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What Do You Want Your Kids to Be?

Guests: Dennis and Barbara Rainey
From the series: Art of Parenting: What Every Parent Needs (Day 2 of 3):
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Bob: Do you and your spouse have the same set of parenting priorities as you raise your children? Barbara Rainey remembers when she and her husband, Dennis, sat down and compared notes.

Barbara: What was surprising to me was how different our lists were. I shouldn't have been surprised, because we had been flashing over this, but, nonetheless, I think, when you get married, you think, "Oh, we have so much in common," and then, after a few years or maybe after the kids come along, you think, "Well, maybe we're operating off of two different sets of instructions."

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. What can you do, as parents, to make sure you're on the same page, and that your values are in sync together as you raise your children? We'll spend time talking to Dennis and Barbara Rainey about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. We're spending some time this week doing some pre-parenting counseling. We talked about the fact that a lot of couples get premarital counseling, and a lot of couples, when they're expecting a baby, go to birthing classes; but nobody's doing parenting classes. Well, we're doing parenting classes now with The Art of Parenting video series.

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: And with your new book, *The Art of Parenting*, that is now available. Your goal with that book, and our goal with the series, is to equip moms and dads to have a big-picture perspective on what God's calling them to do.

Dennis: Exactly. We're joined again on *FamilyLife Today* by Barbara. Welcome back to the broadcast, sweetheart.

Barbara: Thank you much! Glad to be here.

Dennis: Here's the thing about children: I think most of us look at our children way too simplistically.

Let me depart from a conversation about children at this point, and just talk about the Weekend to Remember marriage getaway. One of the things we do at the getaway is we cast marriage in the grand scheme of things, of what God is up to on planet Earth. We say to couples, “Your marriage isn’t just about two people trying to get their needs met. Your marriage is supposed to be demonstrating who God is to a fallen planet. There are angels looking onto the planet; they’re in the audience watching how you two handle your conflict.”

Well, you know what? The same thing is true about children. It’s not just a little person. You’re talking about an eternal being! In The Art of Parenting video series, which we just launched, we’ve got a number of marriage and family experts, one of whom is Tim Kimmel. Tim and Darcy have been on the Weekend to Remember speaker team for a number of years.

One of the things that he said in this series on The Art of Parenting was, “I know how long children live. They’re eternal! They last forever.” That means, Bob, that they are worth so much more than any of us ever imagine at a point in time. I think it’s why we need to go back to the Book—back to the Bible—and just read and see how children are described. I’m going to go to, I think, a classic passage in the Old Testament. Psalm 127, verses 3-5, describes children. It says, “Behold! Children are a heritage from the Lord. The fruit of the womb is reward;”—not a curse, but a benefit; a reward—“like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them.”

The picture here—and I want every parent to imagine this with me—

God could have chosen any metaphor in existence to describe children, but he chose arrows; and he pictures a warrior: “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior.” What’s the warrior doing? He’s engaged in battle. What are you, as a parent, doing? You are engaged in a battle over the soul, the moral condition, and the development of your child to be used by God in his generation.

So the question is: are you viewing your assignment as a sacred assignment? Children being a heritage; a reward; a blessing. I’m sorry to get so intense here at the beginning of the broadcast here, Bob, but I just think there’s a lot of really lazy thinking about children. We forget—it’s so easy in the midst of the battle [to realize] we aren’t raising rug rats. We’re raising image-bearers, who reflect who God is, and who will carry on in the next generation.

Bob: If you were sitting down with a couple who were about to begin that journey, Barbara, one of the things I know you would tell them is, “You need to begin your parenting journey with the end in mind. Rather than thinking about the first six months, think about a 20 year-old, who is ready to be launched, and start now thinking, “What do we want that 20 year-old to be shaped by? What do we want the influences in that 20

year-old's life to look like?" so that all the choices you're making along the way are choices that support that vision.

Barbara: Exactly, and I think a lot of parents don't think about that. They are trying to survive *today*. [Laughter] They might be worried about what's happening tomorrow, because they've got a to-do list longer than their arm, but they're not thinking about what the outcome is for their kids when they're 18, 20, or 21. They're thinking about surviving the immediate future. But we all know if we can think ahead to what we want something to become, then we're going to make decisions today that will help achieve that outcome.

Parenting is really no different. What do you want your kids to be like when they leave your influence; when they leave for college, or go into the military, or get married, or whatever? What characteristics—what qualities; what attributes—do you want to invest in your children to see grow and determine who your kids become?

