

Married With Benefits

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Episode 6: What Do I Do If My Wife Doesn't Trust Me?

Guest: Ann Wilson
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Brian: Welcome to the Podcast Network of FamilyLife®. I'm Brian Goins host of *Married with Benefits*. A podcast devoted to helping you love the one you're with and discover all the benefits that came with saying, "I do."

Today I'm joined once again by Harvard-trained researcher Shaunti Feldhahn who just got her Diet Coke—

Shaunti: Yes, I did.

Brian: —delivered to her. I just got my coffee delivered to me.

Shaunti: That's my fuel.

Brian: I'm sitting here going, "Why don't we have *Married with Benefits* mugs? We need to get some.

Shaunti: We need those, absolutely!

Brian: We need Ryan to start designing our logo because we could start selling those.

Shaunti: We probably could use those as premiums for our listeners. I'm sure they would love that too.

Brian: Yes, give some swag away. Be looking for those at some point in time. [Laughter] But we're not—

Shaunti: Our producer just went "Oh, no, one other thing to do."

Brian: That's right; one other thing to do.

We have a great benefit today, not just of being joined with Shaunti, but we have Ann Wilson in the house. She is going to be on the podcast, as well. Ann, of course, is the cohost of our daily radio program *FamilyLife Today*®, and dare I say, the favorite host of *FamilyLife Today*. [Laughter]

Shaunti: Well, I can't say that because I like both Ann and Dave.

Brian: Okay, Dave's okay but I'm going to go ahead and say, she's my favorite.

Shaunti: Don't tell Dave.

Brian: She's also the author of a new book called *Vertical Marriage* which is also—FamilyLife just produced a small group series with *Vertical Marriage*—

Shaunti: Awesome.

Brian: —which is excellent. In fact, Jim Mitchell, our executive producer, helped produce that and did a great job with it. You can find all of that on our website at FamilyLife.com.

Ann, thanks for jumping on with us this morning.

Ann: So fun to be with you guys.

Brian: I wish I had a lighter question to come at you with, Ann, to start your first visit on this podcast with us, but it is a bit of a tough one. Many couples can lose heart and some move from saying "I do" to "I don't" if this isn't handled well.

Shaunti: Absolutely.

Brian: The question is this, "What happens when my wife says she doesn't trust me and she's growing distant or cold, what do I do?"

Ann: That's a great question, isn't it?

Shaunti: To me the starting point—and I'd love to hear Ann address this because I know this is part of your story in *Vertical Marriage*, in your book—but when I hear that kind of question, "She says she doesn't trust me anymore and she's becoming distant. What do I do?" like, wake up fast. Because that's a really big signal of something that, it's something you need to take very seriously as a husband.

Because one of the biggest trends that we see in the research across all the different studies, and frankly across more informal settings like when we do events, is pretty often we'll have a husband come up to us and say, "My wife just suddenly shut down and she says she wants a divorce and I didn't even know we had such a big problem." It just didn't register that there was something such a big deal that was going on.

Sometimes there's been a reason for the lack of trust. He had a pornography problem. He just didn't realize how big of a deal it was to his wife. Or he had become a workaholic and she was like, "I need you. I need you," and he just thought, "You know, it's fine. We've got to make sure we can provide for the family," and then she's done.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: I'm curious, because I know that's part of Ann's story as well.

Brian: Yes.

Ann, was there a time where it felt like, man, Dave was just clueless? I know we might be throwing Dave under the bus. I will say we talked to him yesterday. He's like, "Tell all these stories. They're in the book." So we're not sharing anything, and you're not going to be sharing anything, that has not already been vetted by Dave, which is very important for couples when they share stories, always get permission.

Shaunti: Yes!

Brian: But, Ann, was there a time where it felt like, man, he was just clueless as to where trust had been broken? How did that develop in your story?

Ann: You guys really are describing our marriage, our lives. Shaunti, I would agree with you. I think that guys, when their wife is crying out or complaining or saying, "We need to fix this", they need to perk up their ears because it's serious.

It was really—I'm sure some listeners have heard this story, but it was our 10-year anniversary. I thought we were doing *terrible*. Dave was gone all the time. He was traveling with the Detroit Lions because he was their chaplain. We had two little boys, a four- and a two-year-old. We had always been doing ministry together and suddenly he's just gone all the time.

