

FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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Facing the Storms

Guest: Barbara Rainey
From the series: Letters to My Daughters (Day 1 of 1)
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Bob: To be the woman and the wife that God created you to be, you have to know how to walk by faith on the good days and on the dark days. Here's Barbara Rainey.

Barbara: Most people who have been through suffering—whether it's shallow, small things or really deep, tragic things—can say, on the other side, "I didn't enjoy it—I didn't like it—but I knew God better as a result." I've heard so many people say that. I would say it's true about us too. We've learned more about God in the valleys than we have on the high places and hills in the sunshine.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey—I'm Bob Lepine. We'll spend time today exploring how a husband and wife can draw closer together and become one as they walk in the valley and in the path of suffering.

Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. Anybody who has ever been to one of our *Weekend to Remember*® marriage getaways knows that—on Friday night, as we are getting underway—we spend some time talking about the common potholes that can derail or destabilize a marriage relationship. I think there are some things that are pretty standard—pretty common that can cause a marriage to wobble at high speeds.

Dennis: We begin the conference with a message that is really about five threats to your oneness—five threats to your marriage—five threats to your marriage going the distance over your lifetime.

Bob: One of those threats is a failure to anticipate the unexpected trials that come into a marriage. It's not a question of *whether* unexpected trials will come into a marriage—but "How do you respond when they do?"—because all of us are going to hit them; aren't we?

Dennis: Well, if you think about it—the vows are built—the traditional vows, "...in sickness and in health—in financial success and in also being poor." I mean, the basis of what we promise, when we establish the marriage covenant, is that we're going to take the storm head-on. We don't know what it will be, but we're pledging to one another to not quit, but to keep on loving—keep on believing—and make our marriage go the distance.

Bob: And we are taking some time this week to talk with your wife, Barbara. Welcome back to *FamilyLife Today*.

Barbara: Thank you, Bob.

Bob: We're going to talk about some of those valleys and dark places that the two of you have walked together in 40-plus years of marriage and how you've not quit in the midst of that.

Dennis: What Barbara has done is—she has taken the past—almost ten—years to complete a book to wives called *Letters to My Daughters: The Art of Being a Wife* that is designed to be what it is. It's an older woman stepping into the life of a younger woman with sage advice—with seasoned advice—with the advice that comes after four decades of marriage. The way this book is constructed—you end it with this subject that Bob's talking about here—the subject of suffering.

I guess I'd have to ask you, "Is that because of what you and I have been through—because we have been through some dark valleys together.

Barbara: Well, that's why it's in there—because it has been an integral part of our marriage relationship. It's in there because I think most brides—most young women—get married with some—what I call "fairy tale theology." They get married thinking that "Everything is going to be great for us. We're not going to have difficulties. Yes, there will be some uncomfortable moments, but we're not going to really have hard stuff. We're going to—we're going to be great. We love each other, and everything's going to be great."

For those who are Christians—like you and I were when we got married—we also start our marriages out thinking, "You know, we believe in God. If we do it God's way, it's going to all be good. We're not going to have any hard things." That was how I started our marriage—thinking, "A plus B equals C. If I obey God and I do these things that are in the Bible, then God, therefore, will give us an easy, nice life."

Bob: So, do you have a new equation now if it's not "A plus B equals C"? What would you say to a young wife, who says, "If it's not that, what is it?"

Barbara: There's a lot of algebra! [Laughter]

Bob: Some calculus—[Laughter]—a little geometry—

Barbara: And I don't know algebra very well, so I can't even give you the formula! [Laughter]

Dennis: We're laughing, but it's the hard stuff of life. This is a broken world. There is a heaven, and it's not here—it's not now.

Barbara: Yes.

Dennis: God came, in the person of Jesus Christ, to give us an abundant life *now* and help us face these hardships—but it's like the funeral you and I participated in earlier this year—a dear couple that we love greatly, who buried the body of their 15-year-old son. It's unthinkable—

Barbara: Yes.