Bob: And I think, with us, we were pretty nebulous. We kind of knew, in a general way, what we wanted for our kids, but I don't think we put words, or even values, to it.

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: So if you had said to me, when my child was two years old, "What's your hope or dream?" Well, you know, I would have said, "I want them to love the Lord. I want them to have a good work ethic. I want them to know how to get married to someone and be a good spouse."

Barbara: But mostly you just wanted them to be potty-trained at two! [Laughter]

Bob: You're right!

Bob: I might have been able to go to a big picture, but honestly, my big picture probably would have been shaped more by suburban American values than by what God says ought to be the values you're raising your kids with.

Barbara: Well, we were essentially the same. We didn't really start thinking about values in specific terms until, maybe, our oldest was, say, mid-elementary?

Dennis: Right.

Barbara: Somewhere in that time frame, we started realizing that Dennis and I—and the reason we did this was practical, because Dennis and I came with different values into our marriage, which most couples do. You have a lot of things in common, and we had a lot in common, but we also had a lot of values that were different.

Bob: There was a Saturday where this became clear to you.

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: That you were not valuing the same things.

Barbara: Yes, because on Saturday, in my house, we worked. We washed windows! My dad had us—he had spent some time in the Army during World War II, and he had his kids lined up and ready for battle on Saturday mornings. [Laughter]

Bob: You got up early?

Barbara: We'd get our chores done!

Bob: Yes.

Barbara: So I thought that was what every family did. It never occurred to me that anybody else lived any other way, because I had no comprehension of how other families spent their Saturdays, other than what I did.

Bob: Did you *not* do chores on Saturdays at your house?

Dennis: I do not remember ever being told to do chores. I thought it was every child's American right to be able to nuzzle in next to my dad and watch the game of the week.

Bob: On TV?

Dennis: On TV.

Bob: A baseball game?

Dennis: A baseball game, because my dad was into baseball, and that was just what we did on Saturdays.

Bob: Saturday was about fun at your house?

Dennis: It was! And I'm sure I had to do some things, but I really don't remember about chores. [Laughter]

Bob: So there was a particular Saturday—I've heard you say. . .

Dennis: Oh, my goodness!

Bob: You were packing the kids up for a fishing trip, right?

Dennis: Oh, yes! I still remember Barbara on the back porch with her arms folded as I backed out of the driveway and pulled off to go fishing.

Bob: Do you remember this?

Barbara: [Laughing] Your face is getting—

Dennis: I mean, I'm reliving the moment! [Laughter] I had a couple of the kids. Daddy was being the playful Daddy: "Let's go fishing!" I took a couple of the kids.

Barbara: Well, you took a couple of the older ones, and left me with the little ones who needed naps and diapers.

Bob: Were you scowling a bit?

Barbara: Oh, I'm sure I was scowling a lot!!

Dennis: So I get out there, and we're in this boat, and it wasn't much of a boat. It was just a little, aluminum boat. It was rocking and the fish weren't biting.

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: And I kept thinking about Barbara on the back porch. I didn't just keep fishing. I thought, "You know, this is the wrong picture right here. This is a husband who is being selfish." I said, "Come on, kids! We're going back home to see Mom."

Bob: And I think, truth be told, you were probably thinking in the back of your mind, "The longer I stay out here, the more trouble I'm going to be in when I wind up getting home." Don't you think?

Dennis: You know, I guess, Bob, I was just kind of ashamed at what I'd done. I pulled out of the driveway and looked at Barbara, and I thought about it at that moment. It was like, "What are you doing? Oh, I'm going to do it anyway." So I drove off, but I turned around pretty quickly. That day of fishing didn't last very long.

Bob: So that led to the two of you actually getting some time away together—

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: --to map out, "What are the things we value? What matters to us?"

Barbara: Right.

Bob: Was this something that you just came to off the top of your head?

Dennis: It really was. I think it was because of all these clashes around our values.

Barbara: Exactly.

Dennis: So we were on a retreat, north of Little Rock, about an hour and a half away on Greer's Ferry Lake—

Bob: Where you could do some fishing?!

Dennis: Where we could do some fishing, but I—

Barbara: There were no kids!

Dennis: I just remember that I think what was happening, Bob, was that the pain of our differing values had reached such a point that I was looking for some relief. I thought, "This just isn't good."

Barbara: You would say, "This doesn't feel good."

