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Relating to Adult Singles

Guests: Dennis and Barbara Rainey
From the series: Relating to Your Adult Children (Day 3 of 5)
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Bob: As a parent, what do you do when one of your adult children faces difficulty—they come to you, asking for help? Do you help out? Dennis Rainey says, “Maybe, but be careful.”

Dennis: If you've got a child who has a pattern and a habit of irresponsible behavior, I think you dare not rescue them.

Barbara: I agree.

Dennis: You can't rush in and say, "Oh, let me help!" And some parents get their sense of importance and their own personal self-identity in terms of their relationship with their adult children. What they don't realize is they're raising children to become dependent upon them and not learn the lessons of life God has for them.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. As a parent, how can you tell when you ought to step in and help out and when you shouldn't? We'll talk about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. You hear—it's almost become a cliché—people will say, "Kids grow up so fast." And they do grow up fast; but there are times, when you look at them, and you think they ought to be more grown up than they are, and they haven't. Part of our assignment, as parents, is to help finish that job—to make sure we have pointed them to what adulthood is supposed to look like and gotten them ready for when full adulthood arrives. Then, when that happens, our relationship with them needs to transition away from what it's been to something different; doesn't it?

Dennis: We have to move from being authoritative parents to affirming them, as adults, and then begin to relate to them, not as a parent in charge of them, but instead relate to them more as a peer, although we'll always be a parent with them.

Bob: That's right. You've been defining adulthood this week as—what is it?—independently dependent; right?

Dennis: Independently dependent upon Jesus Christ.

Bob: That's where you want your children to be.

Dennis: That's right. We want our children to have a faith of their own and learn how to live life under God's authority.

Barbara—who joins us again on *FamilyLife Today*—Barbara and I have—well, it sounds easy in the studio; but it's been an interesting process of releasing six of our children now through this transition phase toward adulthood and watching, now, five out of six get married. Hello! It's an interesting process—trust me!

Bob: Barbara, welcome back to the program.

Barbara: Thanks.

Bob: We've talked about the transition that begins when the kids leave home for college, or for career, or maybe they're still home for awhile as they get established in a career / in a job.

We've also said we're aiming for a day that is a full-release day / an emancipation day. Did you memorialize that / did you ceremonialize that? In other words, did you have a dinner or an event, where you said: "Congratulations!—here's the title deed to the car," or whatever you did to launch them into adulthood?

Barbara: We did more of a ceremony upon graduation from high school, going into college and on their own, than we did going into adulthood. The real ceremony, when we officially said they were adults, was when they packed up the U-Haul® and pulled out of the driveway—that was the real ceremony.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: I think there are times when we, as parents, need to help our kids out—getting started—but we do need to be very careful that we're not using our position in life to just carve out a place for them where they don't have their own identity.

Bob: You know, I think most of us are aware that when children get married, we're supposed to have a new relationship with them. But there is a phase between, I don't know, the end of college and the time that they get married—that may be a couple of years—and they are adults but not married. That's kind of an awkward phase for us, as parents, to know what our responsibility should be—particularly, I think, for girls.

Barbara: I think it's a little bit different for girls. Two of our children moved into that phase, unmarried—one was a son, and one was a daughter. It was different with our

daughter than it was with our son. I felt a little bit more responsibility to help her with things. For instance, we went to visit her when she was still single and living in Atlanta. She picked us up from the airport, and we're driving down the freeway. Dennis said: "Your car feels kind of funny. Have you had it checked lately?" And she said, "Oh, yes; I had the oil changed,"—whatever. Well, when we got where we were going, he got out and looked at it. Her wheels—I mean, the tires on her car were nearly bare.

Dennis: You could see the steel belts.

Bob: Oh, really?—yes.

