

# Married With Benefits

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## Episode 14: Why Doesn't my Marriage Look Anything Like a Hallmark Movie?

Featured Host: Shaunti Feldhahn  
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**Brian:** Welcome to the FamilyLife Podcast Network. I'm Brian Goins host of Married With Benefits. Where we want to help you love the one you're with and discover the real benefits of saying, "I do."

This week with Shaunti I've got a question for her. Every once in a while I walk in and my wife is watching one of those Hallmark movies and I have this thought in the back of my head, does she really expect me to act like those guys who she's watching on the screen? Come on, really?

That's a--that's an intense question.

**Shaunti:** For some women it really is.

**Brian:** [Laughs] What saddens me is like every time I call my mom, I think she's watching--I always interrupt a Hallmark movie.

**Shaunti:** [Laughing] That's great.

**Brian:** So I don't know if I want her to listen to this.

**Shaunti:** I know.

**Brian:** I don't want to take away all her viewing pleasures.

**Shaunti:** Yes, exactly. Well listen, there's nothing wrong with Hallmark movies. I will say I am an action movie kind of girl.

**Brian:** Really?

**Shaunti:** Not a chick flick kind of girl. Yes I know.

My daughter really wanted to watch *Pride and Prejudice* with me last winter. Like, "Can we just curl up on the couch and watch *Pride and Prejudice*?" I'm like, "There just aren't enough car chases and explosions." Like I love-- [laughs]

**Brian:** I want exploding carriages, you know, two drawn horse and buggy explosions--just one of them.

**Shaunti:** Can we have like a meet in the middle? No.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** But in all seriousness my daughter does love those kinds of movies.

**Brian:** Okay.

**Shaunti:** She loves the Hallmark movies. She loves the sappy romance, the chick flicks and so she has asked over this last you know period of time as she was getting ready to leave for college--which I'm still sort of blocking out.

**Brian:** Right. Why did you bring that up? I was happy before you brought that up.

**Shaunti:** Yes, I know sorry. I know you, too.

But as she was getting ready to leave she basically said it would mean a lot to me if we could just over the course of the year if we could just watch some of these movies together because, you know, it gives us some mom/daughter time and it mattered to her. So I ended up watching probably about ten of those movies with her.

**Brian:** Ten? That's a commitment.

**Shaunti:** Oh and well it was over the course of six, eight, nine months. I will admit, okay ladies, I will admit that I actually liked a lot of them. I actually, you know, enjoyed them. I will even admit that I actually watched a couple of them over again with her because she wanted to watch them over again.

**Brian:** All right. What was your favorite one of those ten?

**Shaunti:** Oh man.

**Brian:** Am I putting you on the spot?

**Shaunti:** You are kind of putting me on the spot. There was one recently that she had me watch--one of the more recent ones--*To All the Boys I've Loved Before*.

**Brian:** Okay.

**Shaunti:** It's one of these, you know, sorta sappy romance.

**Brian:** CJ3 is saying yes he saw it.. Did you see this CJ3?

**CJ3:** Yes, me and Emily watched it.

**Brian:** And is it good?

**CJ3:** I mean, like Shaunti is describing it's, you know, cute sappy.

**Brian:** Okay

**Shaunti:** And it's cute.

**Brian:** All right.

**Shaunti:** Another one that made the rounds a year or two ago was *The Christmas Prince*.

**Brian:** Oh, gosh.

**Shaunti:** [Laughing] I'm sorry Brian is like, "What?"

**Brian:** Yes, I saw like--I've seen that on tv and I ran through the room as quick as I could.

**Shaunti:** You asked. Because you're like, "No, I don't want to get caught."

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** But in all seriousness, one of the reasons that I ended up actually liking them is the same reason my daughter likes them and that is that it tugs on your heart as a woman.

And that therein is the genesis of our conversation today which is: that you start longing for that in your marriage. You start getting dissatisfied with this wonderful husband and this normal life that you have because it doesn't look like that.

And so as women, you know, we have to, sort of, ask ourselves, "Why, why is that? What is going on in our hearts?"

**Brian:** Yes, you know we've talked in the past about what's going on in the male brain. So what's going on in the female brain to say, "I'm glad there's a whole channel devoted to these movies."?

**Shaunti:** Yes, exactly. Well here's really ladies here's in all seriousness, and I'm going to say something that's probably kind of sensitive here at this point but I think we have to go there.

**Brian:** Okay.

**Shaunti:** Which is that, you know what porn does for a man is it tugs on something in his heart. We as women don't realize that porn tugs on this feeling of being desired and all those movies, all of those pictures they all have that message of the sensual woman looking at through a camera saying, "You're the most desirable man. I want you." And he knows it's fake.