We were also starting a new church so he's at meetings. He's kind of helping start this whole thing, which was a dream come true for both of us. But I also felt like, "You're leaving us in the dust. Our boys don't know you anymore, I feel like." I was saying those things to him, like, "Dave, we need you."

He's like, "I know but this is so important." He was gone all the time.

I started out so angry. I would yell but I found that after a while I stopped yelling and I started becoming really bitter. Then my bitterness turned to resentment. Then my resentment turned to numbness and I didn't even care. We were at the point I didn't care. I told Dave that at one point, "I have nothing. I feel like I've checked out of our relationship. I don't even care that you're gone."

Here's the thing, you guys: he thought we were doing great. Exactly what you said, Shaunti. He thought we were like at a 10. I'm like, "We're a point five. Are you kidding me?"

Brian: How do we get that clueless as guys? What is it that where we can't even pick up on the signals?

Shaunti: Well, here's—I can actually tell you exactly what it is because this is one of the things that Jeff and I really dug into in a couple of the studies that we did—it comes back to one of the things we said in one of the previous episodes about the different insecurities of men and women.

Men simply, once they get married, they stop feeling insecure about whether their wife loves them. They just assume that she loves them because that's not their insecurity. Their insecurity is more, “Am I going to be able to provide for the family?”

Guys, that's your insecurity, so you never take that for granted.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: You completely assume your relationship is fine because, “Of course, she loves me.”

You don't recognize in *her* heart her question is that, “Am I lovable?” that we talked about in episode one—“Am I special?” In marriage that doesn't go away. It just morphs a little bit to, “Does he *really* love me?” That is a very, very real concern and fear for her.

When you're off being the Detroit Lions' chaplain, you're off—maybe you're on the road as a salesman a lot, maybe you have other issues like the pornography stuff and you signal to her something that says that you're growing distant, she is feeling absolutely like, “We are about to go over the edge. I am absolutely feeling unloved,” because that's *her* question.

Brian: That's where, Ann, I'm thinking about how you two were totally missing it. Yet Dave, probably the reason why he thinks it's a 10 is because he is providing for the family. Like he is working hard. He's building the church. He's working with the Detroit Lions. So he's feeling like, “I am loving you.”

How was that—how did that conversation go where you're going, “You're clearly not. You've broken trust,” and he's going “Man, I feel like I've been loving you hard. I've been doing all that I can do”?

Shaunti: —loving you well.

Brian: —loving you well.

Ann: I think he was saying that. He said, “I'm proving I'm loving you by all that I'm doing for you.”

Yet I'm thinking in my heart, "I don't want that. I want *you*."

I think you're exactly right. He's chasing his career thinking he's loving me by providing and I'm thinking, "No, I want a relationship with you. I want you to be here with us in relationship time wise." That was really hard for Dave, for us to even *get it* for one another of what that looked like.

Shaunti: If I could mention one of the statistics for the guys.

Brian: Sure.

Shaunti: This is going to blow a lot of the men who are listening to this away. This is a nationally representative study. This isn't just church goers. This is every age and racial background and religious background, etc.

That is that seven out of ten married women, 70% of married women, said if they had to make a choice, and you know we wouldn't want to have to make the choice, but if we had to, 70% said, "I would actually give up financial security. I would endure financial hardship even if I had to, if that's what it took to get more of you."

That is the difference. Men find that incredibly hard to believe. Guys, I know you find that incredibly hard to believe. But if you're seeing it in the statistics and you're hearing it from your wife, you need to listen.

Brian: Yes.

Ann: Shaunti, that's so interesting because I took that statistic in your book and I asked them, "Which would you choose?"

Every single woman in the room said, "I would rather have the relationship than the security of the financial part."

Shaunti: And every guy listening to this is going, "Oh, yeah, you say that now when we have the financial security."

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: I can tell you, because this is what men always say when we mention this. They say, "You say that now. But, hey, let's try enduring that financial hardship and see what you say."