Dennis: No couple—standing at the altar, about to say their vows to each other—can even *fathom* the grief, the loss, the agony, the darkness of the valley. Yet, there are a lot of our listeners—who are in it right now, or who are about to go in it, or who have been in the valley and they've come out the other side—they're nodding their heads.

Bob: One of the things I've heard you say before, Barbara—is knowing that those valleys are ahead—you don't know when they're coming—you don't know where they are—it could be months—it could be years before you head into one—but the time to prepare your marriage and the time to get ready to walk through the valley is not when you find yourself *in it*—it's while you're still walking in the sunlight.

Barbara: Yes. I think that it also illustrates that the importance of building your marriage *today* because we don't know how many days we have. Our days are all numbered, but we don't know what the last number is. That reminds us that *today* is the day we need to focus on. *Today* is the day we need to live—as if it were our last—even though that's hard to do in a practical way—but we need to focus on making our marriage all it can be today.

Focus on getting to know Christ today—focus on growing today so that, when those hard times do come—and they will come—because Jesus said,

“In this world, you will have trouble” Period. Done. “...you will have trouble.”

We don't like that—I never liked that verse—I always kind of wondered why it was even in there—but it *is* because He's telling us the truth—that we will have trouble and we will have difficulty. So the best way to prepare is to live each day on purpose and to live each day with focus and intentionality in your relationship.

Dennis: You don't prepare for the storm in the middle of the storm. I will never forget a Green Beret, who came up to me at one of our *Weekend to Remember* marriage getaways, way back when we started FamilyLife® years and years ago. He came up and said, “Dennis, as a Green Beret, we practice what to do in a crisis over, and over, and over again in training so that, when we were *in* the crisis, it was second nature—we knew what to do.”

I think what people need to look at—is look at the Bible as the training manual. We need to know how to live *now* in light of eternity. As a married couple, you have to know how to live together. We've been through some hard things in our family—some difficult challenges. It's true, Bob, husbands and wives do not suffer the same—they do not process grief in the same way. We're different, as male and female.

I'm so glad that Barbara has this chapter in her book to coach women to know how to view suffering—how to view the valley in their marriage and not lose heart—not lose hope—but to not give up.

Bob: Sometimes in a marriage, Barbara, we are plunged into a deep valley, where it's the kind of darkness we've talked about here—burying a child or—I know, for you and Dennis—the loss of a grandchild years ago, was one of those deep valleys.

For a lot of wives, the valley is not as deep, but it's kind of a shallow, prolonged valley.

You wouldn't necessarily even call it suffering, but it's just a general discontentedness about life and where you are. It drags on you every day. If a wife is in that moment, where she's saying, "This is not what I—

Barbara: —"signed up for"?

Bob: "Just not what I thought life was going to be."

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: "It's not what I thought marriage was going to be. I thought having kids would be more fun than this."

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: What does she do in that moment?

Barbara: Well, first of all, I want to say that that *is* suffering. It's just a different kind of suffering because I think that is a common experience for many, many women. I think a lot of us go through seasons of life, whether it's because of hormones or it's because of the season that our kids are in. I remember a season like that for me, in the late teen years, before we became empty nesters. I remember being so *exhausted* every single day.

I think there's a cumulative effect that a lot of mothers feel—it just kind of builds—so that by the time you're in your 40s or pushing 50, there's this general fatigue with life.

I think that *is* a kind of suffering because we do live in a broken world and that *is* a difficult thing to deal with because it affects everything about you—it affects your marriage, your kids that are still at home, your perception of yourself, your perception of life, your enjoyment of life. I think that those really can be called kinds of suffering.

So the answer—and I don't want this to sound like a pat answer because there isn't a pat answer—but I think the bottom line is continuing to believe God—that He is in control—and that this too shall pass. It's pulling back and looking at the big picture.

