

Married With Benefits

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Episode 3: How Important Is My Physical Appearance to Her Desire of Me?

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Brian: From the podcast network here at FamilyLife this is *Married with Benefits*. I'm your host, Brian Goins, on a relentless pursuit to help you love the one you're with and discover the benefits that came with saying, "I do."

You know it says in 1 Peter 3:7, "Husbands...live with our wives in an understanding way," [paraphrase] which if you're like me, feels pretty daunting. It's not too easy. So I'm glad that I've got an ally here to help me do this well. Shaunti Feldhahn, you are basically a Harvard trained relationship Jedi.

Shaunti: [Laughter] I think that's the first time I've ever been introduced that way.

Brian: Yes, well at least it's not baby Yoda. For all those *Mandalorian* fans out there, we got that in.

Shaunti: I will admit—I will admit to being one.

Brian: Are you watching? Are you watching *Mandalorian*?

Shaunti: Oh yes. We binged, man. Yes, we did.

Brian: It's good.

Shaunti: Baby Yoda, yes. We just spent the whole time going "It's so cute!"

Brian: Right, I know.

Shaunti: Which actually has some bearing on what we're talking about today.

Brian: Oh, nice segue!

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: Because this Season Two has been fun already. We've had a great time with "Questions Every Husband Is Asking". This one I'm particularly interested in because it's a question that I have and that I'm a little ashamed to ask. But a husband—definitely

one of our husbands is listening—he asked this question as well. I was really glad to hear it. Listen in.

Shane: Hi! My name is Shane. I've been married for 21 years and I have a question. I want my wife to be attracted to me. How important is my physical appearance?

Brian: How important is my physical appearance? Now, I don't know about anybody else out there, but I've been working for the last—let's see, it's been 20 years now since we had Brantley—so I have been working on my “dad bod”. I've worked hard at this and I feel like I've developed a great “dad bod”.

I was coming across something out of *Reader's Digest* recently that said that your 21 day—if you guys out there don't have a “dad bod” like me and you're jealous right now because I know you are, here's a 21 day to a “dad bod”. This one came from a guy by the name of David Tate who put this great list together.

Day One, Shaunti, if you want—you can pass this on to Jeff.

Shaunti: Follow along, absolutely.

Brian: Yes, “Eat a burrito at your steady job during your lunch break.” If you're needing to get a “dad bod”, eat a burrito.

Day Four—I like this one—“Do one push up, breathe heavily and then open up a bag of Wild Berry Skittles.” You're going to get a dad bod.

I like Day Six: “Look at yourself in the mirror while recalling that how you look has zero to do with your chances of getting lucky today and that this is true for every day forever after.”

Shaunti: There you go.

Brian: I like this. I do this a lot. Day 11: “Start running but immediately injure your entire body...then take a year off.”

That's where a lot of us guys are is that we have worked hard on our dad bod and there's a bit of wondering like “Okay, does my wife care about this? Is this a big deal to her? Do I need to be in a certain shape?” We asked this in season one about the women—

Shaunti: Yes

Brian: —because every wife was asking, “Do I need to be a bikini model?” And guys are asking something similar, “Do I need to be in shape?”

Shaunti: Well, and here's the thing, a lot of guys assume that if they're not in shape or not as in shape as the guys on the television set, that she's not going to desire me, right? "Oh, but if I really do go to the gym a lot, she won't be able to keep her hands off of me."

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: We kind of have to give the guys a little reality check.

Brian: What's that?

Shaunti: [Laughter] It doesn't really have as much to do with it as you all think. Because for you, if your wife is hot, "Heck yeah," you know? You can't keep your hands off of her and you are visually stimulated, and you assume, "Oh yeah, if I've got the hot bod rather than the dad bod, that's what I should be expecting."

I hate to tell you this, guys, but your wife just doesn't have the same visual wiring as you do and that maybe seeing you in all your glory isn't going to be what makes her go, "Heck yeah, where's the bedroom?" Because for her, it's a whole different story. There's a whole lot more going on in her mind than what you realize.

Brian: So my dad bod's great then. I can just keep working on that—

Shaunti: Well, let's talk about that for a second. [Laughter]

Brian: —because it seems like that's what I hear you saying is that I'm on the right track with keep growing this dad bod.

Shaunti: Okay, for you guys, you want your wife to make an effort to take care of herself for you. That makes you feel cared for.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: Right, and that's a big thing that we spend a lot of time in our books telling women about men is that's important to you as a man. It's not that you expect a bikini model. You just want to see her make an effort to take care of herself because that's how you feel cared for. That's one way anyway.

