

# Married With Benefits

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## Season 1, Episode 8: Why Does He Care More About Work Than Me and the Kids?

Featured Host: Shaunti Feldhahn

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**Brian:** From the FamilyLife Podcast Network this is Married With Benefits. I'm your host Brian Goins. We are helping you love the one you're with so you can experience the real benefits of saying "I do."

This season we've formed a secret society of women and one token guy daring to ask the questions we know you're thinking but just aren't sure who to ask. We're asking our featured host Shaunti Feldhahn and this week is no exception. We've got a really complex question but a good one, "Why does my husband seem to care more about work than me and the kids? How do I talk to a husband who is prone to be a workaholic?" We're going to tackle that and a lot more in this episode.

**Shaunti:** I have gotten this question dozens and dozens of times just in the last few months alone.

**Brian:** Yeah, really?

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** Like after you're done speaking, you're--

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** Women come up and go, "Okay this is what I'm dealing with."

**Shaunti:** Yes, and we get emails and listen this is where I used to be.

**Brian:** Uh huh.

**Shaunti:** It is a very common problem, even today, where you know often in many marriages both husband and wife have full time jobs.

**Brian:** Uh huh.

**Shaunti:** But statistically what we find is that even though there are some marriages where the wife works a lot more hours than the husband it is usually the other way around.

**Brian:** Okay.

**Shaunti:** And what often happens is that the wife has made choices that are more family friendly in her employment and her number of hours, like maybe she's working more of a part-time job so that she can pick up the kids. Whatever that is she is the one who's spending a bit more time with them and she's starting to get more and more frustrated like, "I feel like I'm a single mom, like he's traveling all the time."

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** Or "He's working until 7, 8, 9 at night and he's missing Johnny's soccer games." And "Why is he working so much?" You know like, "Basically I feel like he cares about work more than about me."

**Brian:** Yeah. Well and I wonder, too, it seems like it's like even what you just said there about how for women they'll make life choices with work to go, "I need to make sure that my hours are a little different," and you don't think intuitively that comes to guys.

**Shaunti:** Well [laughs] *you're* probably going to answer that one better than I could honestly. But honestly, for men, here's what we know is emotionally underneath that: is that there is a deep, deep sense in the heart of most men of wanting to be the provider for the family and always having this—I don't know the right word to use exactly but almost like this thing hanging in the back of his mind like this cloud hanging over him like, "How am I going to provide for the family? How am I going to provide for the family?"

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** And as he gets married and as he starts to have kids—especially—it becomes this constant either conscious or subconscious pressure of constantly having to look forward. And constantly going, "Am I going to be enough? Are we going to make enough?"

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** You know, "Are we going to be able to pay for not just the mortgage but are we going to start setting aside money for the kid's tuition?" Or, you know, whatever that's going to be like. So there's this constant feeling of, "Are you kidding? I would love to be able to come home at 5:30. I would love to be able to go to all the games, but somebody's got to earn the money."

**Brian:** Well, I mean, but you think now - I mean I would especially imagine like back in the [19]50s that was more of a cultural thing where the man was always working, the wife was at home.

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** Now it's like a lot of women are making even more money than men. But you're still staying the pressure statistically is on the men more than the women.

**Shaunti:** Is different. Emotionally there is pressure no matter what. And if you are in a marriage and this is—there's plenty of marriages like this today—where the wife is the primary breadwinner and the husband is more likely to be a stay-at-home dad like there are plenty of those marriages but statistically that's still a small number. Right?

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** Statistically it is usually the case where the husband works more hours, makes more money, and sort of feels the primary sense of responsibility.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** And that sense, we as women don't realize that unless we're in that primary-breadwinner role where it is all on us we don't realize that he feels like it is all on him. Even if we make plenty of money ourselves the guy still feels this sense that it's on *me*. And, "I can't ever let my guard down." So he over--what we've found and this is not to be offensive to a guy if there happen to be a guy listening--

**Brian:** I'm about to get defensive right now. I don't even know what she's about to say. I'm like, "No it's not true."

