

Married With Benefits

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Episode 4: Why Can't My Wife Land the Plane in Conversations?

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Brian: From the Podcast Network at FamilyLife® this is *Married with Benefits*. We're on a relentless pursuit to help you love the one you're with and discover all the benefits that come with saying, "I do."

I am your host Brian Goins joined by Harvard-trained, best-selling author, Shaunti Feldhahn, who's helping us answer the "Questions Every Husband Is Asking". If you have missed any of the episodes up until this point in time, you can look back at FamilyLife.com/MWB and find some great questions that we've already asked so far. Today's not going to be any exception.

Shaunti, welcome back.

Shaunti: Oh, thanks. This is a big one for a lot of guys.

Brian: What I love about what we're doing here, it's really breaking down this verse in 1 Peter 3:7, where it says, Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to them since they are heirs with you in the grace of life. [Paraphrase]

There may be no greater area where a husband finds this command more challenging than he does with our topic today. One of the things I've loved about doing this is we've actually had guys introduce these.

Shaunti: I know, me too.

Brian: These are actual husbands that are introducing these questions so they aren't just coming from my brain. They're coming from questions every husband would ask. Today's question, I think, is one that a lot of us are thinking about. Listen to what it is today.

David: Hey, my name's David. I've been married for 18 years and here's the question I've got. Conversations sometimes take forever, especially when it's a little bit of a heated dialogue. Why can't my wife just get to the bottom line and just say what she's really thinking?

Brian: Wow! That's an honest question.

Shaunti: It is an honest question.

Brian: Do you recognize that voice?

Shaunti: I do.

Brian: That's our very own President, CEO of FamilyLife, David Robbins. I could tell, as a busy guy he wants to land the plane.

Shaunti: Get to the point. Come on, Meg.

Brian: I know. Meg and David are great friends of mine and Jenn's. They do have a great marriage, but I love the fact that David is going "Hey, help me understand my wife a little bit more." [Laughter] No pressure, Shaunti, but you're helping out our president and his wife.

Shaunti: I'm super excited to talk about this today because this is one of those things that has a disproportionate impact on marriages because it's *so frustrating* to the average husband. What's underneath it, guys, there's actually sort of two pieces to the puzzle that are going to be underneath what we're talking about today. The first of them is, believe it or not, your wife's *brain* is actually wired different from yours. That is what is running under the surface here.

Brian: We're talking about neurological issues today.

Shaunti: We are.

Brian: This is not something we can control or change.

Shaunti: No. [Laughter] It's not. Every man just went, "Oh."

Brian: Yes, "I've got to deal with this." You're saying then that their wiring is more complex. Is it more—it's not—it's just different is what you're saying.

Shaunti: It is different and here is how it is different—and this is actually the result, I will tell you, of many conversations and much analysis over the course of the last 15, 16 years, talking to neuroscientists and reading these neuroscientific studies that make my eyes roll back in my head [Laughter] because they're so complicated so I am going to super simplify something that is actually pretty complicated.

If any neuroscientists are listening to this, please forgive me in advance. But here's basically the starting point for most women, not all, and most men, not all. It turns out we actually process completely differently.

Most of the time women tend to be verbal processors. That's actually what's happening when you see her circling the airport. What she's basically doing is doing on the outside what you do on the inside because most men are internal processors. They tend to go underground and it's actively difficult for you as a guy to try to think something through while you're talking it through. Your wife is not that way.

For your wife, that is one of *the* best ways she can actually figure out what she's thinking, what she's feeling, what the right decision might be, so it's an incredibly important thing to recognize instead of getting frustrated. This is actually an opportunity to help your wife, sort of be your wife's hero in being okay with it and actually help her process.

Brian: What I heard you say, which was great, is that there's a sense where if you're compared to two different modes of transportation, the wife tends to process everything where we can see it, up in the air. She's an airplane.

Shaunti: Great way to put it.

Brian: She might circle. Guys are like subways.

Shaunti: Great way to put it.

Brian: We go underground and we're trying to find the way where we need to go but we don't want anybody to see it. Like, we want to think about it and then we're going to come out somewhere else. But for what I hear you saying is that for women, by and large—I know there's probably guys that are sitting here going, "That's how—I'm a verbal. I've got verbal diarrhea. It's just coming out of me, you know." But for most, guys are not like that.