Barbara: And she just—even though she did some minor car repair with her car when she was in college—I mean, you know, we told her, "Go get your oil changed," and all that kind of stuff—she never really was responsible for it totally on her own. And now she was, and she just didn't—she had no idea why her car was shaking. It didn't occur to her that there was anything wrong with it. She just thought it was the car, or the road, or whatever. We felt a little bit more a sense of responsibility to protect her and to help her take care of that.

Bob: Now, did she need four tires?

Dennis: Oh, yes! And the interesting thing was—is that took just about every penny she had in savings; and yet, she got a chance to see God's providential care, because some of our closest friends in Atlanta—well, we happened to be staying with them. They overheard the conversation—told us where to take the car to get the tires put on—

Barbara: —because they knew somebody locally who would give her a good deal and wouldn't overcharge her. That's a problem for these kids—because they don't know, when they're in a new city, who to go to and they can be taken advantage of. We were concerned about that, as her parents.

Dennis: Yes; and it turned out to be more than tires. She needed brakes too. I mean, you know, it was—I think it was \$500 or \$600. These are really good friends; because they said: "You know, we realize Rebecca is working with young people today and leading high school girls to Christ in Atlanta.

Barbara: Right.

Dennis: "We would like to participate in her ministry by supplying the tires and the brake pads for her car." They took care of it, and so here she got a chance to see God provide for her in a very specific way. Now, God doesn't always do that.

Bob: Yes; and that's what I was going to say.

Let's say you didn't have friends who stepped in and did that. Your daughter calls and says: "I just took the car to the shop. It's \$600, because they say I need brakes in addition to tires. Mom/Dad, I don't have \$600. What do I do?"

Barbara: I'm not sure what we would have done if she had not had the money. She had been saving money. That's part of the reason why this was so traumatic for her; because when she realized what this was going to cost, it would have taken every penny that she had saved up until that point. She was just overwhelmed. But if our friends hadn't stepped in, we would not have stepped in and paid for her tires.

Bob: You wouldn't have bailed her out? You wouldn't have done it?

Barbara: I don't think so—would we have?

Dennis: Well, you know, since it involved a single woman in a major city on the freeways, driving back and forth to work, I don't know. [Laughter]

Barbara: If she hadn't had the money, we might have helped her—I don't know what we would have done—but she had the money to cover it if they hadn't stepped in. So it was a good lesson, I know.

Dennis: I'm glad I didn't have that choice, Bob.

Bob: This is one of the big areas—when we talk about your, now, adult children and that day of full emancipation—the financial side of things is where it all gets sticky; isn't it?

Barbara: It really is.

Dennis: And it gets really foggy, too, as to where we need to be careful we don't step in and rescue our children from irresponsibility.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: Now, if you've got a child, who has a pattern and a habit of irresponsible behavior, I think you dare not rescue them.

Barbara: I agree.

Dennis: You can't rush in and say, "Oh, let me help." Some parents get their sense of importance and their own personal self-identity in terms of their relationship with their adult children. What they don't realize is they're raising children to become dependent upon them and not learn the lessons of life God has for them.

Bob: So how do you as a parent decide whether this a time you should help bail a child out or this is a time you let them go?

Barbara: I think what we probably would have done is because it would have been her first major car crisis, first time she ran the tires off on her car and didn't really know because of the freeway and the traffic. If she hadn't had the money and God hadn't provided, we might have helped her out and said, "We're going to do this this one time because we want you safe. That's more important to us than anything that your safe. I think if it was the first time we might have gone ahead and helped, but had she done it again we would have been very reluctant to help a second time because then that would be establishing a pattern for her that when she gets in a crisis she calls us and we rescue her.

Dennis: I think if we had helped her, it just might have been that we said, "Instead of you going in debt to a credit card, we'll either do half of this or you can pay us back over the next six months." Because here's what happens, Bob, if you run in and you pay for all of this and then you get a phone call from your daughter "Well where are ya?" "Well, we're just having a blast at Disney World and we flew down here over the weekend. It's so much fun." And you begin to go, was I just taken for a ride?