**Shaunti:** But he almost is overestimating the possibility that something could fall apart and you know, what are the chances that something could go wrong? And so he's like, "I constantly have to be taking that extra deal. Or if there's a chance of, you know, me earning this amount of dollars if I work this many hours, but if I earn even more dollars if I work these other hours then I feel like I *have* to do that in order to sort of keep things going or it all could fall apart."

**Brian:** Yeah.

**Shaunti:** And statistically honestly probably that's not true. Like probably you'd be just fine if you told your boss, "You know what, gotta run." You don't need to tell him you're running to Johnny's soccer game. You can just say, "Gotta run." But he's feeling like, "I *can't do that* like that's just an unreasonable expectation.

**Brian:** Yeah. And aren't we talking really about it seems like he cares more about work.

**Shaunti:** That's the problem.

**Brian:** It's this values statement of for a guy he is caring about the family but it's coming out in the sense of providing. It's coming out in the sense, "I need to keep working to make sure my family's okay."

**Shaunti:** And now every woman listening to this-not every-but many women listening to this are going, "Oh yeah, right!" You know. This is the disconnect, right? This is why we're tackling this topic is because there are so many women who are feeling uncared for.

Their husband gets home at 8:30 at night having worked this incredibly long day and they greet him at the door with: "I cannot believe you are so late again! Don't you care about me and the kids?" And the guy is like, "What are you talking about? Do you think I want..." This is what the men told me is that they're thinking inside, "Do you think I want to be working this much? I'm doing it because I care about you."

And that is where the disconnect happens because as we discovered in the research with women what men don't get about women is that the women would trade off that extra money and that extra stuff in order to get more of you.

**Brian:** "I'd rather not have that extra security or even perceived security because what I'm not feeling is secure within the family relationship."

**Shaunti:** So here's where the men look at me like, "Now you're kidding right?" Because Jeff and I when we do marriage conferences when we do marriage events we always will talk about the fact that women would actually trade off financial security--they would give up the stuff. They would even endure, if they had to, they wouldn't want to but if they had to they would actually endure financial hardship if that was what it took to get more of him and to have him be involved in the marriage and the life of the family.

There are very few men who believe that that's true. Most men say, "Absolutely she's lying through her teeth. Okay she says it now, but just wait until she actually does it."

**Brian:** Yeah, wait until we say, "No we can't go out to eat we've got to eat beans and franks again tonight," or whatever it might be.

**Shaunti:** And most women would absolutely make that trade off.

Seventy percent of married women on the survey said, "If I had to make the choice between eating beans and franks and not going out to dinner and getting you home so you can go to Johnny's soccer games so we can sit on a couch and watch a movie and just catch up on our day, if that's what it takes absolutely are you kidding?" As opposed to, "Oh you know I'm eating this beautiful gourmet restaurant meal--"

**Brian:** From Blue Apron or something you know flying in.

**Shaunti:** Or eating it *alone* because you had to miss dinner again because you had another client meeting

**Brian:** Right. I want to come back to that moment at the doorway. The husband's walking in the door--

**Shaunti:** At 8:30 at night.

**Brian:** --at 8:30 at night and where both of them are looking at each other going, "I don't really believe what you're going to say." It's the sense of--

**Shaunti:** [Laughs] I'm sure nobody listening to this has ever encountered that, right, like nobody. Yeah.

**Brian:** I'm going to walk in the door and the wife is going to say: "What's the deal? Why don't you seem to care about us?" And the husband's sitting here going, "Well I am caring about you but—" and both of them are looking at them going, "I don't believe you. I don't trust you. I don't trust what you're saying."

**Shaunti:** Well and it's because you're feeling unvalued. I mean, just honestly for the guy—and I'm telling you this, I'm sure you know this but you're the stand-in for every man listening so I'm going to tell you this.

