can get so overwhelmed to the point where she just doesn't see clearly.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. What do you do, as a wife, when you get overwhelmed / when you're discouraged by all that's going on? How do you deal with that? We're going to talk about that today with Barbara Rainey. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. We're diving back into a rich field of ore today. I mean, there is some good stuff that we're going to be digging into.

Dennis: We have some pretty fair guests on *FamilyLife Today* from time to time.

Bob: We do; yes.

Dennis: Max Lucado, Tony Evans, Crawford Loritts, Mary Kassian, Nancy Leigh DeMoss Wolgemuth—a lot of, really, pretty fair country guests.

Bob: Pretty good communicators with some pretty good biblical knowledge.

Dennis: Yes; this one is a cut above.

Bob: Somebody who is—

Dennis: —just a cut above.

Bob: —kind of your favorite?

Dennis: Definitely my favorite—my bride of 43 years. Sweetheart, welcome back.

Barbara: I don't know if I can live up to all of that.

Dennis: That's pretty strong; wasn't it?

Barbara: Very strong.

Dennis: Well, our listeners love you. We were with some friends here this past weekend and ran into a number of listeners. They came up and talked to Barbara about her books and Ever Thine Home®—all the resources she's creating for wives and moms and women to be able to display their faith in their homes. It was kind of fun to watch them come out of the woodwork—out of a large gathering of people—come by and say, “Hi,” to Barbara and say, “I appreciate you.”

Bob: Well, and a lot of buzz around your new book. It's called *Letters to My Daughters*. This really didn't start as a book; did it?

Barbara: It absolutely didn't. When our oldest son was engaged to be married, his fiancée came to me and said, “You know, I would really love to hear some encouragement from you about being a wife.” And I thought, “Wow!”

Bob: She just opened the door; didn't she?

Barbara: I know. I thought, “Wow. If she opened the door, then I'm going to gently and cautiously walk through that door.” So, I wasn't sure exactly how to go about doing it because we all lived in different places. It wasn't possible to take her out for coffee and have a conversation. So, I decided I would start writing some letters to share some of the lessons that I had learned over the years in being a wife—just by way of encouragement and, “Here are some things that I learned, and maybe this will help you.”

Bob: Did you write them one-on-one to , or did you copy everybody else when you started?

Barbara: I copied all three married girls: our oldest Ashley who was already married and then our son Samuel who had married the same summer. So, it went to three married girls.

Bob: Then you expanded it out as this snowballed and continued?

Barbara: We traded about—I sent—I'll rephrase that—I sent about a dozen emails total. I don't know how much of it was that they didn't know me that well—so there wasn't a lot of response which I understood.

I mean, you know, we're talking about subjects about marriage; and this is your mother-in-law. What do you say?

Bob: Yes.

Barbara: So, I didn't get much feedback. So, they kind of dried up. Then, when our daughter Rebecca got married in 2005, I went and dug them all out and sent them to her sort of as a batch / a couple of them at a time; and then, that really was the end of it after that—the email version.

Dennis: I think what's interesting about this is the whole idea came from a couple of sources. One was a book that was famous and very popular, back when Barbara and I were college students, by Charlie Shed.

Bob: Yes?

Dennis: It was called *Letters to Karen*. It wasn't *Letters to My Daughter*. It was—although—was Karen his daughter?

Barbara: Karen was his daughter.

Bob: Because I also got *Letters to Phillip*, which was the follow-up, which he'd written letters to his son—both of them around marriage subjects; right?

Dennis: Exactly; exactly. But there was another kind of—I don't know—birthplace of this idea of sending letters that was a part of Barbara's family.

Barbara: When I was growing up, I remember my mother used to anxiously look for this large legal-size envelope that would come in the mail probably every couple of months. She had married my dad, and they had moved two or three states away from where she grew up. It was a place where she knew no one. Although she developed friends, there were no family members anywhere near. So, she and her mother and some other relatives in the family and friends had this exchange of letters, that were all handwritten, that went by the postal service. It was called a round robin.