Dennis: "It doesn't feel good." So I told Barbara—I said, "You get alone by yourself and pray, and read the Bible, and think. List out your top ten values that you want to teach the kids. I'll do the same. You're going to be over there; I'm going to be over here. Let's take about an hour, as I recall. Then, after you've got your top ten, I want you to prioritize the top five, and let's get back together."

Honestly, Bob, no one told me to do this. I was facing a time when I wasn't agreeing with my wife about a lot of things in raising the kids, and I felt a need for us to be singing off the same song sheet. So she did that, and I did that, and we got together. Our lists were the same on a few, and very different on others.

Barbara: Yes, and we had decided that we were not going to put "Love God and walk with Him" on our list—

Dennis: Not overly-spiritualize the whole thing.

Barbara: Right, because we both *knew* that we both valued that. That was a commonality that was without dispute or without question in our relationship. We knew that was important to us, and we knew that that was the most important thing we wanted to instill in our kids; so we said, "That's going to be off the table. Let's put all of the other things." So [it was things] like "work ethic" and "having time to play together" and "learning how to forgive and love other people" and "having good manners." We just went on and on, down the list.

What was surprising to me was how different our lists were. I shouldn't have been surprised, because we had been flashing over this, but, nonetheless, I think, when you get married, you think, "Oh, we have so much in common."

Bob: Right.

Barbara: And then, after a few years or maybe after the kids come along, you think, "Well, maybe we're operating off of two different sets of instructions."

Bob: There are really two points you're making here, and both of these are things you have counseled parents with. One is, mom and dad need to be on the same page. . .

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: . . . when they're raising the kids. Two, they need to spend the time talking about, "What is it that we really value?"

Dennis: And what I didn't anticipate is how many problems this would address later on, in raising teenagers. It was immediately practical to our young family. As I recall, at that point, what did we have—four or five children?

Barbara: Probably four.

Dennis: And we were making decisions out of our values, and we were comparing our decisions with our friends. It is so easy to doubt your decisions, but if you have hammered out what you agree to, and "What our family's going to stand for," it enables you not to do what the Joneses are doing, but to do what you're supposed to do.

Bob: Yes.

Barbara: Exactly, and so one of the things that we did when our children became teenagers is that all of our kids began to work at Chick-fil-A. We did that for several reasons. One was we wanted them to learn to follow direction from somebody besides mom and dad. We wanted them to learn how to serve other people with a good attitude; and we wanted them to learn how to have a good work ethic for someone else besides mom and dad, too.

Dennis: Yes.

Barbara: And it taught them how to build relationships. But we did that in such a way that they worked on Saturdays, but they didn't work all day Saturday. So, sort of, our pattern became, "Get your chores done and get your work done in the first half of the day." And then, in the second half of our Saturdays (when we were home), that would be when we would do fun. So having fun was a reward for getting your chores done, or

your work done, or after you'd put in your time at Chick-fil-A. Then we went and did whatever was fun.

So we did both of those things, and we found a way to keep both of those values that we each brought into our marriage and into our parenting—to keep them both alive and to feed off of each other.

Dennis: One other thing, Barbara: I want you to tell the story of how our core values ultimately helped us make a decision that we couldn't agree to. It had to do with Rebecca and gymnastics.

Barbara: Yes, I know. I thought about that a minute ago when we were talking about it. Our fourth, Rebecca, was born limber. I don't know where she got it. She didn't get it from me, I don't think; and I don't think she got it from you, either, did she? [Laughter] But she just naturally knew how to do the splits. She could just sit that way if she wanted to. So, anyway, when she was in first or second grade, somewhere along the line, we put her in gymnastics. It was just great fun, and she loved it!

Because she was naturally good at it, she advanced pretty quickly. By the time she was in fifth grade, she was being recruited to go to the next level. So we were trying to decide what we were going to do about this, because it meant more hours per week; it meant farther driving time, because the gym that she would have to go to was *at least* 45 minutes one-way; and it meant that she was going to be spending more and more time at the gym after school every day (and into the evenings). It would mess up our family dinner hour, and all kinds of things.

So Dennis and I began a three-month conversation. Have you ever had a conversation that lasted three months? [Laughter]

Bob: I don't think so!

Barbara: You don't think so!

Dennis: Would you like to know *why* it lasted three months? [Laughter]

Bob: 'Cause we never got to agreement?

Barbara: We never solved it.

Dennis: We didn't get to an agreement. I was determined not to just say, "Boom! Decision made!"

Bob: Right.

Dennis: I wanted to honor my wife, because I believe she's perfect for me; and, together, we reflect what God wants our kids to be about. So I was listening to her for all of her reasons why she wanted Rebecca to continue on in competition.