Shaunti: It's about 75%. There's about 25% of the population has what some neuroscientists and researchers call a bridge brain. Which is that they tend to process in the same way that the opposite sex does, or they have like pieces of that puzzle. But most of the time it's about 75% of men, about 75% of women tend to process these two different ways and it causes so much frustration.

Because for us as women, if I can just tell you as a guy, it is so frustrating. I don't realize, by definition, I don't realize that Jeff has been processing something for three days because he wasn't talking about it. He says, "I think we should do this," and I think this is the beginning of the conversation. [Laughter] I have no idea that he's been processing for three days on whether we should buy a new refrigerator or whatever.

I'm like, "What about this? And "What about that?" The average guy could kind of feel a bit criticized.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: But we don't know that you've been talking about it, thinking about it internally, talking to yourself about it.

Brian: This happens to Jenn and I all the time.

Shaunti: Does it really?

Brian: Oh, gosh. Because I do. I go subway. I go underneath the surface and I think about it. I journal about it. Then I want her to see all of the brilliance of my work [Laughter] of the last three days. Then when I unveil it, all I hear is questions, criticisms.

Shaunti: "What about this?" Yes.

Brian: Yes. It's like, "No, no. I've thought about that. We're done with this. We're moving on. This is great. This is a great plan." But what I hear you saying is like, no, she needs to enter into the conversation. How could a guy help with that to where it's not like an ambush? Because it feels like an ambush.

Shaunti: It does. Here's the thing you need to recognize, as a guy. When you unveil your brilliant plan, recognize for her this is the beginning. This is the first she's heard about it and she's going to need to do on the outside, what you just did on the inside. She's going to need to ask the "What about...?" because you did that. You just did it internally in your subway, right?

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: She's going to need to do that. View that as her subway. She's not circling the airport. She's not being scatterbrained. Something that a lot of guys told me is, "Why is she so all over the place? She's so scatterbrained." No, no. She's processing and she'll sometimes do that internally, too, but expect it. When you say your brilliant plan expect that she's going to need that and this is a chance actually for you to help her with this.

Here's a piece of the puzzle that is very, very common when it may be that she's responding to your plan. It may just be that she's bringing up something that is frustrating to her. You see her circling the airport as she's talking about how her boss embarrassed her at work in front of all the people, as she brings it up over and over and over. For you, you're thinking, "Why can't she just let it go? Or you try to go, "Here's what you should do tomorrow."

Brian: "We've been over this ground before."

Shaunti: Yes!

Brian: Or, "Hey, let's just settle it then."

Shaunti: Yes! “Let’s settle it” or “Let it go until you can deal with it.”

What you don’t recognize is the reason that you start hearing “I don’t want you to fix it. I just want you to *listen*,” right? How many guys have heard that? Here’s what’s going on. It’s part of the same process.

Part of what she’s processing is her feelings and you don’t recognize, as a guy, when stuff starts getting emotional like, “My boss really embarrassed me and I don’t know how I’m going to have credibility when I walk in tomorrow,” she’s got all of these feelings that are jangling in her head and her heart. She’s—the image that to me is really helpful for a guy is think of it as like, you know how you take a rubber band and you twist it?

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: You twist it more and more and more and it starts getting all jangled and tight and kinked up. There’s no processing really going on, at that point, because she’s so tense and tight. What she most needs, at that point, is for you to help pull out those feelings. For you, as a guy—a lot of guys sort of feel like feelings kind of fur up the gears. They make it harder to think.

Brian: Exactly.

Shaunti: Your wife is the opposite. If you think about it, it’s amazing the human race survived.

Brian: It is.

Shaunti: I mean really it is. Your wife is the opposite. She needs to get all of those feelings out of her. You will actually do her a great service if, instead of trying to skip straight to the solution because you did your three days and you know what the solution is, instead of skipping straight to the solution or the solution to the fact that her boss embarrassed her, instead, step one is actually pull out those feelings.

“How did that make you feel when he said that? Did you think that so and so is going to be looking at you sideways tomorrow? Did you feel like Jesse and John were talking about you behind your back?”