Bob: You didn't buy tires, you bought a trip to Disney World.

Dennis: That's exactly right. Then as parents you are tempted to really resent what you sacrificed again on behalf of that child.

Bob: You know, this issue of a child becoming financially independent is a challenge. There is another challenge, though, and that is how much freedom and independence should an adult child have in terms of relationships?

What about when an adult son—a 25-/26-year-old—comes and says, "I think I've met the one that is the one that I want to marry"—does a parent say: "Well, that sounds great. Send us an invitation to the wedding," or do you get more actively involved in the process than that?

Dennis: Bob, I think a lot of parents don't play all the cards they have in their hand when it comes to this decision. I think we, as parents, need to be involved in this aspect of their children's lives. The reason is—this is a life-determinative decision. Who you marry really determines what—not merely *how* you're going to live—but the spiritual plane on which you live and where you are going to raise your children and under what values.

As parents, I think if there is a time to step into your children's lives—and to disagree with them, or to throw your body in front of the train as they are running and rushing headlong into marriage—it's right here. We've done this on two or three different

occasions with our children. Bob, I'll tell you—it's one of the riskiest things Barbara and I have ever done in our relationship with our children. Interestingly enough, it's not occurred around our sons—it's been around our daughters, who I do think need a dad and a mom to help them navigate these waters.

Barbara: I remember, with two of our girls, stepping in. I think what I want to say is—there's a huge difference in letting your children fail, financially, as in bouncing checks or some of those kinds of things, and fail in the most important decision that they make.

With our oldest daughter, she was dating a young man who, outwardly, had everything we were looking for.

And yet there was something inside of me and in Dennis, too—I think, if I remember right—we both felt this way.

Dennis: Yes; but you stronger than me.

Barbara: Yes; but there was something that just wasn't right. I remember going for walks. When I'd go walking in the mornings, I'd say: "Lord, what is it that I don't feel good about? What is it that I don't like?" I would mentally go through this checklist and go, "Well, he's this, and he's this, and he's this," and all these things that we thought we wanted in a husband for our daughter; but there was something inside—it was kind of an intuitive thing—that didn't feel right. As we talked and prayed about it, that didn't change.

I remember driving to Memphis to meet Ashley for lunch one day. It's a two-hour drive for me, and it was a two-hour drive for her. She was a junior in college at the time. We met in Memphis for lunch. I went with the express purpose of talking her out of this relationship and convincing her that this was not the person that she needed to be marrying.

Dennis: And I want to say here, Bob—that trip that she made came about after a lot of prayer—

Barbara: A lot.

Dennis: —and a lot of discussion on our part. It also came after Barbara and I had counted the cost that this might cost us our relationship with our daughter—she was that much "head over heels" with the young man. We also realized that we had to handle it appropriately; because if she decided to ignore our counsel, and then decided to share what we were saying with the young man, we would be dead on arrival at the wedding.

Bob: —and for the rest of the marriage.

Dennis: Absolutely—there would be no relationship / virtually, no chance of a relationship. It would be a remarkable man or woman who could look past that kind of—well—

Barbara: —concern.

Dennis: Yes; intrusion—we inserted ourselves into that relationship. I remember another conversation that we had with Ashley on our way from Little Rock to another city, where we talked to her again. These were *hard* discussions with our firstborn daughter.

Bob: And I want to ask you about them, because you talk about throwing yourself in front of the train. Were you saying to her: "Your dad and I could not support this. We couldn't come to a wedding." I mean, there are different levels, or were you just saying: "Boy, we've got some real concerns; and we want you to think about this. It's going to be your decision, but ..."

Barbara: I think what we were doing is—I think we had had some of those smaller, more minor, so to speak, conversations along the way on the phone. But when I drove to Memphis, it was a lot more significant—primarily because I was taking the time, and she was taking the time.

