The Deadly Traps of Adolescence

Guest: Dennis and Barbara Rainey

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Woman: Honey, let's do something fun tonight.

Man: Yeah. How about let's watch some TV.

Woman: No, no, no, no, I was thinking more of like a game.

Man: Yeah, that's a good idea. I think the game is on right now.

(sound of football game on TV)

Woman: I am not talking about a TV game. I'm talking about a board game.

Man: Oh.

Woman: You know, a board game with the kids.

Man: Yeah.

Woman: Okay, if not a board game, how about we read to them? That would be so great.

Man: Yeah. I know – we could do that after the game.

Woman: Which game?

Man: The game on TV. It's starting right now.

Bob: So how about it – did you get the family together, you watch a little TV – does that qualify as family time? Not according to Barbara Rainey. But why not?

Barbara: Well, there really are several reasons. One of them is because I feel like it's not a relational time. It's not building family unity and togetherness. We may be sitting together in the same room, but it's not building our family, it's not allowing for communication between
us, and it takes us away from doing other things that I feel like are more important that we could be doing either together as a family or even individually, for that matter.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, July 17th. Our host is the president of FamilyLife, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. There may be a media monster on the loose at your house, so what do you do to get rid of it? Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today, thanks for joining us on the Tuesday edition. Just the fact that you have media in your home doesn't mean you've got a monster in your home, but in a lot of homes, whether it's the Internet or the television or other forms of media, things have gotten a little out of control. In fact, we're going to be encouraging our listeners next month to enjoy a fast from television. We'll talk more about that in coming day here on our program.

But, I was thinking, as we've been talking this week about teenagers and some of the challenge they face, media is one of those challenges, and one of the reasons that things like this are a challenge for our sons and our daughters in the teen years is because their body gets to a point of adulthood before their minds and their emotions catch up, you know what I mean?

Dennis: Yeah, and they're not ready in their character, their emotions, their value system, or their spiritual maturity, to be able to handle what's being thrown at them, and I think one of the biggest mistakes parents make today is they start looking at these young boys and girls who begin to form adult bodies, they begin to look at us eye-to-eye, their height is up there, and we begin to make some dangerous assumptions that just because they look like an adult, they're beginning to even take on some adult mannerisms, that does not mean they are an adult.

And that's why God, I believe, has given parents to teenagers; that we, as adults, need to be careful about taking our hand off the plow. We need to keep both our hands on the plow and keep our eyes fixed on the goal, and keep headed straight down the row and persevere – not give up – don't give in to these desires that can fluctuate with teenagers.

Bob: Barbara, as you look around, you can't help but see parents who seem to be letting go of the plow much earlier than they ought to be – kids getting to the age of 9, 10, 11, 12, and parents are feeling like, "Well, our job is pretty much done."
Barbara: Yeah, I think there are a lot of parents who are letting go way too soon, and I think we see it all around us. Kids have so much freedom today. They're let loose at the mall, and they're wandering around, and they don't have the supervision that I think they need at that age.

Bob: We talked last week about the trap of peer pressure and how it snares kids. We talked about sexual immorality, and we've talked about dating, and one of the things we've realized is we've talked particularly about sexual immorality and dating is that those impulses in teenagers are being fed by the trap we're going to be talking about today, and that is the media.

Dennis: Yes and, you know, the choices that are before young people today are enormous. If a child has an hour or two to spare, think of what he has a choice between. There's books, magazines, newspapers, mail, junk mail, radio, television, cable TV, e-mail, computer software, computer games, video games, and then there's the Internet, and I feel like sometimes the Internet is trying to take over all of our homes, offering the world to our children who sit in front of computer screens to be entertained by choices that, in many cases, are evil.

Bob: In the book that the two of you have written, "Parenting Today's Adolescent," you say that when it comes to media, we live in a media-driven world and, for parents, we have to look not only at what our children are choosing to consume but in what quantity. It's not just an issue, Barbara, of what they're involved with but the amount of time they're investing in media-related activity.

Barbara: I think we need to be really careful as parents that we don't allow our kids to just veg out with media, whether it's the computer or music or television or radio or whatever and become static and become just like a vegetable and just be there. I think kids this age still need lots of activity, they need lots of – they just need a lot of variety in their lives, and they don't need to be consumed with all this information that's out there via media.

Dennis: You know, I am so glad I'm married to this woman, because I think I would have been the original veg. Early on in our marriage, she would walk in – when we had no children – and she would circle my easy chair that I was trying to watch "The Game of the Weekend" on Saturday, and she would circle that chair, Barbara would – kind of like I was roadkill, and a little bit like buzzard.
Bob: You probably looked a little like roadkill in those days.