Well, guess what? We actually crunched those numbers based on where people *were* financially and the women who described themselves at the lowest end of the financial scale, who described their finances as quote, unquote, desperate were even *more* likely to say that they would want him.

Brian: We're talking a lot about workaholism, it seems like. How did that translate into broken trust for you, Ann? Because I could hear one guy going "Alright, yeah, I work a lot but why is that broken trust? That doesn't feel like broken trust to me."

Ann: Yes, that's a good question. I think what happened is—I think what happened for me, as a woman, is I stopped trusting that he was intentional or wanted to participate in our relationship. What I mean by that is he would say, "Hey, it's going to be okay. In another week or two, I will get my schedule together." But it kept going and going and going.

What I think I did in my heart was I kind of shut down my heart. Because when you put your heart out there, it's kind of, "I'm handing you my heart because I trust you with it. I'm trusting your word of saying you're going to commit to this and we're going to be together." So my heart got hard and I no longer trusted in the care for it because I felt like he wasn't putting the time or energy into caring for it.

Shaunti: Well, it felt like he didn't care for it, right?

Ann: Exactly.

Shaunti: That's what it feels like. Even if that's not true, that's what it feels like.

Brian: Right.

Ann: Yes.

Brian: Because I think most guys that are listening to this are going, "Broken trust? I can understand with pornography. I can understand it with—"

Shaunti: "—an affair."

Brian: Yes, an affair. Those are the big things. But what I hear you saying is, no, it's about, "I'm trusting you with my heart and when we said 'I do', the benefits of saying 'I do' was you're going to care for me; you're going to nourish me. The Bible in Ephesians 5, talks about nourishing and cherishing. If I'm constantly feeling ignored and taken advantage of or thought light of, I'm not going to trust that we're going to be one.

Ann: It's not like I was saying "Me. Be. Come and serve me. Be with me." I just wanted to say, "Let's just be a team together again."

Shaunti: —not be so distant. There's a whole host of ways that a guy without intending to—I mean, let's all acknowledge to all the men and the women who are listening in that this is out of good intentions. This isn't *bad* intentions most of the time. A man cares for

his wife deeply. It's just that the wife is feeling uncared for and we're trying to help some of the men understand why that is.

But another example of that is—this has actually happened to a friend of mine. They went through some financial hardship and had to shut down a business—had to—they lost their home and had to move back in with *his* mother and from that—

Brian: Who wants that?

Shaunti: Neither of them really wanted to but it was kind of, “Okay, this is the way it's got to be for a bit until we get back on our feet.” The problem was that he didn't realize—and I totally believe he didn't get this—he didn't realize that from that moment on, he kind of started prioritizing his mother rather than his wife.

Literally, I was asking her if—I was giving her a gift of some kind and she was like “Oh, I don't have any place to put this because we're in the guest room in his mom's house.”

I'm like, “Maybe she can just store it in the storage room.”

She's like, “Well, I don't really have any status to ask that.”

I thought “Oh, dear.” That's a signal that he's, all of these ways, he's prioritizing his mom over his wife and not standing up for his wife.

Now that's an extreme example, you're living with your in-laws. However, think through, there may be things like that where you as a husband don't realize maybe you are sort of not standing up for your wife with a difficult situation with your parents or not protecting her in that way. That could also be broken trust.

Brian: Yes, I almost wanted to give the guys something to go, hey, here are the five or six things that are broken trust issues that we may not be thinking about. Like, I'm hearing you say, “Prioritizing mom over the wife.”

Ann, I'm hearing you say, “I just don't feel like you're cherishing my heart. You're cherishing, you're valuing something more than my heart.”

What are some other things—again, we know about porn, we know about affairs; we'll get to that later—but what are some other ways where you go, “This is a signal of broken trust in that arena of my relationship,” that a guy might not be thinking about?

Shaunti: The thing that occurred to me *immediately* when you said that Brian is, to some degree, how you handle the kids. Women and men tend to have, sometimes very different ways of handling the kids.

Sometimes, a wife can feel your way of handling the kids is too harsh. That doesn't mean that you change everything you are as a dad. Dads and moms just handle things differently. But if she is consistently worried about that in her mind, if you're hurting her children, you're hurting her and breaking some trust there.