My mother would write her letter, put it in the envelope, and send it on its way, where the next person would read my mother's letter and all of the other letters that were in it. She would take out her original letter, and put in a new letter, and send the packet on its way. It would just make this circle between these six or eight women that were a part of this group because nobody got on the phone and talked for fun in those days.

Bob: Right.

Barbara: You only used the phone for emergencies or business or important things. You didn't just get on it to chat. Letter writing was the only way that you really kept up with people who lived far away. They had this letter exchange that they passed around.

I just remember, very vividly, that every time that letter came / that packet with all those messages from home—touches with her family and friends that she didn't get to see very often—she would get a cup of coffee and sit down. She *relished* those letters. She read them and absorbed all that she could out of those communications from friends that she loved and cared about and missed deeply. That became a way for her to stay in touch with those friends.

Dennis: You know it's interesting, Bob—now, in the present age of social media and having communication so—

Bob: —tweets and texts and emails.

Dennis: —it's so easy, you know.

We have access to so much that the art of letter writing—I mean a really good thoughtful letter—in fact, I have back on my desk a letter that was given to me by Steve Green, who is the President and CEO of Hobby Lobby, that he'd obtained that was written by Thomas Jefferson, during his presidency. It's just interesting to have a copy of a letter that's over 200 years old and to think about the words being crafted—how thoughtful it was.

I think there's a need to recapture that—both personal side but also just the thoughtful side / the contemplative side of—“You're facing some issues. Let me step into your life and provide some guidance in a personal way for you.”

Bob: Not just shoot from the hip, but give some real thought to the response. Some of the letters—because you will print a letter in here—we should say this is not an actual letter from one of your daughters.

Barbara: Correct.

Bob: People shouldn't read this and try to figure out which daughter was asking this question. You would take a composite of questions that were being asked of you—subjects that your daughters were asking you about.

Dennis: —and people who were coming up to Barbara at a *Weekend to Remember*[®] marriage getaway.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: We have tens of thousands of people who come to those events. When Barbara speaks, women stand in line to talk to her. These questions that are in the book are really questions that these women had asked Barbara from the *Weekend to Remember*.

Bob: I'm looking at one of the letters that you respond to in your book. You're tackling some pretty interesting stuff here. I mean one of these letters asks this question—it says, "Hey, Mom, sometimes I get tired of being discouraged by all the unexpected things that I have to deal with that come from the way my husband lives life. It's not just that we're different—you already wrote me about that. It's more than that. It's like, I think, 'If I didn't have him, sometimes life would be easier.'"

Now wait a sec! Do wives really feel that way? [Laughter] I mean I'm starting to feel a little insecure here!

Does a wife really feel like sometimes life would be easier—

Dennis: Let me just stop you. What if your wife's name is on the book—[Laughter]

Bob: You can feel real insecure now! [Laughter]

Dennis: —and you're on the radio!

Bob: Let me finish this—it says, "It's kind of nice when he's out of town for a few days." This is a wife, who is saying, "Sometimes, I wonder if I'd be happier, more satisfied, more fulfilled if I didn't have a husband to deal with."

Barbara: Well, I think there are those moments when women do feel that way because the differences *never* go away—that's the first chapter in the book. I write in the book that it's the first and most lasting adjustment to marriage because the differences never go away. Even though I'm used to things that he brings to our world—his personality, the way he approaches life, and his maleness—

Bob: His perspective is different.

Barbara: —it's very different. I think what this question is saying is that, sometimes, when a husband travels, there feels a little bit of a—"Oh I can do things the way I want to do things. I don't have to be just thinking about what I would like to do and 'How's this going to make him feel? How he's going to respond to this?' I can just do what I want to do."

Bob: You know, I get that because I think, for husbands—I think there's a similar—

Barbara: I would expect so!

Bob: —to have a break and just to be able to—times when I'm traveling, I'm focused on whatever I'm doing, traveling-wise, and—

Barbara: Or if your wife goes on a women's retreat, you can just kind of veg and eat pizza all day long and not worry about anything; right?

Bob: Sometimes, those breaks are nice to have; but you wouldn't want them to go on for very long.

Barbara: No; no.

