

# FamilyLife Today<sup>®</sup> Radio Transcript

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## The Team Approach

Guest: Dennis and Barbara Rainey  
From the series: Art of Parenting: What Every Parent Needs (Day 3 of 3)  
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**Bob:** As parents, it's important that you continue to grow in your relationship with the Lord and in your understanding of Scripture, because Barbara Rainey says you never know when your kids are going to ask you a question that's a stumper.

**Barbara:** I'll never forget--my grandson said to our daughter—he said, “Mom, why do I need to tell God what I did when He already knows?” Those are the kinds of things that parents run into. You've got to teach your children what it means to forgive, why you need to confess your sin to God; because kids are smart, and they're going to start thinking about that stuff. They're going to press you on it. You have to know why you're going where you're going with your kids.

This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine.

As parents, we don't have to have all the answers to the questions our kids ask us, but we need to know where to find the answers. We'll talk more about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. We've been spending time this week talking about what's at the heart of parenting—what parents need to be thinking about and processing together as they raise their children.

I'm thinking back to when you first started working through what the Bible has to say about parenting—this was more than a quarter of a century ago—

**Barbara:** Gosh, that's sounds forever.

**Bob:** I know. It does, doesn't it? [Laughter] Right in the middle of—

**Dennis:** I think it is forever. [Laughter]

**Bob:** In the middle of raising your kids, you took an extended season of time and dug into the Scriptures, and talked to a lot of pastors and Bible teachers, theology professors.

**Dennis:** Men and women.

**Bob:** You got a lot of input, and what is in your book, *The Art of Parenting*, is a lot of the fruit that came from those conversations back years ago. The thing I love about that is the fact that it's still as relevant today as it was then; because we're talking about things that are eternal and not things that are temporal.

**Barbara:** Uh-huh.

**Dennis:** This was created in 1990 and 91, prior to radio. Because once radio started, it's daily. I wasn't able to get the time away to be able to do the fresh thinking that I took over a 12-18 month period. But I looked to see if I could condense down—what's the essence of parenting?—what does God want us to do?—and I found four things.

I think He wants us to teach *relationships* to our children—how to relate to God, how to relate to another sinful, selfish human being. We're preparing our children someday probably for marriage. But our kids need to know how to love God and love one another.

Secondly, we are establishing and building their *character*. We're shaping a child who's wise and not a fool—who knows what's right and what's wrong—how to choose one and not the other. Character development is something that God works over time in our lives to create. The Bible is full of all kinds of illustrations of this. In fact, I think we take a whole chapter in the book talking about how God develops character in us. I think we could take a page out of how God does that and apply that to us as parents, and we do that.

Third is the issue of *identity*. Keep in mind this was developed in 1990 and 91. We talked about how God created us with a spiritual identity—who are we?--what are we to be about?--do we have value?--do we have purpose? The answer is, yes.

Also, *sexual identity*. One of the first descriptions of man in Genesis chapter one, verses 26-28, was that He identified them as male and female. He says that definition three times in a matter of three verses. Our sexual and spiritual identity, I believe today, are on the line as never before.

Finally, the fourth area is *mission*—why are we here?—what's our purpose? These arrows were not designed to stay in the quiver. Children were made to be pulled back on a bow and let go and released to fulfill God's mission for their lives.

**Bob:** Your wife Barbara is joining us this week as we talk about what parents need to keep in mind as we raise the next generation. Barbara, we've talked about the big picture—having the end in mind as you raise your kids. But parents need to also have kind of a working strategic plan for what they're doing.

**Dennis:** Uh-huh.

**Bob:** In fact, this is really the heart of your book. You help parents come up with a short-term strategic plan that needs to be reviewed and updated throughout the parenting years so that you're always thinking, "In the next 12 months, what are the priorities?"

**Barbara:** Right.

**Bob:** "In the next 24 months, what are the priorities?" Then come back, revisit that / readdress that, so that you're being intentional as you raise your kids.

**Barbara:** Yes, and that's a big word for us. Dennis and I have always wanted to be very intentional with our kids and with our marriage and with our lives. Because we think that is what God has called us to do. He hasn't called us just to exist and have fun. He has created us that we would glorify Him and that we would raise godly children and that we would have a marriage that would honor him.

That takes intentionality. It isn't going to happen accidentally. It's not going to happen just by doing life. You have to make decisions that cause that to happen. As we talk about parenting, you have to begin with the end in mind.

In our book we write and try to create a vision—try to help parents see the big picture—help them see the wonderful calling it is to be a parent. Because it's so easy to get caught up in the messiness of being a parent. We are constantly casting that vision, but we're also trying to be very practical and help you know how to make decisions, how to work together as a team, how to be intentional, how to have the right values govern your everyday life as a mom and a dad--so it's both together.

**Dennis:** And the way we did that was on a date night. We'd get out on a date and initially—I've got to admit—I was kind of looking for some romantic date nights [Laughter] where we just had a fun time because we had six kids in ten years. Ultimately, those date nights became the vice president and president hiding away from the kids [Laughter] on a date in a restaurant.

