

# FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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## Surviving the Seasons of Intimacy

Guest: Barbara Rainey  
From the series: Letters to My Daughters (Day 2 of 2)  
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**Bob:** Why does it seem like moms are often not that interested in marital intimacy? Barbara Rainey understands.

**Barbara:** It's hard to have a good, healthy, dynamic sexual relationship when you're tired all of the time. You're being pulled in a hundred directions by jobs, and kids, and financial stresses, and everything else; and, yet, I would still say that it's important to keep it a priority because, if you don't, you're vulnerable to the enemy / you're vulnerable to the temptation to find that excitement somewhere else.

**Bob:** This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. Barbara Rainey joins us today to talk about how she worked to make intimacy a priority in her marriage when there were six kids still living at home. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. With the season of romance and love in the air—and let me just remind some of the husbands who are listening—Valentine's Day is coming up. You may want to put that on your calendar or on your reminder list so that you don't arrive at that day and find yourself empty-handed. I've had that experience—it's not a fun experience when that happens. [Laughter] Do you know what I'm talking about?

**Dennis:** No. [Laughter]

**Bob:** Yes; you do!

**Dennis:** Forty-four years; and I'm batting a thousand, Bob! [Laughter]

**Bob:** Are you?

**Dennis:** Ask her! She's here with us!

**Bob:** We have an eye witness here. Barbara Rainey is joining us. Is that true? Has he never missed a Valentine's Day? Has he always had a card, or a gift, or something?

**Dennis:** I've always shown up!

**Bob:** Showing up is something else! [Laughter]

**Barbara:** You have been present.

Although, I don't know that you've always been present on Valentine's because of travel.

**Dennis:** Oh, yes! That's probably true.

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Bob:** Well, we thought it would be helpful today to discuss the area of sex, and intimacy, and romance, especially since this is something, Barbara—that you wrote about in your book that is now almost a year old—it's called *Letters to My Daughters*. Chapter 6 was all about helping your daughters and other young wives understand what's going on with this aspect of a marriage relationship.

**Dennis:** And, at this point, I want to read a P.S. that Barbara puts at the end of one of these letters. Now, the book has nine chapters. There's only one chapter on sex, but it's a long chapter; and there are like half a dozen letters that pose a question to Barbara that she answers in the book. I just want to read this:

P.S. There are additional unseen benefits to regular sexual relations in marriage.

Three little facts I learned from one of our *FamilyLife Today* radio guests:

Number one:

The chemicals oxytocin and dopamine, when released in the brain, increase bonding; the reexpression of love and commitment strengthens mutual affection; and there is a sense of satisfaction in keeping intimacy alive, even if the actual experience isn't a great one. The last is my favorite, because in our marriage...

Now, this is really interesting for me to read on air; because, Bob, you know, we have people come up to us and they say: "You guys! All you do is present a perfect picture of marriage!"

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** Well, I'm about to dispel that [Laughter] in what I'm about to read that my wife wrote in this book!

The last one is my favorite, because in our marriage, sex hasn't always been accompanied by fireworks! Among a lot of good-to-great experiences, we've also had some pretty lousy encounters...

Did you really write that in this book?!

**Barbara:** I did. [Laughter] And I can tell you still don't like it very much.

**Dennis:** I don't; I don't. [Laughter] I complained about this when I edited it, but you didn't take it out.

...some pretty lousy encounters...some that left us both either disappointed or hurt. That makes the chemical facts all the more important, because even not-great sex still bonds us together. Nice to know, huh?

[Laughter]

**Dennis:** Honestly, I really appreciate Barbara's honesty about our marriage, because I think a lot of people out there are hurting. They think they're the *only* ones that ever had a *lousy* encounter around the sexual relationship.

**Bob:** When you and Dennis, together, wrote the book, *Rekindling the Romance*, you talked about seasons of a marriage.

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Bob:** You talked about early love, and then you talked about, kind of, this middle season—

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Bob:** —where it just can kind of get routine.

A lot of husbands and wives, in the middle of raising kids and going through things—they hit that season and they think to one another, "This is it?" They're frustrated and they're disappointed. They wonder, if they switch partners, if things would get better for them.