Bob: In the midst of them, you do have a sense of something lacking, even if you're enjoying just the pause in the relationship; right?

Barbara: Yes, without question because we are complete in one another, and marriage does complete that which is lacking.

I mean, God says, "The two shall become one."

So, there is a sense in which you can relax about some things when your husband or your wife is out of town; but there is that realization that life isn't the same without him in it. So, it makes you miss one another and appreciate those differences / those things that the other person brings that are so very contradictory at times. But it is for good.

Bob: When should a wife start to be concerned if she's thinking, "I kind of wish he'd go away for a few days because I really like it when he's gone." When can she tell: "This is an okay break," versus "No, this is us drifting toward isolation in our marriage?"

Dennis: —or "This is unhealthy thinking."

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: Here's what we're talking about. We're talking about the very essence of marriage goes back to Genesis, where it says it was not good that man be alone. So, it says, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother; shall cleave to his wife and the two shall become one."

I think we get married because there's something lacking in our lives and that *something* is a person. It's the completeness of a husband and a wife in a marriage relationship designed by God.

The two are asked to deny themselves and to defeat isolation and not grow into an unhealthy relationship where you long for the times when you're going to be separated. You need to keep the relationship alive and not forget why you married the other person in the first place. God brought you together—you need to get on with it, and you need to learn how to embrace the differences.

Barbara: It's okay to have a break occasionally; but the goal of marriage is being together and becoming one and allowing God to do his redemptive work in our lives.

Dennis: Ultimately, what marriage is all about—it's about two imperfect people learning how to love one another within the commitment of marriage.

Barbara: Yes.

Dennis: You're going to school with God teaching you from the Bible.

I'd have to say I didn't understand that when I enrolled in this course called marriage; but looking back over four decades of marriage, I'd have to say, "I know more about love because of marriage than any other relationship in my life."

Bob: Some of the wives, who are listening to us have this conversation, are thinking, "The negatives that you're talking about with my husband—some of these are pretty dark negatives. Some of these are negatives that cast such a shadow over the relationship that it's hard for me just to hold things together. How do I turn that into a positive, or what do I do with those negatives? How do I deal with a husband who—man! the negatives—they're stark, and they're real, and it's really challenging?"

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: "I'm not married to Dennis." [Laughter] You know a wife, who's listening, is saying, "I'm not married to Dennis who's a godly, virtuous man, who is pursuing a walk with the Lord. I'm married to a guy who's marginally interested in spiritual things, who's yelling at the kids, and who's drinking too much. What do I do?"

Barbara: Well, that's a very complex question because there are so many levels and degrees of what constitute negatives and difficult things in a relationship. So, let me answer it two ways. One is "Any wife has to start by looking at herself and saying, 'Okay, God, am I accepting the man that You've put in my life? Am I giving thanks for him in his strengths and his weaknesses? Am I looking to You to do the transforming work?'" because you even said in your question, a woman says, "What can I do? How do I relate to him and help transform him?"

Well, it's not the wife's job. I think we so easily get caught up in thinking that it's our responsibility to fix him / to change him. We do that with our kids. We're always helping our kids. We talked about that on another broadcast—that helping a husband is different than helping your kids; but it starts by her attitude and her perspective and her belief in God and His sovereignty and His ability to work.

So, it starts with where she's focusing her eyes—is she looking at all of the negative in his life to such a degree that she's totally forgotten all the good that there is? My first challenge is to her: "Are you open to God being at work? Have you totally given up on Him? Are you giving thanks for your relationship the way it is?"

Then, the other side is "If it really is, indeed, very, very difficult things that are beyond a woman's responsibility to deal with, you may need to see a counselor, you may need to get a pastor or someone who's wise and skilled to intervene—to help you, to coach you,

to guide you. Find an older woman who can be your mentor to help give you perspective.

One of the things that's true about us, as women—I had a conversation with my daughter just yesterday on the phone about this—is that it's so easy for us, because of our emotional makeup, to get very overwhelmed by the circumstances of life. So, a woman who is married and is discouraged by her relationship with her husband—she can get so overwhelmed to the point that she just doesn't see clearly.