**Brian:** I'm the stereotype.

**Shaunti:** Well you could pass this along to all your guys friends, okay.

**Brian:** Right, right.

**Shaunti:** Which is that the men don't realize that you have just essentially told your wife that work is more important than you are.

**Brian:** Yeah.

**Shaunti:** That's what she is feeling.

**Brian:** That's what she's feeling and hearing.

**Shaunti:** She's feeling that very, very deeply. And it is a very emotionally painful feeling which is why she reacts in this way of, "I cannot believe you did this again." Like, "What on earth?" And here is what, for any women listening to this who's in this situation—maybe it's not that exact situation but you know what that feels like and you've been trying to address it, the most important thing that you need to realize is that your husband *does* care about you.

**Brian:** So it's to give them the benefit of the doubt.

**Shaunti:** Yes, because-- and recognize he does care about you and that *he sincerely* believes, sincerely--and we would say statistically mistakenly-believes that you care more about the money he's earning than about his presence. That you care--this is what he thinks--he thinks his job and that how he's saying "I love you" is to be willing to exhaust himself to pull in and provide.

And I had so many men who've said, "Look, I feel kind of inadequate at all of the kind of fussy, fluffy, flowery stuff. I'm not good at saying just the right things. And I don't I don't seem to be able to say 'I love you' in all the right ways. And I'm not good at the flowers but, doggone it, the one thing I can do is to provide."

**Brian:** Yeah.

**Shaunti:** And "I hate missing Johnny's soccer games. I *hate* it but I'm willing to do it. I'm willing to sacrifice that--because she needs to know that I am providing for her." And so one of the things--it's a big picture thing it's not necessarily in that moment but the big picture thing ladies is that he is really to be able to have conversations with him for him to know that, "No, I really truly do care more about you and your presence in our lives than I do about the stuff."

And I'll give you an example honey, you know that money that we're saving for the vacation, let's stop. Let's not save for the big vacation. Let's go camping. Let's instead of going on the big spring break to you know--"

**Brian:** The wives are going, "Whoa, whoa, wait, who said anything about camping? I'm not doing a tent." Right. Right.

**Shaunti:** Whatever it is for you. There are plenty of women who like camping.

**Brian:** I'm not saying there's not, there's a lot of guys that don't. Like their idea of camping is the Hilton.

**Shaunti:** Right, exactly. Well and here's the reality is that truly if you give an example to him like, "Look, honey, if it means that we need to do this instead of this," that is when his eyes will be opened like, "Seriously? Really?"

**Brian:** So when you're feeling that because that's really what we want to address. There's definitely men and I'll speak for the guy that is using work as an escape.

**Shaunti:** And that's true there are some men.

**Brian:** And I want to go out on record going there are guys because it's just easier to deal with stuff at work than at home. Especially now that I have teenagers, there are

times when I get the temptation to feel like, “You know what? I’d rather stay at the office another extra hour.” And I’m just being honest, I mean, because--

**Shaunti:** Thank you for confessing that, you know, on behalf of men everywhere.

**Brian:** Because I just know that I can accomplish something here and there’s things that are going on in my relationships at home that I don’t know how to accomplish. I don’t know how to bring it to a conclusion. I don’t know in that inadequacy and security, I would rather move into something that I am secure at. So there are men that are feeling that.

**Shaunti:** And it sounds like maybe even good guys sometimes feel that in different seasons.

**Brian:** Absolutely.

**Shaunti:** So how does the wife deal with it?

**Brian:** So I think -- and of course that’s a different issue, if your husband is escaping. Maybe that’s another -- “How do I know if my husband is escaping to work for security versus home. What’s the reason?”

**Shaunti:** That might be a whole different podcast.

**Brian:** That would be a whole different conversation that we could go through but for the -- just to get into that situation of, “Okay, how can I bring up the fact that I *feel* like you care more about work than about me and the kids?” I think that’s really what we want to try to understand and how do I communicate that?