**Dennis:** Or, let me tell you this—Barbara spoke to one group of women who talked about a no-sex marriage, where people just give up / toss in the towel and say, "We're done."

**Bob:** And we've talked to couples, who have said, "It's been two years" / "...three years since we've been intimate with one another. We're committed, and we still love each other; but we've just kind of given up on that area of our marriage."

You would say to a wife, who says, "We've given up and we're content, and it's working out for us,"—what would you say?

**Barbara:** I would say that's a dangerous assumption. I think that it's a *very* real possibility in a lot of marriages, because—you're right—there is a middle ground in marriage, where it's just hard work; because you have so many demands on both of your lives. There's not much energy left over; there's not much enthusiasm; there's not much rest. It's hard to have a good, healthy, dynamic sexual relationship when you're tired all of the time. You're being pulled in a hundred directions by jobs, and kids, and financial stresses, and everything else.

Yet, I would still say that it's important to keep it a priority; because if you don't, you're vulnerable to the enemy / you're vulnerable to the temptation to find that excitement somewhere else, which is why there are so many affairs. There are so many couples, who are splitting up and finding new partners, because it is exciting. They're finding that excitement that they once had in the early days of their marriage.

But it's not going to satisfy; it's not going to replace; it's not going to be better. It's actually going to be more complicated.

I really believe, and I've repeated it multiple times in my book, that God is big enough to change any marriage. I strongly believe that His Word is true when He said, "Nothing is too hard for Me." You may look at your marriage, and you may go: "This is impossible! This is just too hard! I don't think there's any way out." I want you to know—I've felt that way. I remember *feeling* that way at different times in those middle years of marriage, when we were *swamped* with kids and life. It felt too hard; *but* I knew that God meant what He said when He said, "Nothing is impossible for Me."

So, therefore, if I believe in God—and I do—then I have to take Him at His Word. I have to go to Him and say: "This feels impossible. This feels too difficult, but I know that You can bring life back to our marriage."

If you don't quit, then there's always the hope of the redemption—there's the hope of God bringing new life back into your marriage. But when you quit, you've basically slammed the door on the possibility of God working a miracle. I think that's a tragedy.

**Dennis:** And there's a biblical admonition that Paul gives us from 1 Corinthians, Chapter 7. He said, "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise, the wife to her husband." It goes on to talk about the wife doesn't have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and the husband doesn't have authority over his body, but the wife does.

What I think Paul is exhorting us to here is that you've got to pay attention to one of the strongest drives in humanity. I got to thinking about this, and there are really only a couple of drives, I think, such as the need for oxygen and the need for water and food that would supplant sexuality.

**Bob:** You think survival might be a little ahead?

**Dennis:** Well, those are both survival categories; but the point is—the urge for two people to merge was put there by God. I've thought about this many times. It's a good thing, in most marriages, that one of the two of you has a stronger desire to be with the other in the area of sexuality. Why? Because if one of you didn't have a pursuit, what might happen? You'd just have two people, spinning plates, off doing their own thing, and occasionally coming back, like roommates at a house to be able to maybe touch each other with eyesight, but never emotionally—never in depth, with a true, real relationship—the way God designed it in marriage.

I think God, in His ingenuity, has made something powerful here that too often has been called “dirty.”

It really is a healthy desire for two people to become one.

**Bob:** So this brings up the issue, then, Barbara: “How would you coach a wife? Is it ever appropriate for her to say, ‘No, not now / not tonight—I'm not interested right now.’ How should she say that? And what are the legitimate reasons for her to say, ‘I can't be with you’? Is it because, ‘I'm too tired,’ or because, ‘You hurt me the other day’? What works here?”

**Barbara:** Well, first of all, I think she does have a responsibility to be honest with her husband. I think that faking it—faking being together sexually—is not going to accomplish anything. If there is emotional distance between you—and you're feeling hurt because of something he said or if you really are so exhausted that you just can't function anymore that day—those are real life issues that we all deal with and we all feel.