Ann: The other thing that I was thinking too is—this is a big one for women, especially in today's society with our social media platforms and how we're so interactive digitally—but I think boundaries with women, other women, is really big.

What I mean by that is, not just that you're having an affair. It could be who you're talking to online, who you're interacting with on social media, what you're looking at, who you're following. I've talked to so many women that are feeling so insecure because there aren't very many boundaries put in place for protection of their marriage.

I think for Dave and I, we're pretty diligent on this. Because he's a pastor, he has a lot of women that are hurting and wanting to meet with him, wanting to have lunch with him, wanting to share her problems with him. He's really—we've both put some boundaries in place, even on our social media of we can see who we're following, we can see what we're looking at because that can feel—make us as women feel super insecure.

Shaunti: Even things like, "Wait, why won't you let me see your text messages?"

Brian: Ding, ding, ding, that's a signal.

Shaunti: Those kind of things—and, guys, let me just say to any of the men listening to this who that may be a question for them is, "Why aren't you?"

You may think, "I'm not having an affair. I'm not..." If you're not completely opening your life to her, if there's some piece of yourself that you're holding back out of sort of a desire to protect yourself a little bit; maybe you're a little worried about having your heart be so open to this person that you love so much it feels scary, but if you're holding back and protecting yourself, you're actually going to create the problem that you are trying to protect yourself from.

Brian: It seems like there are a lot of guys that will have attics of their heart that they won't let their wife into. Eventually that attic grows to take over the other parts of their heart and that's where their trust really starts breaking down.

I was thinking about this and, Ann, you started feeling cold. You mentioned the word bitter and that you just started getting resentful. You started pulling away.

I would imagine if I'm Dave—because this happens with Jenn and I a lot—is that I have this unbelievable super power where Jenn can walk in a room and I can take her temperature from across the room. [Laughter] I'm like this—it's like a meat thermometer but for a woman's heart.

She comes in and I can go, “Okay, she’s cold and I need to find a warmer room preferably with a TV and a bag of chips.” I could see how this problem exacerbates because when a woman gets colder towards a man, it’s not like that signals to a guy, “Hey, let’s move closer.” [Laughter]

What is it that, a guy—I’m hearing Shaunti say, first of all, “Wake up and stop minimizing this issue.”

Shaunti: It’s a big deal. You need to treat it as such.

Brian: Treat it—so if I’m getting the signals my wife is cold, she’s not responding, she’s yelling, it’s like something’s off.

Shaunti: Think of it, guys, think of it this way: How would you feel if that was your boss?

Brian: That’s good.

Shaunti: If your boss started getting distant, if your boss started excluding you from meetings, if your boss started saying certain things, you would take it so seriously because of your fear of needing to provide for your family. Take it exactly that seriously.

Brian: I’m hearing, “Wake up,” but what else did Dave do to really help move towards that restoring. Okay, trust has been broken. That’s been communicated. I’ve woken up. Now what do I do? Where do I go next?

Ann: I’ll just add that I really had a piece in this as well. Because I think what we can do as women is we can put all of our hope, just as men kind of go out to their career and be a provider, what I started doing is I took my eyes off of Jesus as my provider and my provision and security and I put them on Dave. It was like I had a magnifying glass on him and I started pointing out and seeing all the ways he wasn’t making my heart feel secure.

What Dave ended up doing, which was first of all, he said he repented. He said, “I’m not right with God. I need to get right with God. I need to apologize to you.” Which even that, an apology of saying, “I’m hearing you right now and I’m really sorry that I haven’t been listening.”

That right there was like “Whoa,” because before we would just go into combat mode where Dave would be defensive; I would be defensive. For him, first of all, to apologize and, you guys, my heart didn’t get warm overnight and my feelings didn’t come back overnight. But what ended up happening was Dave who *hates* conflict, hates it—and so—but we would go out for lunch.

I was so amazed by this because we would sit down for lunch or dinner once a week or once every couple of weeks and here's what he would say, "Tell me how you think we're doing and how am I doing as a husband?"

I thought, "Are you kidding me?" That is the most vulnerable thing he could say.

