

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

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## Leaning on God

Guest: Barbara Rainey  
From the series: Letters to My Daughters (Day 2 of 3)  
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**Bob:** Barbara Rainey says there's a lesson that every couple needs to learn really early in their marriage. The lesson is this: "You can't do this on your own."

**Barbara:** The bottom line is going to be the same for the rest of your life; and that is, when God brings you to a place that you realize you cannot do this thing called marriage, you can't do this thing called mothering, you can't even do the Christian life on your own—that you come to Him and you say: "I give up. I surrender—Your will, not mine."

**Bob:** This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is the President of FamilyLife<sup>®</sup>, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We'll find out today just how important it is to have a spiritual foundation poured in your marriage if you're going to try to build a home on top of it. Stay tuned.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. I'm curious—did you think, when you and Barbara, in the summer of 1972—I guess September of '72 / late summer; right?

**Dennis:** Right; right.

**Bob:** That's when the two of you stood and faced one another and said your vows.

**Dennis:** It was still summer in Houston.

**Bob:** Did you think, "This is going to be a breeze," or did you think, "I know there will be some challenges"?

**Dennis:** I just didn't think. [Laughter] Honestly! I was in love. I was committed. I was ready to get on with life with my new bride and my new love. Honestly, I didn't do a lot of cost-counting; but I did make a commitment.

**Bob:** We heard your wife laugh as you said, "I wasn't really thinking." Barbara, welcome to *FamilyLife Today*.

**Barbara:** Thank you.

**Dennis:** Were you thinking, Barbara?

**Barbara:** Not much more than you were.

**Bob:** But were you confident?

**Barbara:** Yes, I really was.

**Bob:** Did you start marriage, thinking, “I can do this”?

**Barbara:** Yes; I really did because I had grown up in a good home. My parents were not divorced. I had seen them work out their marriage and—though there were things I wanted to do differently—I felt like I could do this. Added to that, I was doubly confident because I was a Christian and my husband was. We were not just pew-warmers / we were committed Christ followers. I thought: “This is guaranteed to work because we’ve got the right ingredients: We love each other. We love the Lord. We are going to do this the right way. We’re going to follow the instructions in the Bible— $A+B=C$ . It’s going to work out great!”

**Bob:** The reason we’re exploring this is because you’ve been spending a lot of time, recently, working on editing a series of letters—actually, emails that grew into letters.

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Bob:** Letters that you’ve written over the years to your daughters and your daughters-in-law, where you’ve just offered counsel from your own life and experience about getting married.

**Barbara:** Yes. I started writing this series of letters the summer that both of our sons got married. It wasn’t so much that I wanted to teach them—and I was invited to do so by the way—I didn’t do this without an invitation. It was that I wanted to encourage them by sharing some of the stories of things that I had learned so that they would know that: “Oh, it’s normal to have disagreements. Oh, it’s normal for this to happen or that to happen,” so that they would understand the long view of marriage and the big picture of marriage.

**Dennis:** One of the things that had occurred in our marriage that I think really pointed out the importance of perhaps Barbara doing this—early in our marriage, she had kind of run into the differences between us and how that was impacting her. Someone told us—and I don’t remember who—but said, “You really ought to go spend some time with an older woman who has experienced more of life and been around the barn a few more times than you have.” Just to spend some time and to know that what you’re going through is normal.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** I think couples start out their marriage together and they get isolated. They don't realize that what they're going through is what everybody else is dealing with. But if they have someone who is seasoned / who's authentic—and not going to create some kind of pie-in-the-sky approach that's: "A+B=C, and you're going to have all your problems solved by sundown tonight,"—if you've got somebody who's real and helps you understand that it takes a lifetime to work out this thing called marriage. That's what really fueled Barbara in writing our daughters and our daughters-in-law to be able to enter in to these first months and years of their marriage.

**Bob:** Barbara, one of the issues you felt like you needed to mentor your daughters and daughters-in-law in was this issue that we talked about—your confidence that you could be the wife and mom that God called you to be—that, at some point along the way, you kind of woke up and went, "This is harder than I thought it was going to be."

**Barbara:** Yes. I think that realization was an on-going realization. What I've realized, as I look back over my life, is that, along the way—from those early months of our marriage all the way up until the present—God has been saying to me, over and over again, "You can't do this on your own." Now, my initial response is, "Oh, yes; I can."

**Bob:** Yes.

**Barbara:** Because I've got—especially in the early years—a lot of motivation, a lot of energy, a lot of enthusiasm—to really do a good job being a wife. Most young women start out that way / most new brides start out that way. We're highly motivated, highly teachable, energetic, ready to go and be the best we can be; but God knows that, if we really are able to produce on our own, then our confidence is in our self and not in Him.