Brian: Wait, so you’re wanting me to engage with this. [Laughter] That’s what I think I hear you saying.

Shaunti: That is, that is what I’m saying.

Brian: You don't want me just to nod my head and feel like in the back of mind I'm going, "When's this going to end? Let's just land the plane." You're actually wanting me to go—I got to ask follow-up questions.

Shaunti: Because for you, the solution is landing the plane.

Brian: Right, it is.

Shaunti: For her, there's actually two solutions. For her, the first solution that she needs before she can get to the solution solution, the first thing she needs is to actually have the solution to all these jangling feelings. She's incredibly tightened, kinked up right now like that rubber band. As you ask those questions, you think you're adding fuel to the fire. You're like, "Oh, my gosh! I'm pulling out more feelings."

No, no, no. Think of it more like drawing poison out of a wound, okay? You're not like throwing gasoline on a fire. You're drawing poison out of a wound. You'll start seeing that jangled, tight, kinked-up rubber band start to untwist a little bit and relax.

That's the first solution, that she *has* to talk out these feelings, get them out, understand what she's feeling, understand what she's thinking *by talking*. Then you can move to the second solution which is, "Do we need to talk about what happens when you go in tomorrow to talk to your boss?"

Those two things, guys—here's really the big picture issue of this. This is a *huge* way to make your wife feel loved, like *huge*, because she could probably figure out the solution on her own if she had to, but she cannot feel listened to on her own.

Brian: Wow! That's big. She can't feel listened to on her own.

That's truly—how much of this about both of these seasons is about learning to die to self? That if I truly want to live with my wife in an understanding way, if I want to experience the oneness, the intimacy that I think that's the reason every guy and gal got married is that I want to be one with someone, it requires me to do something very counterintuitively. I've got to understand a brain that is so different from mine. I live with somebody that is just very different.

It just goes back to say FamilyLife is all about helping couples move towards oneness when everything else is trying to make us pull apart towards isolation. And oneness, when we think about that Biblically, never means sameness.

Shaunti: Great way of putting it.

Brian: When God decide to put two things into one, He decided that you're going to reflect my image so I'm going to put together a man and a woman just because in my image I'm very different. When you think about God, He's three in one. He's perfectly

loving and yet He's perfectly just. Yet He is three and yet He's one. He's distant but yet He's near. He's all these like mess of contradictions.

Shaunti: I love that.

Brian: It shouldn't surprise us that He's asking us to reflect His image. He's put a contradiction into your life—

Shaunti: —your wife.

Brian: —called your wife. Now, how do I love this person? What I hear you saying is that it's going to make you die to yourself. Because everything in you wants to go, "Let's just end this conversation," or "I've got something else going on in my mind." What I hear you saying is, no, we get the privilege to untangle that, that rubber band that's all tense.

Shaunti: You do. Here's the thing that I will encourage the men listening to us is: Yes, it is dying to yourself, especially at the beginning. Because, can I just tell you guys, you start doing this, the first few times it's going to be like "Uh," you know?

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: "I have to wait while she's asking all these questions that feel like criticisms when I've been thinking about this three days," or "I have to wait when she's talking about her boss embarrassing her in the office."

That will happen maybe two or three times and then you're going to start seeing her relax. You're going to start seeing her feel heard. You're going to start recognizing that, "Wow, this is actually me making her feel loved. This is actually me being part of a solution that she can't be for herself. This is me being her hero." Once you recognize that, it's no longer going to be a sacrifice.

Now, of course, it might be still frustrating where you're like, "Okay, we've got to get to the point. We've got to decide whether to buy a refrigerator." [Laughter] There are some of those cases but recognize that it is dying to yourself at the beginning.

But once you get used to this and you see the benefit, talk about married with benefits. This is not going to be something that for most men that you have to like, "Huh, okay, I have to pretend to listen." You're actually going to *want* to because you see how much it makes your wife feel loved.

Brian: You're practicing a muscle that you really haven't used before.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: Like anything, it's going to feel weird, awkward. But then once you get that muscle engaged, you're going to go, "This isn't so bad. This is good." And I start learning that—I think the image that you're giving which is really, "I get the opportunity as a husband to be the hero of her heart, to help her heart unwind."