And as he's kept doing that because he's like, "I'm going to be so bad. She's going to give me a one again." You know, "Out of a one to ten, how are we doing?"

But what happened was I saw that, wow, just having that conversation. It was so simple just to ask that, but that conversation made me feel more secure, like, "Oh, he means this. This is *really* important to him that he's going to the point of having conflict that could happen and he would ask me that question." That really began to restore my trust in Dave.

Brian: I'm hearing, "Wake up." First of all, guys, just wake up. Don't minimize this. "It's not that big of a deal."

It's not going to go away. Don't wait for her just to warm back up to you. Wake up and address how significant the issue is. Repent first to God. I think that's one of the things you said, like, get right with God vertically which is what your book is all about. It's such a great concept.

Get right with God and then apologize. Get right horizontally with my wife. Truly apology; no *buts*, no rationalizations. Just own it, right?

Then I love what you said there is that Dave was going back almost for a performance review.

Ann: Oh, that's a good way to see it.

Shaunti: It's scary.

Brian: It's scary and it sounds like, that shouldn't be a gospel centered marriage that we're—but the truth of the matter is it's accountability. It's saying, "Hey, how am I doing here? I recognize I have blind spots." They wouldn't call them blind spots if we saw them, right? The best person to see those is my wife. "How am I doing, Honey? How am I doing specifically in this area of holding your heart well?"

Shaunti: I can see a guy listening to this and going, "That right there is the most scary thing that you said out of all four of those things." Because it is opening himself up for criticism. As we were talking about, for a guy it's all about, "Am I any good at what I do?"

Opening myself up to hearing, "No, you're doing a stinky job," doesn't feel very good. But, guys, here's the thing: the very fact that you are opening yourself up in that way,

that right there touches your wife's heart. This is one of those cases where you're going to have to trust God, even if it's hard to trust your wife to hold that heart well, to recognize your vulnerability in that area.

Maybe she doesn't recognize your vulnerability. Maybe she has been rubbed so raw that you're going to have to be okay for a while with her saying some pretty hard things that may be really hard for you to hear and for you to recognize that, as this is part of the consequence of me being so clueless for so long and having good intentions and not realizing that I was rubbing her raw.

Now she's responding out of that which isn't great. But this is your opportunity to protect that rawness while she regrows the skin, so to speak—

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: —and is able to get back to a place where she's able to be more loving and more caring. This is your opportunity to be that protector of her heart in a different way.

Brian: It's one of the most courageous things guys can do because we do feel so insecure. It's a moment where we can depend upon God's spirit because we don't want to move into that coldness; we don't want to move into that. We feel like a failure. We feel like we'll mess up again.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: But trusting that God will give you power and encouragement to move into that, into her heart, and to help with that. I think you guys have given us a great roadmap to do that. I appreciate that.

Ann, I appreciate your vulnerability. You and Dave both do a great job. I think that's why you guys are a great host for *FamilyLife Today*.

But in the book, *Vertical Marriage*, you go into some details even about Dave's neck problem [Laughter] with how he would constantly—I don't know how constant it was—but he would look at other women—talks a little bit about pornography. We're not going to get into that a ton right now because we've actually got a counselor that we're going to be talking to about how do you restore trust after that—

Shaunti: —in the next episode.

Brian: —in the next episode. But for you what was—you think about that for Dave—what was the thing for him that he was able to go, "Okay, I woke up. I apologized." Walk through that quickly with us about how he did that with you when it came to pornography.

Ann: Yes, and that was something that took a while too because Dave had been—and let me add this was way back at the beginning of our marriage. He’s really found victories, doing great. But in the beginning of our marriage, he kind of came in with this in his background and he went through a spell where he was really kind of just hiding it from me. But I could tell something was off. I kept asking him, asking him. He said “No, no, no.”

Then it finally came out. Which I felt like “Oh, well, you’ve been lying all this time,” which is really hard. But what ended up happening. Let me add, I had a terrible response as he confessed it and told me. I wish I wouldn’t have—I was awful. And then I would keep asking him and he would go through times of victory, times of failure. This went on for a couple of years.

But I realize I was doing a terrible job of responding, which made him feel total shame and wanting to pull away. But what Dave ended up doing was he brought other men into his life and said “You guys need to help me. I’m hurting Ann. I want to be open with her.”