The purpose of sex and of coming together is for intimacy—it's for transparency / it's for sharing our lives together. I don't think there's anything wrong with delaying it—I don't think there's anything wrong with a woman expressing how she feels or what her needs are—because to not do that is being disingenuous / that's not transparency. If the goal is transparency / the goal is intimacy and oneness, you have to be real / you have to be honest. Now, the way you do that, I think, is what's most important. That is, you can say, “I just can't tonight,” or “I feel like we've got to finish talking about this argument that we had two days ago,” or whatever it might be.

It's the way in which you communicate that that matters to your husband. It must be done with respect; it must be done with commitment; it must be done with love. You say something like: "I need you to know what I'm feeling. Can we talk about this now, or should we talk about it later?"

"I need some resolution in this area of our relationship." If you communicate that you're committed to him and you say: "I'm committed to you, and I'm going to work this out. I want to be with you, just not tonight," or "...just not right now." I think that's perfectly acceptable as long as "not right now" doesn't turn into two years. I think it needs to be an agreement between a husband and a wife—they talk about it, and they find a solution together that works for both of them. It has to be mutual.

**Bob:** That's 1 Corinthians 7 again; isn't it?

**Dennis:** It is. Paul goes on to say: "Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement, for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer. But then, come back together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." I mean, we live in a highly-sexualized culture.

We've got to understand one another.

Here's where Barbara's book does an outstanding job of helping young wives, and for that matter, older wives understand their husbands in this area—and how they are made by God—and that it's good—it's not bad / it's not evil.. They should bless their husband and not ignore him. If you need to say, "Not tonight, Sweetheart," don't ignore it tomorrow night, and the next night, and the next night, and the next night.

**Bob:** So the wife who is feeling, tonight: "I think he might be interested. I just—maybe if I just go to bed early—I don't say anything / I just fall— you know, he comes in and finds me asleep. Then, he'll leave me alone." She gets a little passive-aggressive with how she handles this. She finds ways to dodge or avoid.

**Dennis:** Do you think a guy doesn't know this?

**Barbara:** Yes! He does.

**Dennis:** Yes; he does!

**Bob:** So, to that wife—you'd say: "It's time to get this out in the open and have the conversation"?

**Barbara:** Yes; I do. I think it's much better to talk about it. I mean, I think it's a temptation for all of us women to want to kind of just avoid it and hope it will go away when we're too tired, or overwhelmed, or whatever. But making it go away isn't the

solution. It's not the solution to any kind of a disagreement, or an impasse, or something that's between you, as husband and wife.

It's like the part that Dennis read earlier from my book—even not-so-great sex is bonding. It's remembering what's true / it's remembering the value that God places on your marriage and on the sexual part of your marriage relationship. It's going to him and saying: "I am really exhausted, but I sense that you might be interested in making love tonight," or "...having sex tonight. Can we talk about that? Can we talk about a solution? Can we figure out what we want to do together so that we're mutually agreeing?" She's not controlling by being passive, and going to sleep ahead of time, and hoping he won't notice.

Does that make sense?

**Bob:** It does!

What do you say, then, to the wife who says, "You know what? Thirty pounds ago, he was attractive. Today, I'm just not attracted to him." Or she says, "Thirty pounds ago, I felt attractive.

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Bob:** "And now, I don't feel desirable. Even though he says he's interested, I think, 'How can you be? Because I look at myself in the mirror and I don't feel attractive.'" What do you say about those issues?

**Barbara:** Well, I think those are just further reflections of our need for transparency and our need for oneness. We got married to be acceptable to one another. We got married to know one another in our strengths and in our weaknesses. So when we gain weight or when things change about us, are we still committed? Are we still called to love one another? Are we still committed to making our marriage all that God wants it to be for as long as we both shall live?

Well, we have to learn to love one another in our weaknesses.

We have to learn to love one another in our imperfections. Yes; it may have been easier when you were both in your 20s and you were both—whatever attracted you to each other—but marriage wasn't built for just when we're in our 20s. Marriage was built for a lifetime. You are going to go through trials and difficulties, and both of you are going to change. Is God big enough to give you the kind of love that will last?—the kind of intimacy that you got married for in those years when you are challenged with health issues, or weight issues, or whatever it is?