Dennis: And she was letting me know in no uncertain terms that this was a waste of time and, early on, Barbara began to shape our family's media diet. And she put me on that diet, and it was a point of contention early in our marriage and occasionally can still be that in our family because we do have different habits and different styles when it comes to media.

But there are some women who are listening to the broadcast who feel sometimes that they need to apologize to their husbands for feeling the way they feel about the amount of media coming into your homes, and I just want to encourage you women – stand strong, stand firm. Don't nag, don't harp at your husband, but you know what? Don't give in, either. Hang tough and keep the standard up there because what you two decide on as a couple will establish – listen carefully – it will establish the environment for your home.

Bob: And the Scripture does speak, Dennis, to this issue of how we consume media, even though they didn't have cable TV in David's day.

Dennis: That's right. Psalm 101 is one of my favorite psalms. At the top of it, I have written the word "integrity," and it speaks, I think, of what we allow to come into our soul through the eye gate – and you can add the ear to this, although it's primarily speaking, I believe, to what we set before our eyes.

It says in verse 2, "I will give heed to the blameless way." Now, repeatedly, in this series that we're doing on dealing with traps, we call parents to stay out of the trap. We have to set a standard. We have to model what we're challenging our children to do, and the psalmist said, "I will begin by giving heed to the blameless way."

It goes on, "When wilt thou come to me? I will walk within my house in the integrity of my heart." How does he do that? Verse 3, he says, "I will set no worthless thing before my eyes. I hate the work of those who fall away. It shall not fasten its grip on me. A perverse heart shall depart from me. I will know no evil."

There's the picture there, I believe, of a trap that a man or a woman can walk off into, and it fastens its grip on a dad and, before long, we become the gateway into our children's lives for them to be able justify their diet of all these media choices that they have.
Down in verse 6 – the last part of that verse makes a profound statement, I believe, that every parent needs to grab hold of – "He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me."

A parent needs to realize that we, as fathers and mothers, are the ones who need to walk in a blameless way, because our model will give credence to our words, and that means the choices we make do have an impact on our children as they approach adolescence. That's an important time, those years preceding adolescence. You don't just train an adolescent in the middle of the teenage years. You've got to do it in those elementary years as well.

I know the answer to this question, but I'm going to ask Barbara to share with our listeners why she has been so ruthless about media in our family.

Barbara: Well, there really are several reasons. One of them is because I feel like it's not a relational time, because when we are all watching a movie or all watching TV or – some of us are, anyway, because we don't necessarily all do it together very often – but it's not a dialog, it's not a relationship, it's not building family unity and togetherness. We may be sitting together in the same room, but it's not building our family. It's not allowing for communication between us, and it takes us away from doing other things that I feel like are more important that we could be doing either together as a family or even individually, for that matter.

Dennis: If you allow it, media will become the altar where we worship. It will become the focal point of our home.

Bob: The other night I had found a great new site on the Internet, it had a lot of really interesting stuff, and I was clicking from link to link to see what all was there, when I heard my wife behind me say, "Well, goodnight." And it was said in that as to indicate "You vegetable, you vegetable" …

Dennis: "Come out in the vegetable garden, oh, you vegetable."

Bob: And I had to make that hard decision to go down to the left-hand corner and click the shutoff button down there and go and have a little conversation with one whom I had been neglecting throughout the evening. Barbara, you're nodding.

Barbara: I'm nodding. I'm going, "Way to go, Mary Ann."
Dennis: It couldn't be this husband that she's married to. I don't know who she's saying "uh-huh" about.

Bob: Well, in addition to what we model for our children, you've taken some pretty aggressive steps to set some boundaries, some standards for your children in all different areas of media consumption. Give us some ideas, for example, of TV viewing – what's acceptable and how much, Barbara?

Barbara: We generally do not allow our kids to watch television during the school week unless it is something that is very highly educational, which is rare, very, very rare. So we really just try to keep it off during the school week – for the kids, that is.

Then on the weekends, there's not a whole lot that's real great then, either, although as our kids have gotten older and there's been a lot more sport things on TV that my girls have been interested in, like ice skating, they've been watching more of that kind of thing recently than they had years ago.

But we just really limit it, and if there is going to be TV viewing on the weekend for the kids, I mean, it's limited to an hour or two, and if they're sitting in front of the TV all afternoon watching this ice skating thing, and I realize it's been over an hour, I'll walk in and say, "Hey, look, girls, this is it. You can finish the next program, and it's off, and that's it for the day."

Bob: Why? Why, after an hour, are you saying, "We're done."