**Brian:** [Agrees]

**Shaunti:** But it's still it hits something in his heart.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** Because that's his insecurity. That's his question. And it's the same thing with the romance movies whatever those are it is a handsome, attentive, listening, caring, hero...

**Brian:** [Agrees]

**Shaunti:** ...who is pursuing...

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** ...this woman and giving her the signal every day...

**Brian:** [Agrees]

**Shaunti:** ...that I really I'm choosing you and when she's having a bad day and she treats him horribly and she's mad or she's crying he goes, "Oh I'm so sorry." And he moves towards her and gives her a big hug and he says, "Can we talk about this?" And she pours out her heart and he listens and if she runs away because there's a misunderstanding he does not let her go.

**Brian:** Keeps going. "Not until you feel my love."

**Shaunti:** He pursues her. Exactly and it's not the real human. It's not a real human male when you're having a hard day and you're mad at your husband and something's going wrong and you pull away he's going, "Oh thank goodness because I couldn't think anymore." And, "Okay good we need some space, and I'll take some space and you take some space and we'll come back together tomorrow and talk about it."

And you're, as a wife, over there in the corner going, "He doesn't love me cause he didn't pursue me."

As opposed to the real human male the way God has designed you is that all of that emotion was like curdling your brain and you couldn't think and you were worried about saying the wrong thing and hurting her feelings and, "Oh thank goodness that I have some time here where I can figure out what I'm thinking, and we can come back together tomorrow."

**Brian:** Right. So I mean isn't *Christmas Prince* or whatever these movies are it does paint the guy as that's his instinct. Like that's his natural instinct to keep pursuing.

**Shaunti:** Correct.

**Brian:** Which it would be great if it was. I was even thinking about--

**Shaunti:** Yes, it would be great. I will say it would be.

**Brian:** It would be great. I think when a guy's dating a girl because there's an object of pursuit...

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** ...why does that seem to shift? Because I could see that there's a bit of false advertising that wives might feel.

**Shaunti:** Absolutely false advertising! You pursued me up until we got married and then what?

**Brian:** Right. So what happens there.

**Shaunti:** So here's what we found in all of these interviews and all of these focus groups with these guys is that in their minds there's something that happens when they actually win the woman. When they actually get married, they see her walk down the aisle, they sign the marriage papers, they are just over the moon excited, and then they're like, "Cool! On to the next thing."

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** And in their mind, from that moment on it never enters their consciousness the question of does she love me? Like literally of course she loves me we're married, we're sleeping in the same bed, we're making love, we have kids together of course she loves me. Like it's just not even a question.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** And they don't realize that in our minds as women there is no switch that gets flipped to the oh-I-feel-permanently-loved position.

**Brian:** [Agrees]

**Shaunti:** That doesn't happen and we have this question in our hearts this insecurity the same way that you know we've talked on this podcast before about men's insecurity is, "Am I able? Do I measure up? Am I any good at what I'm doing?" Women's insecurity is, "Am I loveable?" And in marriage it's not like that goes away.

**Brian:** No.

**Shaunti:** It just becomes more like, "Is he glad he married me? Does he still love me?" We have that question every day and so a lot of what Jeff and I talk about in marriage conferences is telling the husbands she has that question every day. She needs to know the answer every day.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Shaunti:** Guys don't know that so they don't understand why suddenly she's feeling like this was false advertising.

**Brian:** Right. And if a guy could understand that his wife is asking I know we're not talking to guys but I'm sure--

**Shaunti:** You can help your husband understand this.

**Brian:** Like for a guy the question, if you were to ask, or if you were to tell your husband it's the same question you know that question of "Am I loveable today?" is the same question that every guy feels when he wakes up and goes, "Will I matter today?"

**Shaunti:** Interesting.

**Brian:** "Will I be significant today?"

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** I think every guy does wake up with that sense of, "I don't know if I do."

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** For a wife to maybe relate it to that. I know when I'm talking to guys in Ephesians, Paul talks about Ephesians 5, he talks about husbands cherish your wife like Christ does the church, and that word cherish literally means

**Shaunti:** Oh that's a good word.

**Brian:** Bring warmth to, it's the word we get thermal.

**Shaunti:** Oh interesting.

**Brian:** So, I tell guys that for most guys it's not instinctual for us to when our wives feel prickly and icy and they want to be pursued but they're not giving off signals.

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** We don't want to go. We want to

**Shaunti:** What does it feel like? What does it feel like when she's giving the angry signal?

**Brian:** Oh I need to find another room. I need to find another room with tv and chips.

**Shaunti:** It doesn't occur to you she needs a hug?

**Brian:** No. No, what I need to let her take care of what she needs to take care of. And then we'll come together.

Whereas what I hear you saying is what a wife is longing for is, "No, pursue me in that moment." I think that's why Paul says no it's your job not to be the thermometer just taking a temperature but to be the thermostat to cherish to bring warmth to, to regulate the temperature. I think every wife is now going, "Yes could you tell my husband that?"