It's the same thing for your wife. It's just, it means something other than just going to the gym. It means something other than just what you eat. A lot of things for a wife can be taking care of yourself; can mean you're having some health issues and you're willing to go to the doctor.

Brian: Yes, no one wants to go here. That's not what this question is about.

Shaunti: I'm so sorry guys. I'm so sorry.

Brian: I thought we were talking about physique and now you're talking about actually getting a physical. I don't know if I'm loving this. Is this something you've dealt with, that you've dealt with Jeff?

Shaunti: We literally were just dealing with this the other day because we're going to be on a boat soon and Jeff is motion sick sometimes. So we were getting that little patch that you put behind your ear to help with preventing motion sickness. Awesome!

I called the doctor and said, "Can we get these two prescriptions please for me and my husband." They said "Sure, we'll call yours in. Your husband hasn't been seen here in so long that he's no longer considered a patient."

Brian: Wow! He got written off the rolls.

Shaunti: He got written off the doctor's roll and he's having to go through this slightly embarrassing situation of being a new patient at our doctor. I thought, "You know, honey, we probably need to talk about this," because that is something that for me as a wife is actually a pretty big deal."

All the men right now listening to this are probably going, "What does that have to do with me getting lucky?"

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: Like, what does that have to do with it?

Brian: Exactly. Because when we were talking about this question in "Questions Every Wife Is Asking", for a husband when you think about, oh yeah, we want our wife to be working out, it's generally for her looks, right?

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: But what I hear you saying is that, no, that's not the way she's thinking about it. She's like, "It's just more than about your looks. It's about your health and is he taking care of this person I value."

Shaunti: Yes, "Is he taking care of himself for me? Is he going to be around for a long time for me?" [Laughter]

Brian: It's about longevity.

Shaunti: Well, and don't—let's not down play the fact that physical appearance, it may not be that it matters so much on the up side. Like, "Wow! If he looks like the guy in the

commercial, that I won't be able to keep my hands off of him." Now that's nice, right? I'm wired a little bit differently but it's not like that's not nice. But it does actually matter if he is trying not to be a slob, right?

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: I mean there are things, body odor, guys, hello. Like, no, you're probably not going to get lucky. That's a bit of an issue. There are certain things that I think some guys don't necessarily realize will actually turn your wife off.

Brian: Body odor has got to be one of those things. Guys, you don't have any excuse. Go to a Walgreens, seriously. There should be no excuse for that. The doctor one is big because Jenn gets on me about that all the time that I don't want to take the time to do it. But maybe if I thought this is important to my wife and for me to value what she values, it'd be a great idea to actually make those appointments.

Shaunti: Because what you're telling her when you don't go to the doctor—and guys I know you're thinking, "How did we get on going to the doctor—

Brian: I know. Where did we go?

Shaunti: —from what my physical appearance is like?" But listen, the key is what is it that makes you attractive to her? What is it that makes you appealing? What makes you appealing to your wife is that you care about her and this is an area that you are signaling, "I don't really care how long I'm around for you. I don't really care so much that I'm having these splitting headaches but I'm not willing to go to the doctor and ask what this could be so that we can maybe catch it in time if there's some big problem."

And the reality probably is it's probably nothing. But your willingness to signal that you care enough about her to do something you probably don't want to do, that's a *big deal!* How hard is it to take the hour to go to the doctor if you were going to take the hour to go to the gym? I mean, come on, guys.

Brian: Wow. Don't speak it like that. That's convicting.

Let's shift. Let's go on. That's great. That's good advice. Man, I was not expecting that when we asked this question. I think for a lot of guys what we were expecting is, "Okay, well then, do I really need to work out?" There's a lot of us guys that have gone into that dad mode or that sense of "Gosh, I just kind of let myself go. Is it that big of a deal?"

We got a quote from Dave Harvey who wrote the book, *When Sinners Say I Do*, where he talks a little bit about how for a lot of us guys the reason for this is just that we've gotten lazy. This is what he says, "Sloth is a romance killer. Even the word chills the air. By sloth I simply mean laziness with respect to marital intimacy. The most common fruits of this heart condition are passivity and unresponsiveness. We begin to let our

appearance go. We grow comfortable with bedroom boredom. We tolerate a lack of sexual desire and settle for one partner doing all of the initiating.”

Shaunti: Yes, that’s a really, really good point. That’s a really, really good comment. Listen, this is one of those areas also I can point out to some of the men that if you’re not feeling good about yourself, guess what, you might be pulling back in that way. You may not actually be showing your wife that you do desire her. You may not actually be wanting to flirt with her.

