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Praising the Positive

Guest: Barbara Rainey
From the series: Letters to My Daughters (Day 2 of 2)
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Bob: Barbara Rainey has some advice for wives. She says when you're husband messes up—and by the way, he will—when it happens, how you respond may determine whether he learns anything from his mistake or not.

Barbara: If you rail on him and if you criticize him, and you tell him how stupid it was that he made that decision, he may not learn the lesson that God wanted for him; and he may have to repeat it again. The best thing that a wife can do is trust God, even when it's hard, and ask God to use it for good in their life and that God would use it to grow him in that area where he just blew it royally.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. The words you say, as a wife, have profound power in your marriage. We'll examine that subject with Barbara Rainey today. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. Have you ever stopped to ponder who you would be: (A) if you had been single all your life or (B) if you'd married somebody other than Barbara?

Dennis: Yes; I guess I have because I tried to marry a young lady from SMU before Barbara and I started dating.

Bob: You proposed?

Dennis: She didn't want to marry me. No, no. It wasn't at that point.

Bob: It was clear enough that you didn't—

Dennis: But there was a DTR—a “define the relationship.”

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: How she defined it and how I defined it—[Laughter]—“Thumbs down, baby!”

Bob: Okay.

Dennis: “Thumbs down!! You’re out of here!” [Laughter]

It was good because—it was okay because I wasn’t in search of a myth. I wanted a real relationship with a real person.

Back to the previous part of the question, though, Bob: “Have I ever thought about who I would be if I hadn’t married Barbara and was single?” I have. I don’t visit that picture very often because that’s a horror film. [Laughter]

Bob: Pretty ugly? [Laughter]

Dennis: She’s laughing really hard because she knows what happened behind the curtain. [Laughter]

Bob: Are you saying, “Amen,” to that? Is that what that laughter—

Barbara: No, I just think that’s funny that he said it would be a horror film because I don’t think it would be *that* bad.

Dennis: Well, I don’t know what you would compare marriage to—that teaches you how to love, that instructs you in how to sacrifice for another person, to care for, to cherish, to nourish, and to call you away from yourself and force—I mean, if you’re going to do marriage God’s way, it is the greatest discipleship tool that has ever been created in the history of the universe.

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: It *demand*s that both a husband and a wife pick up their cross, follow Christ, deny themselves, and ask God, “Okay, God, what do You want me to do in this set of circumstances?”

Bob: And that’s true. It works both ways—for husbands and wives—but our focus this week is on the responsibility a wife has—the privilege she has / the assignment she has—from God to be the helper that He’s created her to be.

Barbara, we’re talking about some of the themes that are found in your book, *Letters to My Daughters*. Some women recoil at the idea that they’re called to be helpers. It sounds demeaning to them. Your book affirms that it’s a noble thing that God is calling wives to.

Barbara: It is a very noble assignment that God has given us. It’s equally noble, I think, to the calling that God has put on a man’s life too. What makes it even better is that, together, marriage is a high and holy calling—it says that in Scripture. It also says that it’s a mystery. I think that’s the part that we wish God hadn’t said about it because it would be nice if it was a little bit more black and white / more obvious.

But God says it is a mystery. God is an artist / God is an author—God didn't make robots. So figuring this out—this uniqueness / this relationship that Dennis and I have that's unlike anybody else's relationship on the planet—just as your marriage with Mary Ann is unlike anybody else's on the planet—the ingenuity of God to create these little duos all over the planet that represent Him / that are a picture of Christ and the Church—all of that mystery is profound and baffling.

We wish sometimes that marriage was a whole lot easier, but it illustrates that it is a very high and noble calling. We think it is drudgery / we think it's dispensable—and it's not.

Dennis: Yes. In the book that Barbara has written, called *Letters to My Daughters: The Art of Being a Wife*, you quote Mike Mason. Speaking of mysteries, he wrote a book called *The Mystery of Marriage*. This comes from that book—he says this: “Love convinces a couple that they are the greatest romance that has ever been, that no two people have ever loved as they do, and that they will sacrifice absolutely anything in order to be together.” Then I love the conclusion to the statement. It says, “Then marriage asks them to prove it.”

Well, that's what's at stake. You've got this noble relationship that wasn't created by man—it was created by Almighty God. His image is stamped all over a marriage that seeks to follow His blueprints for what He wants us to do. He's trying to teach us how to love—how to love sacrificially / how to give up our lives on behalf of another. You're never going to be able to do it if you try to have it your way.

Bob: I would love for you to expand on something that I just had to stop and ponder for a second. You said what a wife believes about her husband is the starting place for everything she says or doesn't say about her husband.

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: And what you believe about Dennis is the starting place for everything you say or don't say about him.

Barbara: Correct.

Bob: Unpack that for me.

Barbara: Well, let me explain something about photography that I think will help answer your question for you. Anybody, who has ever used a 35mm camera that has a lens that you turn so you can focus, understands the principle that the person who is holding the camera chooses what's going to be in that image.

You can choose a broad panorama, and you can get as much in that frame as you can get; or you may choose to tighten that zoom lens and focus on somebody's eyes only. You've got great choice, as the photographer, in what you're going to get in that lens of the camera. And the same is true in marriage.

