Bob: Your child is a complete person—body, soul, spirit. As parents, we need to be addressing every dimension of our child’s life including the spiritual dimension. Barbara Rainey says to help shape a child’s spiritual identity, we need to introduce them to the God who created them.

Barbara: Helping them understand that God is good, and that God has great plans and purposes for you, and that He loves you. I mean, what a privilege for a mom and a dad to be able to communicate those wonderful truths about God to your children. Because it helps them see Him as He really is—but it also helps them begin to feel good about who God made them to be—and that’s a part of developing a healthy identity.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, January 29th. Our host is Dennis Rainey. I'm Bob Lepine. Helping to shape and mold a child’s spiritual identity is one of the great responsibilities and one of the great privileges we have as parents.

We'll explore that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us.

We’re talking this week about an aspect of parenting that—I think parents recognize as we’re in the process of raising our kids—we recognize that this is something that is important. I just don’t know that we—that I ever put a label on it. That I am helping to shape my child’s identity as they grow—helping them get a sense of self—a good understanding of who they are.

Although I have to tell you—and there’s some parents who are just going to be mortified by this—but when our daughter Amy was born—when she was still a little baby before she could speak,

I would take her up in my lap and I would talk to her. I would bounce her on my lap and I would say “You’re so cute. You know you’re so cute.” And then I’d say “You’re also depraved. You are totally depraved.” [Laughter] “You’re a wicked sinner.” I’d do that as I bounced her, and she’d smile and giggle and laugh while I’d talk about it.

Dennis: We should call Amy and find out how that—
Barbara: —damaged her.

Bob: —scarred her for life? Well there’s—I have to tell you another story real quick. She likes telling the story. We were driving home from summer camp and she was asking a question about her—her virtue—like her good works. I don’t know how the conversation came along but the dialogue was that no matter how good her best works were on any day they would always be tainted with the reality of sin. Well somehow in her 11-12-year-old heart, that was terrible news—[Laughter]—that she could never have a good work that would be a 100% pure.

Dennis: Pleasing—Pleasing to God, yes.

Bob: Right. She shared this story with some of her friends who think I was a terrible parent for telling a 12-year-old that their works would always be tainted by sin. I thought I was just being biblically accurate as I was raising my kids but helping them understand their identity. A big part of that is helping them understand their spiritual identity—who they are apart from Christ, who they are in Christ, and how all of that plays out for them.

Dennis: I’m tempted to run a straw poll—from our listeners—about how many think Bob—

Bob: —think Bob was cruel. [Laughter]

Dennis: —was cruel by doing that.

Bob: I don’t want to know.

Dennis: I don’t really want to know either. Here’s the thing. Our identity—who we are—determines what we become. I’ll give you an illustration of this.

By the way, we haven’t introduced Barbara—Barbara, my bride for now 46 plus years, joins us again on FamilyLife Today. Welcome back.

Barbara: Thanks. Glad to be here as always. It’s fun.

Dennis: Great mom of six—Gramma of 24. We’re in the thick of this thing called “next generation” right here.

Anyway, I was going to tell you a story about what happened to me when I was a senior in high school. I was in a magazine subscription contest. We were raising money to go on a senior trip. So, the subscriptions back then for Outdoor Life or Time magazine—all the magazines were only two or three dollars—so it wasn’t exactly a big-time ticket item for somebody to buy them.
I started off going to this small town called Ozark, Missouri—where I grew up—a town of 1300 people. I went door to door and I made a couple of sales, but I didn’t do quite well. I thought, “This is not cutting it so I’m going to the farmers. I’m going out in the sticks where there’s people out there who—maybe they’ve got common sense and they’ll buy these magazines subscriptions from me.”

So I started going door to door. The first one—I just happened on it that the lady answered the door and I said “Hi, I’m Dennis Rainey. I’m Hook Rainey’s son.” “Oh, Hook Rainey’s son. Come on in. Have some cookies and milk. What have you got there? Subscriptions. Oh, we’d like two or three of those subscriptions, of course.” I thought, “Whoa, that was pretty good.” I went to the bank on my dad’s—on my dad’s brand out in the county—this Christian county believe it or not.

I set a school record for most number of stuffed animals that I won—most subscriptions. It was a huge number because of my dad’s identity—Hook Rainey. By the way, they called him Hook because he had a wicked curve ball. It was the only thing wicked about him. Now, Bob, I know you’d say he’s still wicked but [Laughter] —anyway, Hook Rainey had a name that was as good as gold in the community—lived his whole life there.