It may not be that it’s showing up in your bedroom habits in quite the same way like we talked last time with Juli Slattery about the different types of desire. Your wife may have a different type of desire than you do. She may not be thinking about it all the time. However, if you are signaling that you’re pulling away because you’re not feeling good about yourself, if you’re signaling that, you are still signaling that you don’t care about her.

One of the things that I think would help the guys is helping them understand what are the things that do matter? Like, what are the things, if she’s not quite as visually stimulated as you are. Well, first of all, we should probably say why that is because I’m not sure the guys quite get that.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: But also what is it that *does* matter? What is it that signals that caring that will then lead to some of that more success in the bedroom which is what I think guys are focusing on here?

Brian: Sure. When you think about that, just quickly talk about the difference in visual stimulation.

Shaunti: Yes, we really should because I think that this is an area that a lot of guys are like, “What? I don’t understand this.” Because the thing is, guys, you may not recognize, the female brain is actually wired very differently than the male brain in this area.

When you see an attractive woman, like your wife, if you see her in a sexual way and you see her—she’s wearing something intimate—there’s a very, very clear biological stimulation that happens where you’re going, “I want that. I want her. I want to visually consume my wife. I want to look at this amazing image of this person that I’m with.”

That leads to this sexual stimulation. You want to fantasize about your wife. You want to have sex with her. All of that comes from the sight.

For your wife, I hate to tell you this, but that sight of you in that way doesn’t have that same stimulation.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: I had one guy who said—I think we actually put this quote in *For Men Only*—one of the men was listening to this and reading this and going to his wife, “Is this true?”

She’s like, “I’m so sorry, honey. It is true.”

He’s like, “Even when I wear my black leather jacket?” [Laughter] Like, I’m pulling out all the stops.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: The reality is, guys, when we see you, when we see you in that way, it’s not that sort of biological gut level sexual stimulation that is happening. We’re thinking to our self: “Oh, yes,” like it’s time for sex or we’re thinking to our self, “Yes, he’s attractive,” or we’re thinking these things. There’s not this gut level sexual stimulation.

Those two differences between men and women is one of the things, guys, that lends itself to what we were talking about last time with Dr. Juli Slattery about the fact that your wife isn’t necessarily just going to be ready to jump in bed just because she sees you that way; that she’s going to need to have been given some sense of, “This is what I’d love to have happen later.” She’s going to need some sense of your caring for her outside the bedroom because all of that leads up to her readiness to be in the bedroom.

Brian: Yes, for guys—it’s almost like for guys, visually when they see you in a way that is stimulating, it’s like, you’re ready for the meal.

Shaunti: Yes, yes.

Brian: Maybe, for the gal, it’s like, “Okay, that’s a good appetizer but it’s not the meal.” We’ve still got to touch her heart.

Shaunti: Yes, exactly.

Brian: We’ve touched her eyes but we’ve got to touch her heart and that’s more important, from what I hear you saying, is that’s more important than just the eyes. Whereas, for guys, you’ve got my heart with the eyes. [Laughter] Okay, it’s a dual package.

Shaunti: That is such a great way to put it. There probably are about 20 to 25 percent of women who will be like a guy in this way. They are visually stimulated, maybe not exactly the same way, but they certainly understand more a guy’s perspective on this. But just know that for the men listening to this, most of your wives are just not visually stimulated in the same way you are. I know that seems absolutely crazy.

My husband and I—I realized really early on just how different we were because we were talking. My husband and I were learning some of this. We're not counselors. We're not psychologists. We're like, "*What?!*" We're learning some of this in the research.

He said "Okay, I bet we are wired the same way. We're probably just using different words to describe it. Here's an example." He said, "You know we went to that movie last week with this really hot movie star. The next day after we've seen one of his movies, how many times will an image of that guy with his shirt off or something just sort of rise up in your head? How many times did it happen the next day?"

"Never. Never." [Laughter]

Brian: Wow!

Shaunti: He's like, "I must not be explaining myself correctly. Like, you're just sitting at your computer. You're working on something and all of a sudden just sort of a movie of him taking his shirt off just sort of plays across the screen of your mind. Like, how many times does that happen the next day?"

"Never. Like, I enjoy him when I see him but he doesn't come back."

Brian: Yes, he's vanished which is so good news for guys. I hope you're hearing that guys. [Laughter]

Shaunti: That other men aren't coming back into our heads.