In this section of the book, I tell lots of stories of how God took me places where I realized I could not do it on my own; and I could not garner up enough strength on my own to see the situation through.

**Bob:** The book you're talking about, of course, is called, *Letters to My Daughters*. It's your brand-new book. The subtitle is *The Art of Being a Wife*—Barbara Rainey is showing us on *FamilyLife Today*.

Barbara, you started marriage as a committed follower of Christ. You were involved in ministry, but there were cracks in your spiritual foundation that started to show up under the pressure of marriage—

**Barbara:** Yes; they did. I first felt it most dramatically after our first child was born. We had moved for probably the fourth or fifth time—I can't remember. We'd moved a bunch in those first two-and-a-half years of marriage. I remember one day just feeling really overwhelmed with these jobs I had. I was a wife, and I was a mother—and it was 24/7.

Our new little baby didn't come with an instruction manual, and I didn't know what I was doing. We lived in California, and my mother was in Texas. It's not like I could call her every day, or I could go visit her or she could come over in the afternoon and babysit so I could take a nap. I mean, I was really very, very lonely. I was very isolated, and I was very bewildered as to how to make this thing work: "How do I do this wifing and mothering thing without any instructions?" I really remember feeling a sense of real *aloneness* in that season of my life. I tell a story in the book—would you like to hear it?—about how I ran away?

**Bob:** You ran away?!

**Barbara:** I ran away. [Laughter]

**Dennis:** It wasn't far—but she did run away. [Laughter]

**Barbara:** No; it *wasn't* far—No; it wasn't far—but I had this—it really is what it was though. I wouldn't have even said so at the time but, looking back on it, it really is a good expression of what I was feeling.

I went—out of just sheer frustration—I wasn't really angry / I was just bewildered. I left Ashley sleeping in the crib or, maybe, she was in the infant seat or something in the living room. I don't even know what Dennis was doing, but all I remember is that I went into the bathroom in our bedroom / our master bathroom and shut and locked the door. It was a teensy little master bathroom—it had a tub, and a toilet, with a little tiny counter with a sink in the middle. I sat on the toilet. Then I got uncomfortable, and I sat on the side of the tub. Then that got uncomfortable, and so I sat on the toilet again. The walls started to kind of close in on me and I thought, "Oh, now what do I do?"

I was just absolutely *lost* because I didn't know how to—I just didn't know how to do this thing. Finally, I came out. Thankfully my husband, in his love for me, did not go: "What an idiot you were! What were you thinking?"—you know, going in the bathroom and locking the door—"What was the point of that?" He didn't belittle me / he didn't make fun of me. He didn't criticize me. He, I'm sure, gave me a hug; and we sat down and talked.

Now, what it was all about—I can't even begin to tell you. What he said to me—I don't remember—but I remember the emotion of the moment—that I was lost. I didn't know how to do this thing called marriage, I didn't know how to do this thing called mothering, and I didn't know where to go for help. That was the first real sort of moment of awakening—when I realized this was all bigger than I could handle, and I needed something outside of myself to make it work. It was God's bringing me to this place of going, "You can't do this on your own."

**Dennis:** I think, as a husband—truthfully, I think I was clueless that she didn't feel that confidence.

**Barbara:** Well, of course, you were! How could you know?

**Dennis:** This was an internal battle she was fighting.

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Dennis:** So, when she did come out of the bathroom, I don't think I had realized that she had actually locked herself in there—

**Barbara:** No; I'm sure you didn't.

**Dennis:** —and had kind of run away from her responsibilities for a few minutes. I don't think you were in there—probably, an hour—

**Barbara:** No; not more than an hour.

**Dennis:** —but the point is—as a husband, at that point / however imperfectly you may love—but just allow your wife to express the inability and to express her need for something to change / something to be different for her to move forward.

I think marriage is an opportunity for us to finish the process of growing up. In fact, I think it was Erma Bombeck who used to say, "Marriage is the last chance God gives us to grow up."

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** I think it's one of the tools God uses in our lives to take us to the end of ourselves—

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —where He kind of puts an exclamation point at the end of the sentence that says: "You need Me! Signed, God."

**Barbara:** Exactly; exactly.

**Bob:** But Barbara, you were a Christian—you studied the Scriptures, you were in church, you were—

**Barbara:** Yes! That's what I thought! [Laughter]

**Bob:** So, what was missing?

**Barbara:** I think what was missing was an experiential understanding of my need for Christ. Yes, I knew I needed Christ when I received Him. Yes, I knew—had you asked

me, an hour before I went into the bathroom and locked the door, “Do you need Christ?”—I would have said, “Of course!” But it was *knowledge* more than it was heart experience.