But I went to the bank on his identity because I was his son.

Now here’s the deal as you raise your children. First of all—if you’ve trusted in Christ—you are a child of the King. You have royal blood in your veins—as a listener—if you know Christ. As you introduce your children to Jesus Christ and help them begin their spiritual walk with Him, they too can be a royal. They can be one of the members of the royal family—the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This thing called spiritual identity—I think, Bob, is one of the most important components of helping our children reach maturity and grow into adulthood that we can possibly give them.

Bob: Barbara, the starting place as we help our kids understand their identity is to help them recognize that they are created in God’s image that they are image bearers—that they’re different than the bugs and the animals—and different than all of the rest of creation. They bear the image of the Almighty.

Barbara: Yes, and I think in addition to teaching them that they are made like Him, is teaching your children that He made them for a purpose. It’s no accident that you were born into this family. It’s no accident that God made you the way that He made you. It’s no mistake that He made you tall, or He made you fast, or whatever—and you can name those characteristics that you’ve already seen in your child. Helping them understand that God is good, and that God has great plans and purposes for you, and that He loves you.

I mean, what a privilege for a mom and a dad to be able to communicate those wonderful truths about God to your children because it helps them see Him as He really
is—but it also helps them begin to feel good about who God made them to be—and that’s a part of developing a healthy identity.

**Dennis:** This is a key assignment of every parent listening to us right now—by the way—grandparents too. What you need to do is get your Bible out and take a look at Psalm 78, verses 5 through 8. I’ll not read all of them right now, but I will read the beginning because it really anchors this point in what God commands us to do with our kids.

He says, “He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded”—now that’s God here—“which He commanded our fathers to teach their children, that the generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children,”—and that’s four generations listed here. It gives a purpose clause that follows, “so that they will not be rebellious.”

They’ll know the truth about God and they’ll know the truth about themselves—and they will learn to trust Him—and obey Him—as they walk with Him.

Bill Bright taught me a great deal about this. He wrote a book called *Discover His Character*—speaking of discovering the attributes of who God is. I think Bill nails it when he gives a list—and this is included in the book—but it just gives you an idea of understanding who God is can help us know how to behave as his children.

Listen to this list: Because God is a personal Spirit, I will seek fellowship with Him. Because God is all powerful, He can help me with anything. Because God is ever present, He is always with me.

I have to tell you, there were a lot of times in raising our kids, when Barbara and I would just need to get down on our knees next to a son or daughter who’s having a hard day as they’re going to bed and say “God’s here.”

He can comfort you. He can be trusted. You can lean in to Him.”

Why is that important? Because your child is made in the image of God. He has a body, a soul, and a spirit. Your assignment as a parent—this hit me afresh as we were writing this book—your assignment as a parent is to take your child’s hand and place it in the hand of God, and introduce your child to who God is, and what He came to do to redeem him from his selfishness.

**Bob:** When we talk to a child about the fact that they are image bearers, what is it that they need to know from that? What’s at the heart of the fact that I’m different than the animals and I’m different than the rest of creation? What does it mean that I bear the image of God?
Barbara: Well, we are definitely made above the animals. I think that our kids can see that but being made like God means that we have intellect.

We can make decisions. We have a free will. We can choose to go our way, or we can choose to go God's way. We have emotions. We've already talked about that this week on the broadcast—that God has emotions and we are made like Him and have emotions.

One way to think about this is—think about the things that we appreciate as human beings. We can watch sunset after sunset—they’re all different. We’re amazed at the beauty of God’s creation—the ocean is enthralling for people—the mountains, the heavens, the stars. When we see those things, we’re in awe and we worship. But have you ever seen a bird or a dog or a cow in awe about a sunset? They see them too—they experience them too—but they don’t have the ability—because they’re not made in God’s image—to respond to His wonders and to His works like we can as people.

So teaching your children those qualities that make them “made in the image of God” help us understand that God made us that way because He wants us to choose to have a relationship with Him.

Dennis: Some of our listeners are getting tired of hearing me quote this but A. W. Tozer said this, “The most important thing about you is what you think about God.”

We can understand who God is—it’s beyond comprehension—but we can get to know Him. Over our lifetime, we can begin to know God—experience God—which is what I think the psalmist was talking about in Psalm 78. He wants you to pass on your experience of God to your kids.