**Shaunti:** So they need to listen to this podcast—the husbands do.

**Brian:** They do. And just listen to Paul. Listen to what Scripture is saying and I think that's why you're bringing up how dangerous these movies *could* be.

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** Even though they're G.

**Shaunti:** Well it's interesting from whether it's a movie or a romance novel, okay.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** Even if it's a clean romance novel and of course many of them are not clean anymore, but even if it's a clean one it is setting up a--and I'll just say this out loud--it is setting up a not just a *false* expectation an *inaccurate* expectation but a *dangerous* expectation. Because then what happens? If it was just like, "Oh that's so sweet and it tugs on my heart strings," and that's the end of it, that's fine.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** But if it tugs on my heart strings and then I start going, “Well why didn’t my husband, you know, pursue me when I was upset? And he didn’t give me a hug and he didn’t come after me and he’s not willing to, you know, listen in the middle of the night and he’s not,” you know, whatever those things are.

Then you start comparing your awesome, real, wonderful husband to this fantasy that doesn’t exist in the real world. There are not men that are wired quite like this.

Essentially all the men in those romance novels and the movies they are a woman’s fantasy of what a man should be like and that is not how God designed real, wonderful, loving, great husbands. Thinking about it ladies, it’s essentially a male version of ourselves and eww!

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** Do we really want that? No, we actually really don’t. So the question is have you let yourself believe that this is the way things should be? Honestly it is--I’ve had those conversations with my daughter and you know because going off to college now and we’ve talked about this from early days once I realized these were tugging on her heart.

I’m like you know that real guys aren’t like that. Real men--I start into my list--real men do this. She’s like, “Mom, I’m Shaunti Feldhahn’s daughter of course I know how real boys are wired.” I’m like, “Okay ha ha ha. But really?”

**Brian:** But really do you know?

**Shaunti:** Do you really know?

**Brian:** Because if we keep filling--whatever you fill your mind with you can’t help but think--

**Shaunti:** It’s going to seem normal.

**Brian:** You’re going to normalize it just like for guys no woman wants their man to think that that porn star is the way that their wife should be.

**Shaunti:** Oh good point. Every woman knows the feeling of looking at the cover of a magazine or an image online of a really hot woman in a bikini and --

**Brian:** That’s been airbrushed.



**Shaunti:** And well that's the thing is that we feel we should measure up to that. Then we see the behind the scenes and isn't not just airbrushed it's photo shopped. Right?

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** Her thighs were photo shopped to be smaller. This is already a hot model and even she didn't measure up to her own to the picture. We literally *physically could never* look like that. No human woman even the hottest model had to be photo shopped to have a narrower waist and thinner thighs.

There is not physical way for a woman to look like that, and it's the exact same thing on the men's side. That is not the male brain. That is not the way God has wired these wonderful normal men that have been wired by God to be a certain way and expecting it is only going to lead to dissatisfaction with the real wonderful person that's in our life.

**Brian:** The hope is is that the guy's put in situations where he's around other guys that are going to spur him on and the Spirit can convict him to go, "Okay I do need to pursue my wife."

**Shaunti:** [Agrees]

**Brian:** And cherish her the way God has called me to cherish her. But to have that expectation is when disappointment is going to set in.

**Shaunti:** Well you can learn as a guy how to pursue.

**Brian:** [Agrees]

**Shaunti:** You're never going to--and this is maybe a strong statement, I don't know if you agree with me on this--I don't think any normal wonderful husband, no matter if he is the best husband on the planet, let's just find the best husband, even that man is never going to measure up to the expectations that can come from those romance movies, because men are broken people.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** Just like we women are broken people. You hurt each other's feelings. I have never seen one of those movies where a man didn't—if he ever hurt a woman's feelings, which doesn't happen very often, but if he ever did hurt her feelings, oh, he comes back, he apologizes, he pursues. He tries to make it right.

**Brian:** You don't see him heading to the couch with a bag of chips and a remote control.

**Shaunti:** [Laughing] No, you don't.

**Brian:** Or to the garage and you know what I'm going to fix something that actually can work.

**Shaunti:** Yes, no you don't so I personally, yes absolutely let the Holy Spirit and other men help a man understand how to pursue his wife but don't ever expect him to be perfect.

**Brian:** Yes, because really Jesus is saying there's a reason why he says to die to self because instinctually men aren't going to naturally respond that way. I don't know that I've ever instinctually said, "Oh my wife's mad at me, now I'm going to do whatever I can to make that happen."