**Barbara:** They were strategy sessions on how to survive the next week.

**Dennis:** They were! [Laughter] We would look at the calendar. We would look at where we were going. We would review our road map—"Where are we taking them?"—"What does this child need?"—"What does that child need us to especially work on in his or her life?"

**Barbara:** And sometimes our dinners were preoccupied by one child that was especially needy at that particular time.

**Dennis:** Exactly.

**Barbara:** We didn't always go over all of them.

**Dennis:** No, no. Sometimes there was no room for romance.

**Barbara:** Oh, most of the time. [Laughter]

**Dennis:** Okay, most of the time. But Bob, here's the thing: we would use those times to pull back to the big picture and get a clearer road map going forward, and just say, "What are we doing here?" We don't want to be held hostage by comparing ourselves with other families that maybe too busy that don't have the same stuff going on that we have.

We tried to say, "Lord, here's what you called us to do to make an impact in other people's marriages and families. Help us to not lose our own marriage in the midst of this. But also raise effective children in the process."

**Bob:** Anybody who's in the business world understands a couple of things. First of all, there are some things that are urgent and there are some things that are important, and we usually focus on the urgent and ignore the important—and that's not good.

Secondly, you understand that, unless you take some time to develop strategic priorities, you can get caught up in the day to day, but never be thinking about, "What are our goals or our aspirations?"

You've mapped out in your book, *The Art of Parenting*, a way for parents to do some concrete, short-term, strategic planning, to get away from the urgent for a little bit and focus on the important. There are seasons where the urgent is going to dominate. I get that, right? The house is on fire you don't think, "Where do we want to go on vacation next summer?" But get away from the urgent for a few minutes and look at the bigger picture / the important.

When parents do that, it's a fundamental shift in their parenting, and all of a sudden now they're parenting with a level of intentionality.

**Dennis:** Here's where our book and the video series, *The Art of Parenting*<sup>™</sup>, spells out and takes people through a process where they reduce in writing on a sheet of paper that is called *Your Child's Arrow*. It's actually a picture of an arrow where you fill out each of the four areas I mentioned at the beginning of this broadcast: *relationships*, *character*, *identity*, and *mission*. You look at those.

It's interesting--Barbara and I would move from child to child and look at where they needed to be developed. From time to time, every one of them had something of those four things that they needed us to either anticipate an issue that was coming down the pike, or where we needed to give them a little more focused attention to be successful in one of those four areas.

**Barbara:** It seems to me as I look back on that, that we most often talked about character and relationship issues because those are the ones that seem to be the ones that we run into day in and day out in raising a family. We would talk about, “What are we going to do about lying?” We would talk about, “What are we going to do about hitting siblings” or “not respecting your sister’s closet?” You know—“You can’t just go in and take stuff. You’ve got to ask.”

There were all of these character, behavioral kinds of things that we were instilling values in. Then, the relationship side we talked about all the time, too, because we had sibling rivalry every day thousands of times—it felt like—every day. We were teaching over and over and over again about being kind, about how to ask for forgiveness, how to say you are sorry--will you forgive me, how to pray and ask God to forgive you, and why you wanted to.

I’ll never forget--my grandson said to our daughter—he said, “Mom, why do I need to tell God what I did when He already knows?” Those are the kinds of things that parents run into. You’ve got to teach your children what it means to forgive, why you need to confess your sin to God; because kids are smart, and they’re going to start thinking about that stuff. They’re going to press you on it. You have to know why you’re going where you’re going in all four of these areas with your kids.

**Bob:** When your kids hit pre-adolescence and then adolescence, that’s where the identity piece starts to really emerge.

**Barbara:** Um-hum.

**Bob:** During toddlerhood and elementary years you’re probably not focused a whole lot on identity. Of course, in these days it’s happening younger and younger with these kids as they start to say, “Okay, who am I?”

**Barbara:** Um-huh.

**Bob:** “What did God make me to be? What am I good at? Will I ever be popular? What’s my life all about?”

This is more subtle than some of the character and relationship issues we deal with—

**Barbara:** That’s right.

**Bob:** But parents can’t just tune this out and think it’s going to happen, right?

**Barbara:** No, and I think probably in this culture you need to be more intentional and more aggressive even than we were, because you know your kids are hearing it. And if you don’t know your kids are hearing it, we want to tell you--Your kids *are* hearing it.

They're aware of it. They may hear somebody say something at school or even at church.

**Bob:** You're talking about gender identity.

**Barbara:** We're talking about gender and identity issues, yes. I think you have got to be—parents have to be--proactive today, even at younger ages, because of what children are being exposed to.

**Bob:** Even beyond the gender-identity question, which is huge, every junior high kid is figuring out, "Am I one of the popular kids? Am I a jock? Am I part of the theater group? Am I a nerd?"

**Barbara:** Um-hm.

**Bob:** They're coming up with a self-assessment saying, "Where do I fit into the pack here?" Those can be challenging years for an adolescent.

**Dennis:** They can. I think the adolescent years are where the character begins to emerge and where you're still not done with discipline of your children.