It was not just a phone call; and I drove over there to say—not just "We have concerns," because that had already been expressed—I drove over there to say: "We really don't feel like this is God's will for you," and "We really are concerned and want to plead with you to reconsider."

I don't remember what I said, honestly—I don't remember what words I used—but I remember that it was very difficult to do. I remember that she didn't respond. She said: "I appreciate you taking the time to come over here. I've heard what you said, but I don't agree with you. I'm not going to call it off—I'm not going to break up with him."

I remember leaving and driving home. I had to pull over to the side of the road for a few minutes because I was crying so hard I couldn't drive—because I felt like I'd lost her. It was a real vivid—it's a real vivid memory for me. I was driving out of the city, and she was actually behind me. At the point where I kept going west to Little Rock, and she had to take this turn to go south to go back to Ole Miss—I watched her car. I just remember feeling like she was gone and that it was over—the relationship was over because she just made it so clear that she did not agree with her mom and dad—that she thought we were *totally* missing it—she was right, and we were *wrong*. It was a very, very hard situation.

Dennis: And I want to say this—to step into your emerging adult child's life and speak

for God, you better be sure you're speaking for God—the Scriptures really warn against that. But I'm going to tell you—as we evaluated that relationship, as we observed, as we went to the Scriptures—it really wasn't right / it wasn't best for Ashley. God used that conversation that Barbara had in Ashley's life to get her attention—He used us / He used her brothers, interestingly enough, who also went to her.

Bob: You didn't set them up on this deal; did you?

Dennis: No; they kind of independently had conversations with her, where she began to see "I'm in a tough spot."

Barbara: It wasn't just us—it was her brothers too—and so that—it made the choice more significant, on her part, to reject those who knew her best and loved her most for her decision. Interestingly, God also used the young man that she eventually married. I don't know that he had any intentions of dating Ashley, either, at the time; but I remember her calling me on the phone and telling me what Michael said. Inwardly, I went: "Oh, he is so right! I am so glad God allowed him to talk to her," because she respected him as a friend; and he didn't have the same motives that her family had. He was an outside source, looking in; and God used him too. It was gracious of God to work all of that out to prevent her from making a poor choice.

Bob: How long from the time you had lunch with her and thought you'd lost her until she broke off the relationship?

Barbara: Probably about two-and-a-half months.

Bob: Wow!—a tough two-and-a-half months for you.

Barbara: Yes.

Dennis: And I want to be quick to say too—that young man is a valuable young man.

Barbara: Yes; and this is not against *him*.

Dennis: It really wasn't; but it was just a combination of things we saw in their relationship that made it not right.

To say nothing is the easiest thing. The more courageous thing is to step in, and to say it in a way that gains you the greatest chance of being heard, and then to step back and pray, and allow God to do the work. It really is a sacred and a holy moment to be able to step into your children's lives. If you do that, you better make sure you're in agreement, as a couple, and that you've counted the cost of what you're going to say and what you're going to do.

Bob: —and that you use some wisdom in how you approach it.

Dennis: And, Bob, after you're a part of maybe a breakup like that, as parents, you can't be just a demolition derby, where you're destroying relationships or breaking up relationships. You have to step back into your children's lives and refurbish hope. One of my favorite quotes for single young women and for single young men is by a great English preacher by the name of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. It's very simple—he said, "Faith is the refusal to panic."

"Can you trust God with these circumstances? Can you believe that God is the God of hope?—that He can replace the hurt, the disappointment, and the breakup of this relationship with something far better?"—something spoken of in Romans, Chapter 12:2—"...that which is good, acceptable, and perfect—the will of God."

As parents, we've got to speak the words that, at points, divide; but we also have to speak the words that bring faith and encouragement, especially to these young adults who don't—you know, they don't have the knowledge of God and trusting Him for all these issues. We have to minister to them, and come alongside them, and be careful not merely to preach at them but to comfort them and encourage them.

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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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