**Shaunti:** Right.

**Brian:** You know, how do I bring that- because it’s not in the moment when he walks in from the door and you say--

**Shaunti:** “I cannot believe this.”

**Brian:** Yeah, “I can’t believe it, you are not home.” Because here’s what a guy’s feeling is like that what you’re saying in that moment is exactly what you just said, most guys at their heart are doing this *because* they want to provide for the family.

**Shaunti:** Right.

**Brian:** “So when you attack that, you’re attacking me. And attacking at something that I feel like I’m doing a good job in.”

**Shaunti:** And it’s even worse than that. It’s like A) I feel like I’m doing a good job and you’re attacking me, and B) do you think I want to be working this much? And this is

what for us as women -- Ladies, you have to hear me on this, if you're in this situation -- this is where you have to stop where your brain wants to go and your emotions and your mind wants to go in all these directions like, "He cares more about work than about me." Blah, blah, like, "What's going on?"

**Brian:** Right, these little rabbits start running around in your head.

**Shaunti:** Exactly. That's a really good description of what it feels like to be a woman sometimes. But you have to stop that. We talked in another podcast about how taking every thought captive isn't just for guys, right, like taking every thought captive that's an example of where you have to pull that back and you have to go, "You know what, this is the guy who is exhausting himself on *my* behalf and who *hates* missing the life of the family. He wants to be able to cheer his son on at a soccer game, too."

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** He would -- Are you kidding he would love to be able to be there and instead he feels like, "But I *have* to be over here at work. My boss is on me. I'm going to lose this deal and if I lose this deal then suddenly we're going to lose the bonus for the year." And he's feeling like, "I *have* to. I have no choice and she doesn't get it."

And since a guy feels she doesn't get it he pulls back he doesn't want to talk to her about it because it feels like there's no point in talking to her about it because she just is clearly not understanding something.

So ladies it makes all the difference if you believe the best of him and if you can actually show that you get it. You're not stupid. If you can actually show, "Look I understand that you feel like you need to work these extra hours because there's this big deal and you feel like you could lose this and you could lose the bonus. You know what honey I want to officially tell you it's okay if we lose the bonus this year."

**Brian:** Wow.

**Shaunti:** "You are working 80 hours a week. You're exhausting yourself. Honey, I don't want you feeling like you have to come home at nine every night. It *kills* me that you're working so much. You know what, let's let the company keep that \$10,000. It's okay we don't have to go on the big vacation this year or we'll cut back on Christmas presents or you know whatever that is honey it's okay."

So many men said, "You know what that does?" It takes this huge weight off their shoulders to know that their wife -- it's almost like she's standing arm in arm with them. It feels so good-apparently.

**Brian:** Yes. It absolutely -- the word picture that came in my head was that now I have a partner in the pressure.



**Shaunti:** Oooh that's good.

**Brian:** Now I have somebody who is in the fox -- because I feel like I'm in the foxhole and I feel like I've got -- and guys we do this to ourselves because we want to be this superhero, right? We want to be the Mr. Incredible that when he talks to his wife and goes, "I'm gonna go in and fight the big monster." And she's like, "Wait! What am I going to do, sit in the car?"

And there's this great sentimental moment in The Incredibles--I can't believe I'm quoting The Incredibles--

**Shaunti:** Hey, it's a great movie!

**Brian:** It's a great movie where she's like, "Why can't I come into the fight with you?" And he's like, "Well because this is what I'm supposed to do and this is what -- and I don't want to lose you again." There's this -- we put ourselves on that solitary hill, okay, I do that.

**Shaunti:** Yeah.

**Brian:** And she's like, "No listen I want to partner with you in this. I want to do this with you." and so to have a partner in the pressure.

**Shaunti:** Who comes alongside whether or not you're trying to push her away a little bit.

**Brian:** Yes. Exactly because--

**Shaunti:** Who says, "I'm going to help you regardless. I going to walk up here and stand with you regardless of what you're telling me right now."