Barbara: And we didn't talk about it every day, but it did take us three months to finally come to a consensus. It was lots of conversations, where we went back and forth over the same things over and over again.

I kept thinking, "Maybe she'll get a college scholarship! Maybe she can go to the Olympics!" You know, I had these visions and dreams of what she might do. Dennis's side of the conversation was always, "Yes, but she'll be spending more and more time away from us. The coaches will have more influence on her than we will." And I would say, "Yes, you're right, but I really don't want her to quit." It was one of those things. I really understood what he was saying, and I agreed with him, but I was trying to find a way we could have both.

Bob: Yes.

Barbara: And so we went back and forth for a long time. Finally, I thought, "Okay, we are not coming to a solution. We are not coming to an agreement; and one of us needs to give." I thought, "I need to be the one to give, because Dennis is my husband and I have to trust that God is working through him; not just for my good, but for Rebecca's good and for her well-being." So I said to the Lord—before I said to Dennis, I said: "Okay! I'm going to be the one to give on this, and we're going to go with his value system, which is we have more time with her—which I agreed with, I wasn't disagreeing with it—but I'm going to follow his leadership in this decision in our marriage and in our family."

I said, "I think he's wrong, and I think I'm right, so I'm going to give you 24 hours to change his mind. I want You to change his mind." [Laughter] "And then I'll tell him!" So I kind of had this little deal going with God, and I don't think I said anything to him right away.

Dennis: I'd forgotten about that prayer.

Barbara: Oh, I did pray that prayer! I remember it vividly.

And God didn't change his mind. I went, "Okay, Lord, then that must mean that's not what you want for Rebecca. You want her to come home and be with us." So I told him that. And I was *so surprised* at how easily Rebecca took it. I thought she would be disappointed; I thought she would be heart-broken; I thought she would really miss it.

She hardly skipped a beat, and we gained an hour-and-a-half plus every day of just car trips and carpooling with other families to get these girls to this gym. It was such a

remarkable shift, and such a clear confirmation from God, that it was like, “Okay, you were right. Clearly, you were right, and I’m so glad that I was willing to trust God in this.”

So that was a values decision that we went back and forth over for months. Most parents are going to do that over one thing or another in the course of raising children to adulthood.

Bob: And, again, we’re back to the two big ideas here, which are: Mom and Dad need to be on the same page—

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: --if you’re divided on this, and if the kids know you’re divided, that’s not good for them.

Barbara: No.

Dennis: No! They’ll exploit it.

Bob: That’s right.

In fact, our kids knew. Instead of coming to me and saying, “Can I do this?” They learned to come to me and say, “Would you talk to mom about this so that I can get an answer?” [Laughter] They just knew! Anything they were going to ask, “Can I do this?” My answer was going to be, “Your mom and I are going to talk about that.”

Dennis: Yes.

Bob: We made that a default decision in our home.

Dennis: And weren’t you a little bit more of a softie than Mary Ann?

Bob: I was a little more. Mary Ann said, at one point, “You will probably never be too firm with the children.” [Laughter]

And she was right! It was going to be my natural tendency to be soft and pliable. I needed her to balance out my soft side in that. So [parents] need to be on the same page; and, then, if you’ve got some core values that you can look at and say, “You know, this is important to us! Time with our kids is probably more important than them excelling in some skill area.”

Barbara: Exactly.

Bob: And, honestly, you look at it today, Barbara, and you see what it takes for a kid to become an Olympic gymnast, or football player, or whatever it is. . .

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: . . . and how to get to that level—the compromises and the things that are given up can often be detrimental in the child's life.

Barbara: Exactly, and it really does rob you, as a mom and a dad, of time with your kids that you will never get again. You know, it's so easy, when you're in it, to feel like you're never going to get beyond the parenting years; but they really are so short.

And if you allow your child to give his or her life to a sport, or a cause, or something that takes them away from the family, and away from your influence, you never get those years back.

Bob: You include instructions for how to do the core values project—

Dennis: That's right.

Bob: --in the book, and do you include what your list of core values were?

Dennis: We give folks a pretty comprehensive list for them to choose their own, because what ours were—

Bob: Doesn't really matter!

Dennis: It doesn't matter. I'm not trying to adopt our core values. I'm trying to get you to pray, decide as a couple, and then begin to hammer it out; because you're going to be far more effective as a couple if you are in agreement, and God is leading that agreement, going forward.

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