I describe this as watercolor painting in my book because one of the things about creating a painting is—you come up with an initial sketch—you’ve got to decide where the horizon line is, and what’s going to be your focal point. Often, when you’re doing a painting of any kind—and even a sculpture, although I don’t do that—I think the same principle is true with any kind of art—you have to pull back. One of the things that’s important about doing a painting is—you walk six feet away and look from it—or maybe even farther—and you see the *whole* more clearly when you’re away from it.

The same is true in our lives—we need to pull back—remind ourselves of the big picture: “God is in control. He still loves me. He’s working good in my life, even though I don’t see it or feel it and I don’t know what the outcome is going to be. I can trust Him.” I think the message is, “Don’t quit when it gets hard.” Our temptation is to want to run away when things get hard or when things get difficult—to escape from the pressure, escape from the pain—escape from whatever it is that you’re feeling as a result of the suffering.

But God is saying, “No. Stay there—I’m with you. I won’t abandon you. I’m going to use this for good.”

Dennis: Back to the motif or the illustration of watercolors—I’ve watched, Bob—I’ve watched Barbara create paintings—and it’s fascinating how she shows off light. You would think that would be pretty simple, but to a non-artistic person like me, it’s fascinating how you use *dark* colors to show off the light.

What Barbara’s actually talking about here is—I think that God allows the darkness—God allows the valleys—He allows the disappointments and the unmet expectations—those things to come into our lives to create some contrast that will call us to trust Him. Because, frankly, if everything went our own way,—

Barbara: —we wouldn’t need Him or we wouldn’t trust Him.

Dennis: —we wouldn’t need God.

Barbara: Yes.

Dennis: We could live our whole lives just being “happy.”

Well, you know what? *That* isn’t going to happen!

Barbara: Right.

Dennis: You’re not going to be able to live “a happy life.”

Bob: But I do think there are a lot of wives who—when they are not happy—they’re in a prolonged season, where, “I just haven’t felt happy for a while,”—they start to look around and go, “Okay, how come I’m not feeling happy? Who’s the cause of this!?” [Laughter] Guess who

is the closest person there to take the blame for—"I'm not happy! It's got to be something *he's* doing! If *he* was doing his job, I'd be happy!"? Do you think that's right?

Barbara: Do I think it is right that she's thinking that?

Bob: Yes.

Barbara: Well, no! It's not right that she's thinking that. [Laughter]

Bob: Is it accurate that she might be thinking that?

Barbara: Oh, I think it's common.

Bob: Yes! But it's not right.

Barbara: But it's not right; yes. [Laughter] I mean, it's very easy to blame somebody else. That's one of the hard things about marriage—is that it's so easy for both of us—husband or wife—to blame the person who's right there because they're handy.

It's really easy to find fault and say, "Well, if you only...my life would be so much better."

But that's not really what the reason is. The real reason is that God—because He's our Father, and He's a loving, kind, gracious Father—is so patient—and He's saying to us, "You need this right now. This will be for your good right now. I know you don't like it—I know it doesn't feel good, but I've got purposes and I've got plans for you. You will be glad in the end."

Most people who have been through suffering—whether it's shallow, small things or really deep, tragic things—can say, on the other side, "I didn't enjoy it—I didn't like it, but I knew God better—I came to know *Him* better as a result. I wouldn't trade that for anything." I've heard so many people say that, and I would say it's true about us too. We've learned more about God in the valleys than we have on the high places and hills in the sunshine.

Dennis: I just want to read a couple of passages, just based upon all Barbara is talking about here. If you're going through a hard time, I'd like to recommend the best-seller—the Bible—and the Book of 1 Peter, which was written to a group of people, who had been scattered and who were followers of Christ. They were called the *diaspora*—they were scattered saints, having to represent Christ in cultures that punished them for it.

Barbara: Well, they weren't just scattered—because we tend to think of scattered as they are just living in different places—but they lost homes—possessions. I mean, they had really experienced some difficult traumas that we face today when houses burn down and we go bankrupt and we lose everything. That puts a little more context in what these people were living in.