Barbara: Well, usually, because there are so many other things that are a better use of their time. I just don't feel like it's teaching them anything, if they're not learning anything, it's simply vegetating in front of the TV. They're just sitting there.

They could be cleaning their rooms, they could be reading a book, they could be playing on the trampoline together, they could be, I mean, zillions of things, writing letters, I mean, it just goes on and on, and, obviously, they don't want to quit watching TV to go do chores.

But there are a lot of other things that they can be doing besides that. They could play a game together. I mean, families used to play board games together or used to do a lot of those kinds of things together as a group, and families don't do that anymore.
Bob: So now they turn off the TV and go get on the computer and play a video.

Barbara: Yes, oh, that's happened. I've said "Turn off the TV," and the next thing I know Deborah is sitting in there in front of the computer and I think, "Oh, well, that didn't work."

Dennis: Yes, I've lost this one again. All of this, thought, is based upon one of our core convictions when it comes to media, and that conviction is we, as parents, have the responsibility and the right to screen and set limits to all the different forms of media consumer by our family.

Dennis: All of this, though, is based upon one of our core convictions when it comes to media, and that conviction is we, as parents, have the responsibility and the right to screen and set limits to all the different forms of media consumed by our family.

In other words, we don't have the luxury of being passive, and I think the easiest thing for a man to do in this deal is to delegate it to his wife and let her do it and not be a protector of his family.

But, instead, we have to guard our own hearts, as the Proverbs tell us, and then we have to guard our children's hearts in protecting them from the different forms of media that come into your home, and that begins with limiting what comes in, and then whatever does come in there, I think Moms and Dads need to monitor and pay careful attention to the values that are represented in those particular forms of media.

For instance, if your child is playing a computer game, as I've watched Samuel do on occasion when he was a teenager and wasn't in college at that time. I remember – and this is a person failure. I will probably go to my grave feeling like I compromised here, but somehow he got some kind of computer game that was – it wasn't blood and guts, but there was a lot of blood, okay? They were shoot 'em up, bang-bang game, and you'd slay all these creatures and stuff, and I was watching him do this and you know what? I believe I compromised, I really do. I did not step in there and say, "Samuel, that game has no place in our home."

Instead, something about his age, maybe something about the peer pressure and all the other boys that he ran around with, and maybe it was just a soft place in my heart for him, I don't know, but I kept letting him play this game. And you know what? I'll look back on
that and wonder if I shouldn't have stepped in there earlier and said, "Absolutely not."

Bob: Because of the time involved or because of the content of the game or what?

Dennis: I think both. He spent a lot of hours playing that game but, more importantly, I think, was the content of the game. It wasn't anything sexually immoral, it didn't have any language problems on the game, it just was a guy walking …

Barbara: It was killing people all the time.

Dennis: It was just walking in an killing people and spilling blood all over the computer screen.

Barbara: I think what we're talking about is what Paul says in Philippians 4:8. It says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things."

And I think that's a good standard for us to apply, as parents, to video games that our kids play, like this one that Samuel played, or TV shows or movies or music or any form of media. We need to train our children that what they think about, what they expose themselves to needs to be pure and holy and wholesome, and if it's not, they need to question and think about it.

Bob: You know, here's a double-edged sword, and you mentioned that sometimes there are good educational programs on TV. The Internet provides a wonderful resource for getting information for term papers that are coming up. There is positive benefit associated with almost every kind of media and, as parents, we can't just isolate ourselves and go back to typewriters and candles. We have to acknowledge the fact that there's benefit, and we can redeem the media.

Dennis: Yeah and there is where, as parents, we need to do what Solomon did with his son as he taught him to be discerning. We need to teach our children to listen carefully to the values, the messages, and what's being said in the music, on the Internet, in the movie, and our children have grown weary of this stuff with us as parents.

I mean, they would have voted us out of office a long time ago, because we would go to a movie that we did approve of that was
appropriate, and we'd walk out of there, and on our way home, we
would be talking about the messages that were in that movie and
what the underlying values that were being represented in the story
line.

And our children go, "Dad, it was a great movie. Just enjoy" …

Bob: … "just leave it alone."

Dennis: "Just leave it alone, Dad." But, you know, I'm not going to leave it
alone, I'm sorry. And you know what? They may not like it right
now, but someday, I believe, as they grow into adulthood, they're
going to be far more discerning. In fact, it's already begun to occur.

I'm watching Samuel – he is being far more discerning about his
movies, and I'm smiling big time, because I'm hearing some of
those same statements come from his lips that initiated from ours
when we challenged him to consider, what were those messages?

I think another thing, too, Bob, is ask your children questions. Hold
them accountable for what they're viewing, what they're looking at,
and make sure what they're doing on the Internet is that they're not
sneaking around, they're not watching something they shouldn't be
looking at.