**Bob:** There are a couple other things that you think are vital for moms and dads if they are going to be effective as parents: one is that they not try to go this alone, just the two of them. They need to be in community with other parents. This is essential, isn't it?

**Dennis:** It is absolutely essential.

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Dennis:** I think especially today with the issues coming at young people, as never before, it takes a village.

**Barbara:** Another thing that we did, that I think was really helpful for our kids and for us, is we knew a lot of people--still do--who are great faith heroes—people who walk with God. When we had the opportunity to bring them over to our house for dinner. We would get the kids around. We'd all sit at the table and we would just hand it over to our friends and we say, "Tell our kids the story about what happened when you went to Africa." "Tell our kids the story about whatever..."

Because I wanted our children to hear that faith was real and authentic for people other than Mom and Dad. Because it's real easy for our kids to think, "Aw, it's just Mom and Dad and they're old and they're archaic and whatever." If they can hear someone else being in love with Christ and being excited about walking with Him, then they might go, "Oh, maybe Mom and Dad aren't so dumb after all. Maybe they're on to something."

That was something that we did and it's an idea that I think a lot of other families can incorporate just with people who are in your church. There are heroes of the faith in your churches that you can bring over and say, "Tell a story to my kids."

**Bob:** There's one other essential for effective parenting. This is one of those things that we could say it and people would go, "Yes, yes, that's one of those *put it on the list so you can check it off.*" But you guys really feel this is not a cliché—this is a vital part of parenting.

**Dennis:** This is how you do it. Proverbs 24: 3 and 4 says, "By wisdom a house is built and by understanding it is established. By knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches." How do you get the wisdom to build a house? You cry out to God and you say, "Help! Help! We don't know what we're doing, God."

We've prayed the prayer of a helpless parent on so many different occasions, because we were brought to our knees around issues we didn't know how to answer—address—how we knew how to tackle. We would pray for the kids. We would pray with our kids. We would pray we'd catch our kids doing what's right and we would catch them doing wrong—all for the purpose of shaping their lives to reflect what God wants to do in their souls.

**Bob:** We put together a prayer challenge for parents not long ago.

**Barbara:** Um-huh.

**Bob:** This was as kids were heading back to school, but honestly, this is something you can do at any point in time. We were sending out prayer prompts every day—where a mom or a dad would get an email that says, "Here's what you can pray for your kids today"—a 30 day practice, just to try to jumpstart this discipline in the life of parents so that you get into a rhythm of regularly praying for your kids.

I know for a lot of parents it can feel like, "Okay, I did that. I can check it off the list. Did anything really just happen there?" This is where we got to by faith go, "There's a God who's listening who's called us to pray / who wants us to pray. This will be good for us and good for our kids." God hears those prayers and responds to them.

**Barbara:** It's important that we pray with our kids and in front of our kids and for them so that they see it modeled. They don't just hear that we do it, but it's something that they participate in as their growing up.

When we were writing the book, *The Art of Parenting*, one of the things I wanted to do was get our children, who are all grown now, I wanted to get their voices in the book. I wanted to get some of their experience in the book. Because all of them are married and all of them have kids now. I wanted them to kind of say, "What have you learned?"

What are you using that you learned? What are you changing that you thought we did terrible and you're doing it differently?" I wanted their voices to be heard.

We asked our kids to write some stories. One of the ones that came in first that we still to this day delight in is the story of Dennis praying with the kids when he would drive them to school in the morning. He didn't do it every day, but he did it enough that this one child—our daughter--remembers him praying.

What's so fun about it is that when we would do this—when we would pray with our kids in the morning before school—when we would pray with them at night—so often they would give us this, "Oh, do we have to?"—kind of a thing. As parents, you think, "My gosh, is this making any difference? Am I getting anywhere?" You just so doubt yourself and second-guess yourself.

But our daughter wrote the story of how she remembered Dad taking them to school in the morning and she describes him octopus-arm Dad, because he would have his coffee in on hand, a handful of cereal in the other. Then he'd be shaving with another hand [Laughter] and throwing the cereal into his mouth and eating while he was driving all along. The way she described it, it was just this beautiful picture of all the things that were happening in his seat as he was driving to get to school.

But she said, "I remember he always prayed for us and he always prayed three things: that God would protect us from evil and from harm and from temptation, and he ended all of his prayers with that. She said, "I remember at the time thinking, "Ya, ya, ya, whatever." But she said, "Now that I'm a mom, when I take my kids to school every day"—they are in elementary school—"I pray the same words every day over my kids because I know God hears and I know that's what He wants me to do with my girls."

It was really encouraging to see as parents because we do want to quit and give up. Because we don't see results. You're not going to see results quickly like we would like. It's not a short-term process. Hang in there and pray together as a couple. But pray *for* and *with* you kids so that they can hear it and see it and you can model it for them.

**Bob:** I know your heart for this book and for the video series is that moms and dads will not just read this and go, "That was a good book. That was helpful." You want this to be a strategic plan.

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Bob:** You want them to begin to implement things in their parenting that are going to have an eternal impact in their children's lives.

**Dennis:** We know it will impact generations—

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