Bob: They were refugees—not just scattered—but refugees.

Barbara: Yes.

Dennis: So I just want to read what God wanted to say to some folks who were going through some hard times. Just listen to how God coaches and gently nudges people who are in the valley.

1 Peter, Chapter 3, verse 13. “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”

But listen to this conclusion to this passage: “For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”

So you hear the Scripture calling us to have the right perspective of our valley. Don’t just look at it from a human perspective. Wherever you are, maybe pull out this book and read 1 Peter, Chapter 3. Then, across the page, go look at Chapter 4, verse 12 and listen to what Peter says here: “Beloved, don’t be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”

I’ve got to stop there because I think we, as human beings, are really odd. We think, when we get married, there’s never going to be a valley. It’s in the fine print of the marriage covenant—you’re going to go through testing—through trials. But listen to this—verse 13 of Chapter 4: “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.”

The Bible so calls us away from our temporary thinking—from how I’m feeling right now. It’s calling you, not to live by feelings, but it’s calling you to faith. Are you going to believe that that’s true? As a couple, will you allow the things that are coming at you to bind your hearts to His—first of all to God’s—but then, secondly, to one another and to not give up?—and as Barbara said, “...not quit and not toss the towel in.” We’re talking to people, right now, who have secretly—or maybe verbally—threatened divorce to their spouse. I mean, it is commonplace in our culture. But this is the biblical way to look at suffering, and the biblical way to run the race all the way to the finish line.

Bob: Well, what I’ve heard both of you saying throughout this is—first of all, “Trials are coming; so be ready, and the way you get ready is by learning how to trust God in the sunshine so that, when you’re in the valley, you’ve already learned what walking by faith looks like. You don’t wait to get to the valley to learn.”

Dennis: You don’t wait ‘til the storm comes and it starts raining to go up on top of the roof to—

Bob: —to fix the leak.

Dennis: —to fix the leak.

Bob: And then, the second thing is, “When you’re in the valley and the circumstances are pressing, you have to pull back—step away from the painting, get the bigger picture—and counsel your own soul with what you know is true in the sunshine.”

Barbara: Yes.

Bob: “Preach it to yourself in the shadow. That’s how Jesus walks through that with you.”

So a wife who finds herself in a season of suffering—whether it’s the mild malaise we talked about earlier, where it’s just discouragement, or whether it’s a significant period of suffering—she has to counsel her own soul and remind herself of what’s true and hang onto that.

Barbara: And she needs to realize that God wants to use the hard times for the good of her marriage.

It’s not just for her good or her husband’s good, or for the betterment of some circumstance, but God really wants to use these difficulties to help them, as a couple—a husband and a wife, grow closer together. We suffer differently—we handle things differently, but that’s part of what God wants to do to help us become more one—is for me to share what I’m feeling when we’re suffering, and for me to listen to Dennis share what he’s feeling or, when he doesn’t share what he’s feeling, to trust that God is at work in his soul. As we go through that experience together, it bonds us together more than on days when we’re not struggling.

Dennis: What I’d have to say to that is—I wish, at this point, I could reach through the radio—whether it’s a phone, or a computer, or your car, or in your shop—wherever you’re listening—and just put an arm around you and say, “Oh, we have such a shallow view of love!”

Barbara: Yes.

Dennis: We think love is like the movies depict it—a couple walking off in the sunset, arm in arm, with the soft breeze, and the music swelling, and people applauding. The reality is—a lot of love is learned in the valley, where two people aren’t feeling the same thing—where two people aren’t finding a lot of romance because there’s no room in the valley, sometimes, for romance. It’s where two people learn how to really love because they meet the God of love in the valley, and they begin to understand He loves them—that’s what they’re supposed to reflect to one another.

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We'd love to hear from you.

Thanks for listening. Thanks to Larry Loraine, Dennis Leake, Rhonda Street, and our entire broadcast team. We hope you've enjoyed the broadcast and that you'll be back for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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