**Dennis:** And I know a dad who took his daughters aside—they had several daughters—and he just talked to them about the importance of your attractiveness to your husband:

“You need to do your job of being the best—the very best—magnet you can be to your man.” Now, we all know that there are these superstar models out there.

**Bob:** Right.

**Dennis:** You’re never going to be able to compete at that level, but you know what? You *can* be a beautiful, attractive wife to your husband. One of the things I appreciate about Barbara is—even when she says she doesn’t feel pretty, she’s still incredibly attractive to me. I just appreciated her for how she’s paid attention to the process of aging. I mean, 44 years—that means our listeners know we’re no longer teenagers in our 20s; okay? Forty-four years of marriage—I mean, you’ve got a lot of gravity to fight by the time you get there. So the point is: “Do you care enough to love your husband in the way that speaks love to him?”

**Barbara:** And it’s not just about the exterior; because I think what we’re talking about right now—people tend to think it’s the exterior. It’s not! What makes a person beautiful—what makes a man or a woman beautiful—is our hearts.

If we pay attention to our hearts, we pay attention to learning to love well, and to do what God has called us to do as men and as women, then we’re going to be attractive to one another. Because when Dennis serves me, and denies himself for me, and when he does the kinds of things that I know cost him something—and he’s doing it because he loves me—that’s attractive to me. I mean, I appreciate that / I respond to that. Any woman alive will do that; because, when she sees a man sacrificing for her—we’re just built to respond to that—and vice-versa—when women serve their husbands and love their husbands, that’s what makes us attractive.

**Bob:** We’ve been focusing on your counsel to young wives because, again, that’s the subject of the book you’ve written: *Letters to My Daughters*. I did want to, before we’re done, go back 22 years and let our listeners hear a clip of advice that you shared for husbands in this area of sex and romance, back when we recorded a series on *FamilyLife Today*, back in 1995—

**Dennis:** This is scary! [Laughter]

**Barbara:** It is!

**Bob:** —called—do you remember 1995? Do you remember being 22 years younger than you are now?

**Barbara:** Yes, but that was a long time ago! [Laughter]

**Bob:** We were recording a series called “Creating a More Romantic Marriage.” We were just asking you to help husbands understand how women think on this issue of romance, and intimacy, and sex in marriage.

**Dennis:** Is this the story about Saran Wrap? [Laughter]

**Barbara:** No!! [Laughter]

**Bob:** Stop it!

**Barbara:** It's a story about "a + b = c"; right?

**Bob:** Ah, she knows where we're headed! [Laughter] Listen to this clip from 22 years ago:

[Previous Interview]

**Barbara:** I don't think that a woman wants to feel pegged; I don't think she wants to feel figured out, button-holed, taken advantage of—whatever you want to call it. I think that that defeats the essence of love. Again, I think that a husband needs to live with her in an understanding way, and to love her as Christ loved the church, and then she will respond to that.

**Bob:** So it sounds to me like the message here to men is: "Once you've found what really communicates love to your wife,—

**Dennis:** —"don't ever do that again!" [Laughter]

**Bob:** That's right.

**Barbara:** Noooo!

**Bob:** — "she will realize it, and she will change the rules.

**Barbara:** That's not true.

**Bob:** "And tomorrow it's going to be something completely different!" [Laughter]

**Barbara:** It makes us sound schizophrenic.

**Bob:** But that's what it feels like for men sometimes!

**Barbara:** I know!

**Dennis:** Well, it feels like it to a man—that, here, he is doing his best to love his wife—

**Barbara:** I understand.

**Dennis:** —and she throws away the rule book.

**Barbara:** I do.

**Dennis:** And she says: “I don’t want a rule book. I don’t want to be figured out.”

**Barbara:** It sounds awful! [Laughter] It really does.

**Bob:** But it’s true; isn’t it?

**Barbara:** Well, I really do think it’s true. I really do, and it’s not that she doesn’t want those things done again. It’s not that you bring her flowers two or three times and she loves it; and then, all of a sudden, she feels like she’s been pegged and she doesn’t ever want them again for the rest of her life. I think there needs to be variety / there needs to be creativity. She needs to feel like he’s thinking about her in different ways at different times and not just the same old, prescribed pattern.

[Studio]

**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 tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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