Bob: You mentioned this earlier, but one of the challenges we face as
parents today is that it seems like we've got to be an expert on
every area of pop culture. I mean, your child comes home and
says, "I got the new CD from so-and-so, and you've never heard of
so-and-so, and you don't know whether that's a good thing or a bad
thing.

Or, "I want to go see this particular movie," and you've never heard
of the movie, you don't know anything about the movie. All you
know is that your child says that so-and-so from church, their
parents are letting them go see it and, for all you know, so-and-so
from church is telling his parents that you're letting your child go
see it, and so both of you wind up letting your son or your daughter
go see something that you otherwise would not approve of.

I've been grateful that there are resources on the Internet. I know
Focus on the Family has a website called "Plugged In Online," and
they do movie reviews and so we can go there and look ahead of
time and see what the themes are in the movies, what the
objectionable elements are.
There are other websites that do the same kind of thing, and I had one of my children come to me not long ago and said, "Can I see this movie? My friend went to see it, and my friend said that there are only a couple of bad words in the movie."

And I said, "Well, let's check this out. We'll go to the Web and see what we can find out, and it turned out there weren't just a few bad words, but there were 20 or 25 bad words in this movie, including some that are fully inappropriate for children, and I showed it to my teenager, and I said, "Isn't that interesting? I think a lot of these words have become so common that your friend has become desensitized to what he was hearing."

Dennis: One of the things we sought to do in the book was give parents a better understanding of all the ratings systems, both for television, for movies, and other forms of media that they can look over so that they can be better appraised.

There are ratings for computer games, and parents need to know what those ratings mean. Most of us are unaware of what those ratings stand for on a box that contains a computer game that you may spend anywhere from $40 to $50 for.

One thing I would add to all these ratings – I don't trust them. After I've said here they are and this is a form of measurement, most of these ratings are far too generous and, in my opinion, they represent what's happening in our culture – the moral dumbing-down of our nation. And, as parents, I think what we've got to do is ultimately train our children to be young men and women who are discerning. It could destroy their lives if we don't raise teenagers today to have a godly discernment about what they allow in their minds and their hearts.

Barbara: And I just want to say, too, that I think it's important that, as parents, that we remember that there is so much more that our kids need besides just information and just entertainment. Our kids need to be playing, they need to be exercising, they need to be outside, and they need to be building relationships, and so much time is spent consuming media cuts that avenue of their life off, and it's an important part of their development that we dare not ignore.

Bob: And I think that's where your book is very helpful, because it does challenge us in these areas, and I'd encourage our listeners get a copy of the book, "Parenting Today's Adolescent," by Dennis and Barbara Rainey.
We've got it in our FamilyLife Resource Center, you can go to our website at FamilyLife.com to request a copy, or you can call 1-800-FLTODAY, that's 1-800-358-6329. Someone on our team can let you know how you can get a copy of this book or, again, you can order from our website at FamilyLife.com.

If you go to our website, you click the red "Go" button that you see in the middle of the screen. That will take you to the area of the site where there is more information about Dennis and Barbara's book. You can order it online, if you'd like, or call 1-800-FLTODAY and someone on our team will let you know how you can get a copy of this book sent out to you.

When you do get in touch with us, if you are able to help with a donation of any amount for the ministry of FamilyLife Today, I just want to say in advance, we would appreciate whatever you can do to help support the ministry. We're listener-supported, and it's donations from folks like you that keep this program on the air in this city and in other cities all across the country.

And this month we wanted to say thank you for your financial support by making available a brand-new resource from Dennis Rainey called "Interviewing Your Daughter's Date." This is a very practical guidebook for dads to help us with the information we need and to help give us some courage as we begin to engage young men who show up around our house and are interested in taking our daughters out to spend an evening with a group of kids.

We had to spend a little time talking with those young men before we give our approval to that, and Dennis walks us through that process in this new book. We'd love to send you a copy, again, as our way of saying thank you for your financial support for this ministry.

You can make a donation online at FamilyLife.com, and if you do that, when you come to the keycode box on the donation form, just type in the word "date" so we'll know to send you a copy of this book. Or make your donation by calling 1-800-FLTODAY and just mention that you'd like a copy of the free book from Dennis this month. We're happy to send it out to you and let me say thanks in advance again for your support of the ministry. We appreciate your partnership with us.

Tomorrow we want to talk about one of the other deadly traps that has been laid for our teenagers, and it's tied to the media trap
we've been talking about today. It's the issue of pornography. I hope you can be with us as we deal with that subject tomorrow.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We'll see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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