That's why a mentor is so helpful—someone who can look at it objectively and say, “You know it's probably not as bad as you think it is. Let me give you one or two things that you can try—one or two practical suggestions that might make a difference for you,” because we do lose perspective and we do—we just get all out of sorts. It's very common for us, as women, to get discouraged with our marriages because we're just discouraged about life in general.

So check your heart. Find someone to help you, find a mentor, find another woman who can speak objectively into your life and say, “It may not be as bad as you think it is, and here are some things you can try.”

Dennis: What I'd say to my daughters is—I'd say, “Do you remember when you'd get up in the morning and see your mom reading the Bible? What was that symbolic of? It was that your mom was teachable, that she was trying to meet with God, and ultimately that her hope was in God.”

So, the woman who's listening to us right now who has lost hope—she's got to have a spiritual thermometer check: “How's your relationship with God?” You've got to be reminded of who He is, how He operates in this imperfect world that we live in, and what he's calling us to do, which is live and walk by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Barbara: I just want to say to the moms who are listening who've got a houseful of kids—or even maybe one or two kids but it feels like a full house to you—I did not get up every morning and read my Bible.

My kids didn't see me doing that every day.

I just don't want anybody listening to think that I was that woman that got up every morning and read my Bible. There were weeks that I would go by and not read my Bible in the morning. I would talk to God, I would pray, and I would try to catch snippets of the Bible here and there in different places; but I was pretty overwhelmed and pretty buried with kids and with life.

Yes, I totally agree with what you just said, Dennis, that it is absolutely crucial that your hope is in God and in no place else. Your hope can't be in your husband because he will fail; that's a given. So, put your hope in God, keep it there, and do all that you can to maintain that.

I just don't want anybody to feel like there's this standard of "I have to get up and read my Bible every morning before my kids are up." If you can do that, great! I couldn't do that, and I failed miserably many times; but my hope remained in Christ for the most part.

Dennis: There was a Proverb that I was thinking about as I was thinking about our listeners today, who are going to hear Barbara on this subject.

It is Proverbs, Chapter 4, verse 23. We quote it quite frequently here on *FamilyLife Today*. It says, "Keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life." You may not be able to get in the Bible every day—I'm glad you said that, just to remove this mythical phantom that exists of the super-spiritual mom—but your heart needs to know who it is that you serve / who is your hope, and you need to cultivate that.

I'm glad you mentioned a mentor or a friend or even a counselor if things really go south—or to keep them from going south—someone that you can lean into and you can spill out your emotions in safety and talk about it not just being negative but trying to find someone who can coach you out of the ditch that you may be in.

That's what church is all about / that's what the community of faith—of Christ followers ought to be about. We ought to be meeting each other in our ditches and saying, "You know what? It's safe. We're all broken. There is nobody who's got it all together!" But to maybe dig in with a group of women into a book like this, Bob, and decide, "We're going to get real with each other. We're going to get honest, and we're going to make sure our hope is in the right place."

Bob: I was going to say—at one level, that's what this book is all about. It is a mentoring book. It is an older woman mentoring younger women on what it means to be a wife according to God's design.

Dennis: I would just like to say here, this is a real-life book that talks about where you are living, as a woman, wife, mom, grandmother.

I think it is life-giving—it's the words of a wise woman that are bringing life to others because she's reminding people of the truth. People today need to get away from the culture, and the messages of the culture, and the messages of all their buddies on Facebook® or Twitter®, and they need to dig in deep with someone who'll tell them the real truth and nothing but the truth.

Michelle: *FamilyLife Today* is brought to you by FamilyLife in Little Rock, Arkansas. And although FamilyLife is located in the United States of America, we understand that our cultures vary but the issues facing us are similar. We all have joys in life, we all struggle and we all want to love and be loved. And we want your family, your marriage and your relationships to succeed.

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I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our global broadcast manager Rhonda Street. I also want to thank our editor Larry Loraine. For Dennis Rainey and Bob Lepine, I'm Michelle Hill and I invite you to join us again for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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