One of our producers just sent this verse which I think is a great verse. Proverbs 20, verse 5, The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but it takes a man of understanding to draw it out. [Paraphrase]

Shaunti: Wow, that's really good.

Brian: And so your wife's heart, her brain is deep water. I get the privilege of going "Okay, I'm going to draw it out. I'm going to figure out what's going on in that swirl, in that mess, in that—that's deep water that I can't see—she can't see clearly—I'm not seeing clearly. I'm going to help us both come to that clarity.

Shaunti: That's really good. I think for the average guy, I think when we're talking about, "What do we do differently?" one of the most important pieces of that is to counter the immediate feeling like, "Her verbal processing is criticizing me."

Brian: That's good.

Shaunti: Because it isn't. It is that deep water that you're pulling out of her. That's what needs to come out. It is important at the very beginning to recognize whenever you're having this kind of conversation, whenever you've had your three days of subway and you've been thinking something through and she hasn't known about it until now because you've got your brilliant thing, is to recognize, "Okay now it's her turn to have the deep water and it's just going to be on the outside. It's going to be verbalized."

This isn't criticizing. Her asking these questions is my chance, not to show her how brilliant I am, but for me to actually recognize this is her doing on the outside what I just did on the inside.

Brian: When David asked the question at the beginning, it was a lot about, "I want to land the plane. I want to get through this conversation a lot faster." There was a sense of—and for every guy that's out, there's like, "Okay, I'm getting the fact that we're processing differently and I'm more of a subway and she's more of a plane. She's processing on the outside. I get to help her do on the outside what I'm doing on the inside. That's cool. That's great. I'm seeing that she's not scatterbrained she's just—that's how she's verbally going through it."

But what about those moments when we don't have time for this. I've got things to do and I feel like I'm getting pulled into a conversation that I don't know when it ends. What are some things that a guy can do in that moment to go, "How do I not short circuit the process but grow through this?"

Shaunti: Here's the reality and I'm sort of thinking out loud because I'm a verbal processor as well. [Laughter]

Brian: You hadn't circled that plane.

Shaunti: But one of the things that is occurring to me is to help your wife understand in advance, because I don't think there is any way for you to help her land the plane more quickly in the moment without her feeling like you're trying to short circuit, that you're not listening because candidly, you *aren't* listening in the way that she needs.

In advance is one of those things that having a conversation about this, this is one of the reasons when we're doing the research on the books, that it was so helpful for us to suddenly go, "Wait, is that how you feel? Is that how you feel?"

Ask your wife about this and help her understand you so that she recognizes that you're not trying to be cold; you're not trying to railroad her with something she just heard about or you don't care. It's not that you don't care about the fact that her boss embarrassed her. It's literally that you process differently and to be able to say, "Honey, in those moments when there is something that's kind of time sensitive, would you be okay if we came to a quicker decision?"

And we sort of move forward temporarily with whatever the decision is knowing that you're still going to probably have to process it and that's okay. We can keep going while you're processing."

Whatever it is, she'll be fine with that because she's a realist just like you're a realist. If something has to happen in five minutes, okay, it has to happen in five minutes. She'll get that. But just don't expect her overall to be the same as you are and talk about it ahead of time.

Brian: How will I know this new muscle that I'm going to be activating as a result of this podcast—I'm going to live with my wife in an understanding way—how do I know that I'm winning? How do I know that I'm succeeding at this? Okay, this muscle is actually working.

Shaunti: Okay, I'll tell you. To me, two things rise far above the others. The first, you'll know it's succeeding when you're no longer exasperated. Because you're going to actually be *wanting* to help her process.

When she starts processing out loud and you recognize "Oh, she's processing. She's not criticizing. She's processing. This is cool. I can help her process," and you're not exasperated anymore. That's like "Oh, wow! Okay, now I know this." Like I said, it's not like, "Okay, I have to grit my teeth for the rest of my life and just take it." You're going to actually enjoy that process and support.

The second way that you know that you're winning is when you see the rubber band relax. It's when you see this tension start to melt away from her as she's talking about what happened at the office and she's starting to feel heard. That's your signal. She's felt heard. You've been successful at helping her work through those feelings.