You can teach a lot of truth about God, but one of the most important things—and I’m not saying this is more important than the truth of scripture about God—but one of the most important things you can pass on to your kids, is what He did in your life today at work.

How He convicted you of a sin. How you dealt with someone and how you asked for forgiveness. How He was there and how you experienced Jesus Christ in the marketplace—at school.

I just think, Bob—I think the whole issue of raising kids today is a great challenge for parents to grow in their own faith and realize that what they’re experiencing of God needs to be real—and they need to be challenged to go deeper so they’ll have something to pass on to their kids.

Bob: It’s one thing to talk about kids being created in the image of God, but most Christian parents are hoping and praying for a day of rebirth in the life of their child. A day when that child moves from death to life—acknowledges Christ as Savior, and is
converted. As parents, that gets a little tricky because—I don’t know what it was like for you guys—but we had some kids who expressed their faith in Christ at a very early age.

We had other kids who expressed it at an early age and then didn’t seem to be living it out as they grew older. We as parents can find ourselves wondering, “Okay, that prayer they prayed at three, did that do the deal? Did they mean it?” This is a tricky thing for us to discern as parents. What is the spiritual identity of our children? How did you guys process that?

**Barbara:** We had situations very similar to yours as well. We had some of our kids who asked at four, “I want to know Jesus.” We had been talking about this their whole lives. The kids would ask “What happens when we die”—because they would have a pet die or something, so we had those conversations as just a part of normal life. We would tell our children that “when we die as people—when your mommy and daddy die, we’re going to go to heaven and be with Jesus,” so the natural conclusion for them, eventually, was “I want to go to heaven with you when I die too.”

We had those conversations, and some of our kids prayed and asked Jesus into their heart when they were four or five years old—then didn’t seem as interested for a while too. I think the most important thing is—this is just an ongoing conversation, like Dennis was saying a minute ago—where you’re talking about your relationship with Christ. You’re talking about your experience of hearing from God—of learning about Him.

Dennis and I just had dinner—a couple of nights ago—with good friends of ours and we were talking about the friendship of God, and how wonderful it is to know God as friend. I think if talking about God and having a relationship with Him is a way of life that you begin when they’re tiny—like you did with Amy on your lap—and you continue until they leave your home and even beyond—then you can encounter those difficulties along the way.

Yes, they may pray when they’re four years old, and they may not be so sure when they’re 13 but that’s okay. All of us went through those times of doubting. But, if you are talking about your life and the reality of having a relationship with Christ, your kids are going to want it. They’re going to see it for what it is—which is a real living relationship. If it’s just doctrine that you’re teaching, and you only talk about it on Sunday on the way to church when everybody’s yelling at everybody “Be quiet. We’re going to be late,” then they might not be as interested—but if you’re talking about a real experience with Christ, your kids are going to be interested.

**Dennis:** Yes, and as you were talking, Barbara, I was just thinking about some research that George Barna has done recently that indicated that only 20 percent of parents listed sharing the gospel and doing everything they could to make sure their son or daughter heard about how to go to heaven and how to have a relationship with God with their children. So 80 percent—
Bob: It’s not a priority for them

Dennis: It’s not on the radar screen.

Bob: Wow.

Dennis: So I’m glad we’re talking about this—

Barbara: Me too.

Dennis: —and I want to underscore what you said Barbara. Presenting the gospel is not a one and done. It’s over, and over, and over again explaining how a person comes into a relationship with God by faith through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He’s alive. He defeated death and because of that you can know Him right now as a young person.

When we get to heaven, we may find out that our children didn’t become Christians when they were five years old. Although Spurgeon did say “A child who knowingly sins can savingly believe.” Your child may come to faith in later life. You just don’t know what circumstances God may put in place to secure that decision with that child.

But I do know this: It is your responsibility as a parent—as a grandparent—to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with every one of your children and grandchildren.

Bob: We talked about this—I remember this was a couple of decades ago, in the early days of FamilyLife Today, we did a series on your child coming to faith.

Barbara: I remember.

Bob: In fact, it may sound odd to listen to now—20 plus years later—but this series is online. A listener can go listen to almost three plus hours of conversation around this subject.