Brian: Which is so different from—

Shaunti: Unfortunately, it is so different from you as men, yes, which I know having studied so many men. But the key is, guys, is recognizing that that visual stimulation, it may be there to some degree; it's not the same as yours. But no matter what it is, it is not enough to make up for lack of emotional stimulation and relational togetherness and a sense of closeness and the sense that you're taking care of yourself for *me*. That matters so much more than the fact that you just have a hot body.

Brian: We were talking a little bit with Jim, our producer here, before this session and he was talking about just even that verse in 1 Corinthians 7, that we talked about with Dr. Slattery in not depriving ourselves from one another.

Usually, we think of that solely in terms of sexual and in the sexual realm which is where—it's the context. But I think he had a great point of just broadening that to say, "You know when we don't take care of our bodies that we're depriving our best self from our spouse." You combine that with our body is a temple. It's like, how are we caring for our spouse?

Shaunti: And listen, I know we have some spies, these wives listening to this. Wives, listen, this is something that we as women have to take super seriously as well. Because our men are so visual and visually stimulated, to some degree we are depriving them if we're not taking care of ourselves physically either. Because the visual nature, it matters so much more to them, because it's speaking to them about us taking care of ourselves physically; actually says to them, "I, as your wife, care about you."

That's something that is hard for women to hear. We don't understand it. But again, to all the spies listening in, all the women, the key is to recognize it's not that he needs you to be or wants you to be like the bikini models that you see on television. We had a whole episode about that in "Questions Every Wife Is Asking". That's not his expectation. It is just taking care of yourself for him.

That's why, guys, when we flip the script and we talk about what *you* need to know, it's the same thing. It's just taking care of yourself has a different meaning to a wife. It's the whole package. It's not just your body, right?

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: It is sort of yourself. It's your soul. Taking care of yourself to a wife might mean going to church with her. She's concerned about *you, the whole you*, not just your body.

Brian: Yes, and I love that even that impression. That's where so many men are different from women. Women tend to be very holistic in their approach to life. It's only natural to go, when you hear a wife say, "I want my husband to take care of himself," it's not just that he'd work out.

Shaunti: Correct.

Brian: What I hear you saying is—and here's maybe the tips we can give these guys—it's like, "Alright, give me the bottom line here." We'll have all this in the show notes but, *call the doctor*. [Laughter] Get a physical every year.

I mean that sounds basic but how many of us guys don't do it. When something comes up that's wrong, and I'm so guilty of this, my wife goes "Have you gotten any medicine for it?"

I'm like, "No."

"Like why?"

"Because I'm mister tough guy."

She's going "Listen, take care of yourself. I can't help you if you don't help yourself."

That's one thing. But I think especially spiritually is a big one. I think for a lot of wives, they're dying for a husband that's going, "Are you taking care of your soul?"

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: It's so much more than your physical health. It's your spiritual health. It's where are you with the Lord? How are you growing together and moving towards Him? That's one reason I love the fact we're promoting the *I Do Every Day*—

Shaunti: Yes, absolutely.

Brian: —which is a devotional. You can sign up for that at FamilyLife.com/Ido. It's a great way to get a quick devo moment every day where you can talk about that with your spouse. Having that conversation shows, signals to your wife, "Hey, he's growing."

Shaunti: Exactly. I think that guys don't realize how much *all of that* matters to her sense that you're appealing to her, that you're attractive to her. I know the guys are like, "What?" That probably seems so strange because for you it's that visual stimulation. That's kind of it, right?

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: And for her, because now you know that her brain is wired differently and her heart is wired differently, that's *not* all that is there and that truly, guys, some of these other things actually matter way more.

I mean you reading this, for example, this daily devotional, you reading this, and maybe mentioning it to her from time to time, that is like strikingly appealing. You being thoughtful to her; holding the door open for her at church, you holding the door open when you go to a restaurant or whatever, taking her hand when you're walking across a parking lot, you saying the thoughtful things, you listening—right—that is so appealing to her. You're taking care of yourself so you're taking care of her.

Brian: It's so funny how if we were to ask this question to guys, "Is your wife taking care of herself?" Guys are immediately going to think, "Is she working out?"

Shaunti: Right. That's pretty much—well, and, "Is she eating healthy?"

Brian: Yes, eating healthy but is she—it's generally about the physical. For what I hear you saying, it's so clear and it's a great "ah-ha" moment. For a wife when she hears that question, "Is he taking care of his health?"

Shaunti: That is—and we shouldn't down play it—that does matter.

Brian: No, it does matter.

Shaunti: Actually, eating healthy and that kind of stuff does matter.