I have complete control over what people know about my husband. If I'm talking about Dennis and I talk about his faults, or I talk about how crummy it is that he just doesn't ever do *this* and I think it's terrible that he doesn't ever do *that*, anybody who hears that description that I just made of him will think of him that way. When they think of him, they're going to remember that.

But, on the other hand, if I choose to leave that out of the description, and instead, I choose to describe him for my friends, or my small group, or wherever I am talking about him, and I say: "You know, one of the things that I appreciate so much about Dennis is that he really makes our family a priority."

"Yes, he travels. Yes; sometimes he has to say late and work / sometimes he is gone on the weekends, but I know that his heart is to make our family a priority." That's focusing the lens of my camera on what is good and what is right about my husband. If he knows that I'm saying that about him, he's going to want to live up to that expectation.

Bob: So some wives will hear you say that and say: "You want me to airbrush my husband. You want me to just brush away and pretend like all those flaws that are there just don't exist and just pretend like he's better than he is."

Barbara: Okay. And I would say to her: "How does God see you? Is God pointing out to you the hundreds of things that you do wrong every day? Um, I don't think so. He's very gentle and very gracious, and He shows us one thing at a time that we do wrong."

I just think that—"Okay, you want to call it airbrushing? All right, I'll take that it may be airbrushing—but I would rather focus on what he does right than what he does wrong because when I focus on what he does wrong—and I *have* done that—all I can see are the things he does wrong. They grow, and they just become these huge things. I become obsessed with everything that's wrong and everything he's not doing that's right. And that's not fun! I don't like that about me!"

"I don't want him to be focusing on all my weaknesses and all my flaws. I don't want him talking about my weaknesses and flaws to other people because I don't like them / I don't want to be known for what is wrong with me. I want to be known for what I do well and what I do right. So the same is true for him. So, yes, I airbrush it—I don't talk about the things that he does wrong or his weaknesses or his flaws. That's for him to deal with before the Lord. That's not my business—that's his business."

Bob: You're not living in denial about those things?

Barbara: No; no.

Dennis: That doesn't mean that the airbrush doesn't get turned off at a point.

Bob: And the flaws are exposed? [Laughter]

Barbara: Well, or that I talk about them with him from time to time.

Dennis: Yes.

Bob: And you're not being unrealistic about the nature of your relationship.

Barbara: No.

Bob: But I think what I hear you saying—and this goes back to where we started—what a wife says about her husband is going to begin with what she's thinking about her husband.

Barbara: Correct.

Bob: And she can choose—

Barbara: Correct.

Bob: —whether to dwell on all of his flaws or whether to set her mind on those things that are his virtues.

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: And every husband's got at least a couple of them; right?

Barbara: Well, if he doesn't, why did you marry him? I mean, all of us got married because we admired something about this man that we fell in love with. So focus on those things. I remember, years and years ago, when we were in a new church that we were a part of—it was a fairly small church—and we had this community group of other couples that we met together every couple of weeks.

I remember standing in a small group of maybe three or four of us.

This wife started talking about her husband—she was talking negatively about her husband. I'll never forget that uncomfortable feeling that all of us in that little, tiny circle felt. We just felt kind of: "Ouch! Oooh! That hurts! I don't know that I want to hear that about your husband."

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw him, standing not that far away. I think he had heard what she said. I have just never forgotten that picture, even though it was probably 30 years ago / maybe 20 years ago—but it was a long time ago—because I saw what the power of her words did. I saw what it did to me—it made me, as a listener, uncomfortable. It made me wonder about him, as a man. And then, when I saw that he heard, it was like an ice pick to his heart. I realized how powerful our words are as wives.

So my whole intention in what I share in this chapter about this is to help women understand that your words are very, very significant. Those who hear them are going to be influenced by what we say.

Bob: One of the things Dennis has shared over the years—you've heard him say it—your belief in him has been massive in terms of his confidence in doing what God's called him to do. I'm just wondering: "Was that just natural to express belief in him? Was that just something that came instinctively to you; or were you conscious and deliberate about saying, 'I need to verbalize to him. I need to express confidence in him?'"

Barbara: The answer is, "Yes," to both because I think most of us women, when we first get married, we marry this guy because we believe in him—we think he's the greatest. Most women marry with those thoughts, those feelings, and those emotions. I think that what happens is—when we do get disillusioned, and we do find discouragements, and we butt heads because we're different—that belief can come down with it. Then, that's when it becomes a choice.

In the beginning, it was really easy for me to believe in him because I just did believe in him—that's why I married him. But then there come those times, farther into the relationship, when belief becomes a choice. So rather than expressing—and it's not that I don't express fear / it's not that I don't express anxiety because I express plenty of that—but the bottom line is: "In the end, no matter what, I believe in you. I believe that God is at work in your life and in our marriage. I believe that God is going to see us through this, and I'm going to be with you there to the bitter end."