Jim Elliff—who we were interviewing—we asked him about recognizing signs of spiritual life in a child. He said, “If my child—at any age—expresses a desire to want to be a Christian, or to give their heart to Jesus, or whatever phrase they would use,” he said “I’m going to encourage that—I’m going to celebrate that. I’m going to cheer that on. I’m going to be so excited about that—but I’m not going to go to bed and then go ‘Well, that’s done.’”

Dennis: Exactly!

Bob: He said, “What I’m going to be looking for in the life of my child is evidence of transforming grace.
Do I see something that indicates that God’s at work there? Do I see them feeling conviction for sin? Do I see them with a hunger to know God’s word? Do I see the things that accompany salvation happening in that child’s life? If I don’t, I’m not going to go back to the child and say, ‘Well I don’t think you really became a Christian.’ I’m going to keep evangelizing them. I’m going to keep sharing the gospel with them. And then when they say, ‘I think I want to pray that prayer again,’ I’m going to rejoice that time.”

It’s the continual cycle you’re talking about of just over and over again encouraging spiritual impulses in the life of a child. Then reminding them when they do sin—when they stumble—of “Is there conviction? Do they understand the work of the Holy Spirit? What’s going on in their lives?”—just evangelism and discipleship over and over again with your kids.

**Dennis:** There’s one additional way that I want to make sure our listeners can take advantage of in securing their children’s spiritual identity.

This was something that Barbara was doing constantly with our children. It was bringing great books about Christian heroes—heroes of the faith who lived out their identity on a mission and on purpose.

**Barbara:** I remember in those early days of being a brand-new Christian, I could not get enough of reading the Bible, but I also loved reading stories about other believers.

There were two that I read in my college years that were just transformational to me. One of them was *The Hiding Place.* The story of Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsy and their experience in Nazi prison camps. The other one was a story about a man named—who was named at the time Brother Andrew. Brother Andrew used to smuggle Bibles into communist countries. I was just fascinated. I was amazed. I was in awe, and it was all because I saw in these books a real relationship with Jesus.

I saw Him working in these people’s lives and I wanted more of that. So when my kids were old enough, I was reading them those books and I was finding other books like that to read to them because I think our children need more than just the testimony of mom and dad. The testimony of mom and dad and what God’s doing in our lives is number one—it’s most important—but there will always be a season in our children’s lives when they don’t want to hear anymore from mom and dad. But if you’ve been reading them stories of other believers—of other missionaries—other faith heroes through the year—they’ve got those other stories in the back of their minds.

If your introducing them to people for whom Jesus Christ is a real thriving relationship, that gives your children other people to talk to—other people to model—others to emulate in their lives. So using books in the lives of our kids was a really important way for me to help them catch a vision for what God might want to do in their lives and through their lives as they grew up.
**Dennis:** I think it’s time for families to capture the high ground of the family time at dinner—instead of just having dinner time just happen—put aside the devices. Put aside the TV. Turn everything off and get purposeful. How are you going to celebrate who God is—and help your kids see how He used other people in a broken world when they lived—so that your children will know how to be used by Him in the broken world where they live.

**Bob:** Yes, and there may be some of our listeners who’d like to go back and listen to that vintage podcast that I mentioned—the series that we did with Jim Elliff on how children come to faith in Christ. You can go to our website at FamilyLifeToday.com and click the link for that podcast, download the episodes and listen to it. Or you can listen online if you’d like. Again our website is FamilyLifeToday.com.

If you are interested in a copy of Dennis and Barbara’s book, *The Art of Parenting*, we’re making that available this week to any of you who can help support this ministry with a donation.

Go to FamilyLifeToday.com and click the button that says “Donate” and you can request your copy of *The Art of Parenting*. It’s our thank you gift when you partner with us to extend the reach of FamilyLife®—to make it possible for your friends—your neighbors—people in your community—people all around the world to be able to connect to practical biblical help and hope for their marriage and their family. As you help make that possible, we want to say “Thank you” by sending you a copy of Dennis and Barbara’s book, *The Art of Parenting*. It comes with our thanks for your support of this ministry.

And, if you’re interested in information about the Art of Parenting video series, that’s available on our website as well. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com—or call us if you have any questions or if you’d like to donate by phone. Our number is 1-800-358-6329. That’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word “TODAY.”

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to talk about the third area of identity that moms and dads need to address with their kids and that’s the one that’s most controversial in our day. It’s the area of gender identity—sexual identity. We’ll explore that tomorrow. Hope you can tune in and be with us.

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

We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you’ve benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider donating today to help defray the costs?

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