**Brian:** Yeah. And I like how you phrased it. I kind of wrote down as you were talking there. Number one, it's like how do I have this conversation? Really instead of moving from, "Why don't you care about me? To now, number one, you've got to believe the best. You've got to shift your perspective just a little bit-just a degree to go, "No I want to believe the best about the fact that he's probably doing this because he feels pressure. I need to stop those rabbits from running in my head and chasing down--"

**Shaunti:** Going in all the wrong directions.

**Brian:** Going in all the wrong directions. And then you said, "Show you get it." Which I think is really it to be able to go, "Hey what's driving this pressure in you? Do you feel like we need to have a vacation or do you feel like we're not saving enough for the education for college?" And step into that pressure because now I feel like I do have a partner.

**Shaunti:** Well and show you get it -- actually the guys told me that this means truly practical like to literally say things like: "You know, what is this behind this?" "Oh well it's this deal and this." "Okay listen. You need to hear me say this honey which is, 'I appreciate how much you're working. I understand you're trying to get that deal and get the bonus at the end of the year. And I can't tell you how much I appreciate this but you know what? It's not worth it if it's keeping you at the office until nine o'clock every night and you want to go to Johnny's soccer games.' You need to hear me say, 'That I am totally willing to give up that bonus to get more of you so that you can have less pressure.'"

**Brian:** Yeah. I think that's fantastic. And I've--

**Shaunti:** Because that shows you get it financially, like practically.

**Brian:** Exactly. It shows you get it and then all of a sudden now instead of me off on my island fighting off the enemy, from my wife and kids that are back in the bunker, there's this sense of, "Hey no we're together on this" And the practical side of it's like, "Yeah you do get it and now we have a choice." Now we really can sit down--

**Shaunti:** Yeah.

**Brian:** And instead of being driven--because the truth of the matter is you and I we're all driven whether you're a man or a woman you're driven by something that may or may not be right. I feel compelled to do something just because I have a feeling and that feeling may or may not be right.

So what you're doing is giving us that choice to go, "Do we really need that vacation? Do we really need that car? Do we you know, do I need to buy a lesser car? Do I need to 'Dave Ramsey' this thing? And just go you know I'm going to buy a junker for a year. Whatever it means it's like sometimes I feel like--"

**Shaunti:** That's a great way of putting it.

**Brian:** Yeah we just let ourselves by run by feelings that aren't really true.

**Shaunti:** The key for a wife listening to this is, "Okay so if I show that I get it how else can I confront when I feel like my husband is being run by feelings that aren't necessarily true?"

**Brian:** Yes.

**Shaunti:** And this is where I would think step three honestly is you're not just showing that you get it--

**Brian:** It'd be step four but that's okay.

**Shaunti:** Okay are we on step four?

**Brian:** We're on step four, it's all right. If you're keeping track at home ladies, it's step four.

**Shaunti:** Okay step four is really truly is showing that gratitude.

**Brian:** Yeah

**Shaunti:** I mean that incredible gratitude for, "I *understand* that you're doing this *for* us. It's just that I am in a different position. I'm valuing something differently. And you need to know that I'm valuing something differently." Because otherwise you're not actually sharing what he needs to know and he really is operating under wrong assumptions.

**Brian:** Yes, he's operating under when we say believing the best-that's step one- is believe that he is valuing what you value he's just operating it in a different way. You're valuing time, you're valuing the sense of, "Hey, we need to have influence in our kid's lives or just to be together as a family." Which is a great value that's providing for the emotional needs of the family.

He's providing for the financial needs of the family or feels that pressure to and what you're saying is both are important and so some might have to-- you're not going to be perfectly balanced so there are seasons where we need to let go of some of the financial pressure and up the emotional pressure.