**Shaunti:** Interesting.

**Brian:** Now, I know that's what I need to do but it's not like I'm going, "Oh I'm happy to do this and I can't wait to do this." No, I've got to die to myself because my flesh is going, "I want to run away."

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** And I think most men that's when they hurt their wife's feelings most men are going, "I'll wait until she kind of comes around."

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** Which is sad. It's sad but I think that's why Jesus says, no you need to die to self.

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** Trust me and move toward your wife even if you don't feel like it.

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** Whereas those movies tend to go every guy is actually feeling this. He's feeling like he wants to pursue no matter what. And I think the danger's what you're bringing up is that in and of itself that expectation.

So are we saying then, Shaunti, it's time to call the cable company and turn off the Hallmark channel? Is that what you're saying?

**Shaunti:** No.

**Brian:** I can see Hallmark boycotting our podcast from here on out.

**Shaunti:** No, I actually now that I actually enjoy watching those movies with my daughter you know I want to keep whether they're Hallmark or any other thing you know I want to keep watching those.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** But I think that there's basically two things that come out of this. Is that if you do engage in watching those kinds of movies or reading those kinds of books, first of all, examine whether you're able to do this in a healthy way. Actually I guess there's three things.

**Brian:** Okay.

**Shaunti:** Examine if you're able to do that in a healthy way and if you think that it has led to some dissatisfaction that may be something you need to fast from. It may be the equivalent of--you know, I have a friend who recognizes she has some addictive tendencies, and so there are some kinds of foods that she eats that just trigger her overeating and she's just recognized "I just can't. I just can't allow myself to even go there." Because it'll trigger some unhealthy behavior.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** So think about and be honest with yourself. Is this something where you've become dissatisfied in part because you've been filling your brain with fantasy? So that's sort of a first thing, that won't impact everybody because not everybody is in that place.

But then the second thing is, no matter what, wherever you are when you're watching those or you're reading those books, recognize that it is fantasy. It's the equivalent of, you know, a warp drive in science fiction. It doesn't exist.

**Brian:** Right. I'm just impressed that you brought up warp drive.

**Shaunti:** Hey, I'm a "trekkie." So, remember I'm an action-movies girl, okay.

**Brian:** [Agrees]

**Shaunti:** Just recognize that what you're watching is fantasy, and that God did not wire real men in this way. You can enjoy it.

**Brian:** [Agrees]

**Shaunti:** And just like you enjoy sci-fi or whatever. But then second--third, I guess third is really at that point also use it as an occasion. Instead of risking dissatisfaction, use it as an opportunity to celebrate and look for all the things that are amazing in your

normal, real-life husband. And really truly tell yourself, “Yeah, he doesn’t come after me you know when we’ve had a misunderstanding, but you know I do notice that he does think it through and he is willing to talk about it, it may be a day or two later.”

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** “But you know I can tell that he is processing it and that actually means a lot to me.” Celebrate that instead of wishing it was something different.

**Brian:** Boy, that’s good. It reminds me a little bit of what you’re saying is of what Paul says in Philippians, “Finally brothers whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

And it is what are you thinking? What is going into your brain that you’re thinking about, dreaming about, desiring? If it’s all on the portfolio of Hallmark you’ll probably be set up for disappointment. If that’s just part of your portfolio and it’s that little thing you escape to every now and then, like I might escape to Marvel, you’ll probably be better and more happy in life and better in your marriage. This is a good question.

I enjoyed tackling this one.

That was great and as we wrap up Questions Every Wife Is Asking it has been fun, again Shaunti, I look forward to more conversations like this.

We at FamilyLife want you to know that we are passionate about you experiencing oneness with your husband and with the other key relationships of your life. So if you need more Help and Hope please go to [FamilyLife.com](http://FamilyLife.com). Thanks to all those who have been subscribing to us on Spotify or Stitcher or Apple podcasts. We really appreciate your support. Also, we want to thank those who are financially getting behind this podcast. FamilyLife is a non-profit so we are dependent on supporters just like you. So, if you are interested in giving you can go to [FamilyLife.com/podcast](http://FamilyLife.com/podcast) and click “donate.”

I also want to give special thanks to our audio producer, CJ3 who started the group [HusbandsForHallmarkMovies.com](http://HusbandsForHallmarkMovies.com). And our project coordinator Page Johnson and the entire production team that make this so easy and fun to do.

Next week on Married With Benefits we close out our season, season one of questions every wife is asking. We went live to a conference that Shaunti was at and we wanted to find out what women really are asking and other questions they had that we didn’t answer on this podcast. You’ll find some of that interaction really fun and exciting. So I look forward to you joining us as Shaunti and I answer these final questions.

I’m Brian Goins seeing to help you love the one you are with. See you next time.

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