Dennis: And what I'd want a woman to know is no matter how competent and confident a man looks—whether he's young or whether he's older; it does not matter—there isn't a man, within the reach of my voice right now over the radio across the country, who doesn't need his wife's steady and certain words of affirmation and belief. He needs it. I don't care if he says nothing to you when you say it. The words are sinking and soaking into his soul because there are not that many people in a lifetime—in fact, I'd ask the question: "Is there anyone who goes a lifetime with you and who believes in you all the way to the end?" The answer is, "Who would it be?"

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: “Who’s going to do that?” That’s the nature of marriage! When you say, “I take you ‘til death do us part, for better or for worse, in riches and in being poor,”—wow! It’s the pay-off!

Barbara: Yes.

Dennis: It’s not always easy. We’re not trying to paint some kind of rosy picture here, but it is a necessity.

Bob: There has to have been a time—and I don’t know if it will come to mind immediately for you or not—but a time when you were facing a decision and you were thinking, “I think we should do this”; and Dennis was thinking, “No, I think we should do this”; and you said, “Okay, I’m going to trust you. I’m going to follow you”; and it turned out that it would have been better off if you’d have done it your way.

I’m just wondering—for a wife in that situation, where she goes, “I think this is the right thing to do”; the husband says, “We’re going this way”; they go down a dead-end; and the wife finds herself, in that moment, thinking, “If he’d have just listened to me, we’d be in a lot better shape right now than we are!” What does she do in that moment?

Barbara: Well, I can’t think of a specific time; but there have been times like, for instance, driving in the car, when he would choose to go one way; and I was thinking, “I don’t think that’s the right way!” Sure enough, it wasn’t. That hasn’t happened very often, but it has happened. I remember one time, early in our marriage, when we were discussing a financial decision. I don’t remember thinking it was a bad decision at the time; but it was a bad decision, and it cost us financially.

Regardless, it doesn’t really matter—if it’s a big thing or a small thing—because the choice is still the same in the end for a wife. That is, even when he makes bad decisions—and he will / when he decides to do things that will cost you—and he will—will you still believe in him? Will you still trust God? Will you put your faith in God’s sovereignty that God can turn this into good in his life? Maybe that’s exactly what he needed to experience to grow in the way God wanted him to grow.

If you rail on him, and if you criticize him, and you tell him how stupid it was that he made that decision, he may not learn the lesson that God wanted for him; and he may have to repeat it again. The best thing that a wife can do is trust God, even when it’s hard, and ask God to use it for good in their life and that God would use it to grow him in that area, where he just blew it royally, because men are going to make big mistakes. It’s how we respond to that mistake that will make the difference in whether he benefits from it or he can’t benefit from it because he’s been beat up by his wife.

Dennis: This is not an easy message for a lot of listeners to hear, but I just want you to comment on why you decided to write a book that is called *Letters to My Daughters* to call them to the art—the biblical art—of being a wife. Why did you want to do that?

Barbara: Well, I think our culture has lost the vision for what marriage can be—what it was intended to be. Yes, we have all seen countless examples of marriage done the wrong way, but that doesn't mean marriage is broken. It means the people are broken who are in it. I want the next generation to understand that marriage is really worth working on. It is transformative, it is redemptive, it is holy. There are so many good things about marriage; but we don't see those good things, commonly, in our culture—we see all the negatives.

I tell the story about—“What would it be like if you went to the Louvre Museum in Paris, with all these great, magnificent art works? And what if, while you were standing in line to get your ticket, there was an earthquake? And after you got your ticket, you walked in, and half of these masterpieces were lying on the floor. There were still half of them on the wall / there were still statues and all of these magnificent things around—what would your eyes be drawn to? Your eyes would be drawn to the tragedy, to the loss, to the broken pieces lying all over the floor.”

I think that's a picture of our culture. We see all of these wrecked marriages—we see these abused women, we see these lost men, we see the damaged children—and we just think, “Marriage is hopeless. Why should I even try?” What I want to do in this book is say: “Look at what's on the wall! Look at what God has said. Look at what God has designed. That is our goal. Don't get distracted by the broken pieces. It's tragic, it's wrong, it's sad; but the institution of marriage is still worthy. It's still worth striving for. God didn't make a mistake when He made marriage. We're the ones who are messing it up.

Dennis: And Bob, I think about what Barbara is challenging people with is—just because people have failed, don't give up on what the Bible—the transcendent beauty and model of the Scriptures and what it's calling us to be, as human beings—and to call us away from our selfishness, to call us to the biblical model of following Jesus Christ, and training our kids to do the same.

I'm going to tell you something—there's a lot on the line in every marriage that is listening to us right now. Generations are on the line. Your children—the best picture that they'll ever see, apart from the Scriptures, of what a real marriage ought to be is your marriage.

Barbara: Yes.

Dennis: Even in its imperfections, it can display what Barbara is talking about—the nobility / the grandeur. Your kids will see something—that they are going to say: “You know what? Mom and Dad could have ended it, but they didn't! They experienced the redemption of Jesus Christ. I want what they've got!”

“When I get married, I want one of those! And I'm not going to settle for anything less.”

The way they get it is by absorbing your teaching about Jesus Christ, following Him, and deciding to make their parents' faith their own; but that means the parents need to have it first.

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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