**Shaunti:** Yes, a very good way of putting it.

**Brian:** So, all right, so those four steps in case you got them down--

**Shaunti:** Because obviously I got them wrong.

**Brian:** Believe the best about your husband about the fact that he is--more than likely, there are times when they escape for work--but more than likely he's trying to provide for the family as best as he can.

Stop those rabbits from running in directions that aren't helpful.

Number three, show him you get it. Take the pressure off in real practical things and ask questions like: Are you feeling pressure that maybe he shouldn't be feeling?

**Shaunti:** Right.

**Brian:** So to be an emotional pressure releaser for your husband that's a huge gift. And then number four and I think this is true with almost every conversation I feel like it all comes back to this that that husband's love language is just gratitude.

**Shaunti:** Yes. Appreciation.

**Brian:** Appreciation. And I know you want to feel that as a wife as well. But we're saying if you model that, he'll probably give that in return.

**Shaunti:** Yes, because it is so emotionally necessary for men because they have so much self-doubt.

**Brian:** As a guy maybe there's another like if there's a step five it's develop a keyword or some sort of a secret language to clue in a guy that, "Hey I think you might be going down that road again."

**Shaunti:** Oh interesting. Okay.

**Brian:** Because if there's like this secret language that we have where it's like okay now that's a trigger for me and I don't know what that is I don't know if that you know, "Hey are you feeling the pressure? Is your balloon getting bigger?" You know I don't know what it is--

**Shaunti:** Whatever that pressure is.

**Brian:** But come back to some trigger phrase that goes hey I feel like we're running down, are you getting in the foxhole again. Whatever it might be. Do you feel like you're in a foxhole right now? You know, dear, whatever that keyword might be to signal to your husband, "Hey I feel like you're going off on that island again."

**Shaunti:** Yeah.

**Brian:** Away from the family again.

**Shaunti:** Yeah. That's good. I really like that and just ladies as we close here just realize that this is a deep-seated issue for so many men. It's going to take some time for them to actually believe that you mean this. That you really do care more about his presence and about him and his emotional health than you do about the money.

And to be candid you know this was a 70 percent/30 percent. There were women who said, "No, I do care more about the financial security." So 30% of married women said that and we should acknowledge that but the problem is that men think it's 100% and it's not. Seventy percent really would make the trade.

**Brian:** So for me that ah-ha moment that I feel like you've given us that is the eye opener is that when you come to that conversation to probably believe that we're valuing the same thing but we're just executing it in different ways.

So I hope that this has been helpful today and there's probably a few things that as you think about those steps those five steps that we gave you that you're doing well. What's

that one thing that you go maybe you are believing the best about your husband or maybe you're not letting your thoughts just run around like wild rabbits in your head. What's that one thing in those steps that you feel like you're doing well? Keep doing that.

But then what's the one thing where you go, "Okay this is how I'm going to address this from here on out. I'm going to do something a little bit differently. I'm going to interrupt the pattern." Because ultimately we want that sense of oneness that happy marriage where both of you are actually together in this and not feeling like you're isolated.

Whether that's believing the best, stopping the rabbits, showing that you get it real practically, showing gratitude, or developing a code that goes, "Hey, you're on that island again. Let's come back, let's be together on this."

Shaunti, as always it's good to be with you. And here at FamilyLife we are passionate about you experiencing oneness in the key relationships of your life. If you need more help and hope we've got it at [familylife.com](http://familylife.com).

By the way this podcast is listener supported. If you go to [FamilyLife.com/podcast](http://FamilyLife.com/podcast) you can become part of a tribe that is helping to keep this podcast going and help make it available for others. I'd love to give a special thanks to our audio producer, CJ3 and our project coordinator Page Johnson for helping to pull this off. We couldn't do it without their help.

Next time on Married With Benefits we're going to talk about video games. That's right, there's a lot of wives asking, "Why is it my husband comes home from work, ignores me but wants to start playing video games?" It seems childish. Maybe there's something else going on. I'm Brian Goins seeking to help you love the one you are with.

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