God loved me enough that He wanted me to *feel* my need for Him—for me to *experience* that I could not do this on my own. I think God loves us enough that He wants to take it from merely head knowledge to heart knowledge. It was the process that God was beginning to work in my life, where He was showing me: “No, you can’t do this on your own. Your knowledge of Me is not enough. You need to experience a need for the Holy Spirit to control your life—not just know it in your head that, ‘Yes, that’s the way you’re supposed to do it,’—but you need to be aware of your need for Me so you will, in fact, depend on Me.”

**Bob:** Okay; so, you’re aware of your need. Now, you’re going to do something different than you were doing. What’s that different thing? How does somebody come out of the bathroom and say: “Okay; I realize I need to rely on God, I need the Holy Spirit to work in my life; but what can I do to make that happen? How do I walk in the power of the Holy Spirit?”

**Barbara:** For me, it was very much an on-going process. It was a growth that happened over decades. But, in that moment, as much as I knew how, in that day of my life, I said: “Father, I want to trust You more. I want to be filled with the Spirit. I want You to control my life. I want You to give me the power and the strength to live the way that You want me to live—to do this thing called marriage that You’ve designed. This was Your idea in the first place; so therefore, You know how to make a marriage work. I want to depend on You more than I have in the past.”

I believe that I did; but then there came another point, on down the road, where God said: “Okay; now, you need to step it up a notch. You need to trust Me some more,”—I was trusting myself again too much. There was another lesson; and then, a few years later, another one.

I think that, just as our children grow up, incrementally, through the years—they don’t go from being a baby to being 18 overnight. Physical growth is a slow process. There are all kinds of little things going on in their bodies, as they grow up, that we can’t even see. It does take a long time for an infant to become an adult. I think the journey is similar in our spiritual growth. We start out as spiritual infants. God gently and slowly works in our lives and our circumstances so that we become mature adults, spiritually, and don’t remain infants.

**Bob:** One of the areas where you had to learn to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit in your own life was when you decided you wanted to do a make-over project on your husband; right?

**Barbara:** [Laughing] Yes, I did that.

**Bob:** This was *Extreme Makeover*. Is that what you were—back before it was on TV—you were—

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Dennis:** It felt that way! [Laughter]

**Barbara:** Yes, it probably did. What is so sad about this story is that I really thought I was doing the right thing! I was a Christian and I thought: “Okay; if there are some problems”—and there were—“if there are some things that I think are not right in our relationship”—and there were those things that I thought weren’t right—“What are you supposed to do about it? You’re supposed to pray about it; aren’t you? Yes, that makes sense.”

I made this list—I began to make a list of all the things that I thought were not right—primarily were not right about him / not so much things that weren’t right about me—because I really didn’t think there were that many things—

**Bob:** That was a small list / little, tiny list. So you’re setting off to try to fix—what kinds of things were you trying to fix?

**Barbara:** You know, that’s what’s sad—I can’t even remember what they were—but I’m quite sure it was all personality related because, as Dennis said earlier—he would get an idea, and [snaps fingers] process it that fast, and he’d be off and running. He didn’t think things through thoroughly like I did. He was much more spontaneous and spur of the moment. I’m sure it was related to these personality differences that I saw, early on.

I made this list, and I thought that the right thing to do was to pray about all the stuff that needed to be changed in his life.

**Dennis:** It was a long list too.

**Bob:** Well—[Laughing]

**Barbara:** It wasn’t really that long. [Laughter]

**Bob:** Is there something wrong with a wife identifying: “These are areas that I think God needs to be at work in my husband’s life, and I’m going to pray about God doing that work”?

**Barbara:** Yes; I think it’s probably not a real good approach.

**Bob:** Really?!

**Barbara:** Really; because what happened to me is—I had this list of 10 or 12 things. I prayed about them every day. What happened was—I thought about them all day after I repeated them to God in the morning. I would say: “Okay, God. Here are the things I think You need to work on in his life.” It was as if they were written in neon block letters on his back. Every time I saw him, I saw what was wrong because I was reminding myself, every day—before God, of course—but nonetheless, I was reminding myself every day of what I didn’t like and what I thought needed to be fixed.

I decided—after doing this for a couple of weeks—I thought: “You know, I don’t like the way this *feels*. This is not really a fun way to approach God.” It’s not fun—the results in my marriage—I just didn’t like the fact that I was *constantly* seeing all these things that I didn’t like.

**Bob:** [To Dennis] Did you have any idea there was neon on your back?

**Dennis:** I think I did know about the list.

**Bob:** Really?

**Dennis:** I do, and I think I definitely felt it when she threw the list away.

**Barbara:** That doesn’t surprise me—

**Dennis:** Yes.

**Barbara:** —because I felt it when I threw the list away too.

**Dennis:** I mean, all of a sudden, I’ve got my friend back instead of my judge.

**Bob:** What prompted you to throw the list away?

**Barbara:** I just began to realize that this wasn’t fun. I didn’t like focusing on everything that I thought was wrong with him. I thought: “You know, I didn’t used to feel this way. I used to like all these things about him, and now I don’t.” It wasn’t this great revelation—I just thought: “You know—this isn’t fun. I don’t like the way this makes me feel. I don’t like the flavor in our relationship.”