At that point, then absolutely, you can start thinking about "Hey, honey, would you like to talk about what happens when you walk in tomorrow?"

Sometimes she'll be like, "No thanks. I'm good."

Brian: Because you just processed her feelings

Shaunti: Because you've processed her feelings and sometimes, she'll be like, "Yes, I want your advice." Which is of course is where you guys—

Brian: Bam!

Shaunti: Bam! You know, Mr-Fix-it hat goes on. But the key is, guys, to recognize that being successful in this isn't necessarily what you thought it was. It's not that you cut down the conversation from 15 minutes to three. It's that you recognize you've just helped your wife with something that she couldn't do on her own which was to feel heard and listened to and that you've also, in the process, made her feel loved.

Brian: My gut is that's going to come back to be a benefit to the husband.

Shaunti: Oh, yes! Absolutely.

Brian: What wife doesn't want a husband that that's his practice? It's going to probably come back to go, "Wow! We feel closer."

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: Which that might lead to other benefits—

Shaunti: It just might.

Brian: —that we're not going to talk about in this one.

Shaunti: It just might. Different episode. Previous episode.

Brian: Different episode. There may be some spies out there in the audience—some wives that are listening—

Shaunti: Oh, there we go.

Brian: —to this that are going, “Okay, for the women that may be listening, how can they make it easier on the husbands to move into this and be like that?”

Shaunti: This is obviously part of the conversation that the women need to have with their men of course. But also, women, I need to tell you as one girl to another, don’t expect your husband to be one of your girlfriends. I mean just don’t. It’s a different brain that he has than you do. God has given you a different wiring. You can’t expect him to act like and listen two hours like one of your girlfriends might. That is literally not the way he is wired.

Brian: *Gilmore Girls* is not about marriage.

Shaunti: No. [Laughter]

Brian: If that’s the example that you’re thinking as far as our conversation is going to go, we’re not going to win there.

Shaunti: No, you’re not going to have the mother, daughter long involved conversations deep into the night. This is something where your husband is wired differently by God on purpose. I do not know why God gave us such different processing wiring. I really don’t know. But I do suspect is that one of the reasons is for us to live with each other in an understanding way.

I do suspect that it’s “iron sharpening iron” and for us to go, “That’s okay for me to appreciate and admire and actually, not just be okay with, but actually celebrate the differences of this man that God has given me.”

I know, women, that one of the things for those of you spies who are listening is to actually recognize that there is something that will help your husbands. Which is if you will say “Honey, I just need to think out loud for a minute. Just let me—I’m thinking out loud.”

Brian: That’s good.

Shaunti: That will help him to step back and not feel criticized when he’s thought of the perfect answer for the refrigerator and now it’s the beginning of the conversation for you. Recognize that he might feel criticized because you’re asking all these questions and he’s feeling challenged. But instead, to go, “You know, honey, just give me a second. I have to think through this out loud.”

Brian: That’s really good. Guys, you can actually give that, you can pass that advice on.

Shaunti: Yes, absolutely.

Brian: That's a great one to give. Incidentally, the minute that you just said "Ladies, don't expect your husband to be your girlfriend," we have three male producers behind you that as you were saying, they all started nodding like, "Yes!"

Shaunti: I just looked behind me and they're all grinning right now. That's hilarious.

Brian: They're all grinning so they're going to be passing this podcast on to their wives, I'm sure. Good stuff as always. I love having these conversations with you, Shaunti.

Shaunti: You too, Brian.

Brian: We get—

Shaunti: We get to help husbands!

Brian: We do! This is good! FamilyLife *is* passionate about every husband feeling like they're one with their wife because we feel like—we believe that when couples are one, it's amazing how society changes, how kids change, how communities change.

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Shaunti: Good stuff.

Brian: Yes, they're great. I want to give a special thanks as always to our audio producer CJ3, our entire podcast team back there, the male producers in the back that are loving this episode. We could not do this without them. That is definitely true.

We would ask you to join us next time as we answer another question every husband is asking and here's a hint at our next topic, guys. It usually happens right about the time you're wanting to go to some deep REM sleep.

So until then, I'm Brian Goins. Thanks for listening.

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