Brian: Eating healthy. Is he taking care of his spiritual health? Is he taking care of his mental health? It's a holistic package, especially when it comes to eating. This is something Jenn and I have done that's been real helpful. I know for me, I would not eat healthy if Jenn and I were not a team on this so to give ourselves challenges. We're doing one right now where—we used to do Whole 30. It's just too impossible. I've done it before.

Shaunti: You can do it for a short period of time.

Brian: I've been there, done that. Now we do a thing called the "Whole Goins" which is just about us. We make up our own rules and we enjoy it. [Laughter] Where we stay off certain foods, fast from them during the week and then on Sunday we've got a cheat meal. It's something we both look forward to and it binds us together.

Shaunti: Hmm. I like that a lot.

Brian: I think thinking through and having guys having conversations about—maybe even asking your wife—this would be a daring question for you to ask your wife is, "Honey, do you think I take care of myself? Do you see me taking care of me and where could I do a better job of that?"

For husbands listening that would be my challenge to you is go, "Is there any area that you feel like I could do a better job of taking care of myself?"

Shaunti: Yes, and recognize, guys, your wife, her brain isn't—when you ask that question, her brain isn't necessarily going to immediately go to "Oh, I wish he would read that daily devotional," right? [Laughter]

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: Because she's going to be thinking physical too because that's the definition usually of that question. But ask her about some of these other things, taking care of myself and which of these matters the most to you and you might be surprised. Some of you will hear, "I just wish you'd get off the couch." I mean some of you *will* hear that. That's probably—

Brian: "Stop taking your chips to the gym. It's not helping."

Shaunti: That probably will be for some of you what you hear. Listen, if that's you, you know that, right? You know that. This is not a surprise to you.

But if you say, “Shaunti and Brian said that there were these other things that matter. Which of these matters most?” let me tell you, once you open that door—which might be scary to you—but if you open that door to her and say “Which of these matters more in the way that I take care of myself?” I honestly think that many of the guys will hear something that surprises them and it is something they can do.

Brian: The good news is my wife loves my “dad bod” which I’m glad of, but she also loves the fact that I work out. I think that is important. I may not ever look like The Rock and I’m glad that’s not the standard.

I think about this episode. I hope it’s an encouragement to you guys. I think one of the things, a great way you can take care of yourself—Shaunti alluded to it a little bit when she was talking about her husband having to go to the doctor to get that nausea medicine. It’s because as we record this next week we’re going on a cruise, the *Love Like You Mean It*® FamilyLife cruise.

Shaunti: We are speaking on a cruise.

Brian: Excited about that and, guys, if you really want to amp up your game with your wife, that’s one of the best Valentine’s gifts you could give to your wife is to sign up for the *Love Like You Mean It* cruise, maybe, in the next year. Whenever you listen to this, just know, it always happens around Valentine’s Day and I can’t think of a better gift that you can give your wife than that. It is always a great time.

But on top of that, just getting away once a year, whether it’s a cruise, whether it’s a *Weekend to Remember*® conference which you can find out about at Weekendtoremember.com. Really, any of these, you can go to FamilyLife.com and you could find an event for you that would help you grow closer together in a world that often is trying to pull us apart. That’s what we’re passionate about here at FamilyLife.

We also want to let you know we have plenty of other audio content here at FamilyLife.com/podcast. We’ve got a blended family podcast with insights from Ron Deal. We have inspiring life impact stories with Kim Anthony. We have *FamilyLife This Week*® with Michelle Hill and of course, our daily program *FamilyLife Today*® with Dave and Ann Wilson. You’ll want to check out any of those at FamilyLife.com/podcast. You’ll also find ours, *Married with Benefits*.

Shaunti, I appreciate you being with me on this journey as we tackle some great questions.

Shaunti: Absolutely. Help these husbands!

Brian: And CJ3 back in the booth. Thank you for putting this on along with our producer, Jim, who added a ton of great insights to this episode especially. Ryan, thank

you, as well, being back there and helping us keep this show going and as interesting as it can be.

Join us next time on *Married with Benefits* in this season of “Questions Every Husband Is Asking” we’re going to tackle, I think, it’s something about wife’s emotions or something like that. I wasn’t really paying attention.

Shaunti: Oh dear. No, no, no, no, we are actually going to tackle something that is a simple question—

Brian: Okay.

Shaunti: —that many husbands have wondered which is, “Why does it take her so long to get to the point?”

Brian: —just land the plane.

Shaunti: —just land the plane. Like, “Why do our conversations take so long?” Yes, there is actually a very simple reason.

Brian: Okay, I think that will be worth listening to. Until then, I’m your host Brian Goins. Thank you for listening.

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