I told God specifically one day—and I remember saying this—I said: “God, if You want to change these things in his life, it is Your business. I am not going to ask You about this anymore because I don’t like what this is doing to our relationship. If You never change him, that is fine with me. It’s Your business, not mine. I’m going to move forward and not pray about all these things that I think need to be corrected anymore.”

I tore up the list, and I literally threw it away. Within days, I wasn’t thinking about all that stuff anymore.

**Dennis:** You know—

**Barbara:** It was a great relief.

**Dennis:** There's a common thread here—to what she's talking about—that I want Barbara to comment because this has been a theme of her life. You're talking about, first of all, coming to the end of yourself, not once, but on multiple occasions, where you realize you couldn't do this thing called "being a wife" / you couldn't do this thing called "being a mom"—and you couldn't change your husband.

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Dennis:** It's not *you* that's going to do any of this. You came to the conclusion that it had to be Christ in you and you yielded to Him.

**Barbara:** Exactly.

**Dennis:** What would you say to a wife, who's listening, who's going: "Got me! I'm raising my hands, saying, 'That's me you're describing'"? What's the hope? What's the solution?—not in terms of a formula—but what does she need to begin to practice?

**Barbara:** I think the bottom line is going to be the same for the rest of your life; that is—when God brings you to a place that you realize you cannot do this thing called marriage, you can't do this thing called mothering, you can't even do the Christian life on your own—that you come to Him and you say: "I give up. I surrender. I need You. Will You empower me? Will you fill me with Your Spirit? Will You lead me?" because it really is coming to a point of giving up because what I was doing, when I was praying for you, is—I was trying to take over.

I was trying to tell God what I thought He needed to do in your life. I realized that I needed to give up. I need to let God do what He wanted to do, in His timetable. I basically—in essence, by saying, "I'm not going to do this anymore,"—I surrendered and I said, "Your will, not mine."

**Bob:** You know, just about every time I speak at a *Weekend to Remember*<sup>®</sup> marriage getaway—first night, I'll say, "If you brought your spouse here, hoping that together we could get her fixed or get him changed, I have bad news for you." [Laughter] I say, "I'm not even going to be talking to your spouse this weekend. The only person I came here to talk to is you." I think sometimes—

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Bob:** —rather than focusing on, "God change this other person,"—

**Dennis:** Yes.

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Bob:** —our prayers need to be redirected: “Lord, change me.”

**Barbara:** Exactly.

**Bob:** I had to chuckle, Barbara, because, at the end of this “Note to Your Daughters,” as you shared this story—you said, “More stories about my failures to come. [Barbara laughing] Love you, Mom.”

Really, this collection of letters that you’ve written to you daughters are lessons you’ve learned—

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Bob:** —some of them through not doing it right.

**Barbara:** Oh, lots of them learned through not doing it right because I think that’s when God gets our attention. When we’re sailing along, and everything’s smooth, that’s when we don’t think we need God; but when we realize we can’t do it, and we’re making mistakes, then we go, “Okay; then maybe—maybe I need some help—

**Bob:** Yes.

**Barbara:** —“and God needs to be my help.”

**Dennis:** —“and Jesus is that help.”

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Dennis:** If the story of Easter is true—and it is / Christ is alive from the dead—then He can make this claim—He said in John 15, “I am the true vine.” Later on, in the same passage, He says, “As a branch cannot bear fruit by itself,”—you can’t do it on your own!—“As a branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is who bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” If you’ve come to the end of yourself, it’s a *good thing!*

**Bob:** *FamilyLife Today* is brought to you by FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. And although FamilyLife is located in the United States of America, we have found that the issues facing families, issues like forgiveness and communication, taking care of our kids, all of the issues transcend national borders. Those issues profoundly affect marriages everywhere.

FamilyLife is a subsidiary of Campus Crusade for Christ. Our mission is to effectively develop godly families, the kind of families that change the world one home at a time. A key part of our mission includes strengthen marriages and families all around the world. We want to do whatever we can do to bring timeless truth to bare on the challenges you face as you seek to strengthen your family.

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Be sure to join us back tomorrow. We're going to continue talking about a wife's responsibility in her marriage. We'll talk tomorrow about what happens when a wife wants to be a helper but it starts to go bad—and it can do that. We'll talk about that tomorrow. Hope you can be here.

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

FamilyLife: Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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