I think when I saw him really attacking this—when I realized this isn’t an overnight fix; there are a lot of deeper issues that he’s kind of getting into that needs to solve. Which I had my own issues and created such insecurity. But as I watched him pursue other men to get help, pursue what was at the core of this.

He was committed to sharing this part of his life with me and was open to giving me every device, everything that he had. Back then we didn’t even have it on any of our devices. But still, that really helped. But I was amazed at Dave—in my response because I was so horrible—that he continued to work on it. It really said a lot about his relationship with God.

Brian: Well, that’s a big deal too.

Shaunti: That is.

Brian: I hope you’re hearing that. Because, guys, this should not be dependent upon our wife’s response—

Shaunti: —because some of us as women are not going to understand it and are not going to respond in a compassionate way.

Brian: Right, and it also serves as, again, another wake-up call to go, “If she’s not responding well, it’s probably because the trust was pretty significant at what’s been broken.”

Shaunti: Don’t minimize it.

Brian: Don't minimize it. Keep moving on this path and the whole idea of just waking up to the realization that this is a big deal, repenting consistently with God and apologizing to your spouse. Then continue to check in, "How am I doing? Are we building trust?"

Ann: I would say this to men: It was the most courageous thing I've seen Dave do because of my response. I did get better because I realized like, "Oh, we're partners. I'm his partner to get better."

But to watch him—like talk about respect— saw him battle this and want to win. I know that it's kind of an up and down thing but, man.

Men, I would say, find some help because this is an area where I feel like Satan, the enemy, wants to destroy, not only our men, but our kids, wives. It's kind of running rampant everywhere. I think we really need to go to battle with this.

Brian: We're going to do that. We're going to get some help in our next podcast with Dr. Michael Sytsma, a good friend of yours, Shaunti.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: He is a licensed counselor and he also is a sex therapist. He's going to talk about, how do I specifically rebuild trust after an affair, after pornography?

Shaunti: Yes.

I'm excited about that. But, Ann, thank you so much for helping us guys, us dudes, deal with something that we've all done. I know I have. It's not an easy thing to rebuild trust after it's been broken. We really appreciated you helping us live with our wives in an understanding way, which is our verse for this whole series. Thank you so much, Ann.

Ann: So good to be with you.

Brian: Just a reminder again for those couples that would like to make a great first step towards rebuilding trust, we want you to check out WeekendtoRemember.com. It's one of the best things you can do as a couple is just to get three days away because especially—

Shaunti, we didn't talk about this. It sounded like we were talking to couples that were primarily the guy was the breadwinner. But we know more and more there's couples—

Shaunti: —not necessarily the case.

Brian: —where it's both. Trust gets eroded because you're so busy, especially with the wife working and the husband working and you got kids, that you don't pull the emergency brake on life and have the conversations you need to have. Going to a

Weekend to Remember® gives you three days that honestly, I believe can add three decades to your marriage.

Shaunti: And it's very guy friendly.

One of the things I was fascinated by when I went to one of the Weekend to Remembers recently as sort of an observer, because one of the things I was going to be doing was—you guys are developing a whole new platform for it which is awesome—I was going to be interviewing some of the wives and sort of figuring out how it was going for them—one of the things that I noticed was how many of the guys started out thinking, “Okay, I’m here because my wife asked me. This is not my natural habitat to be in a relationship conference for several days.”

They started out kind of tight. I was really interested to see that within an hour, maybe not even, they started loosening up. Suddenly when it was like, “Okay, here’s a chance to ask your wife a quick question,” everybody was engaged; everybody was interested. The speakers actually had to call the men to stop talking, which is *really* unusual, because it was time to go back to another session.

But these men were hearing things from their wives that they’d never really quite had a chance to hear before. It was just so encouraging.

Brian: Yes, it’s a great check in. Dave and Ann Wilson are one of our best speakers on the team. They do a great job with Weekend to Remember. Guys, if you haven’t gone, it’d be a big win with your wife. It’d be a great way for you to love your wife well.

It’s WeekendtoRemember.com. FamilyLife puts on about 93 a year all across the country. You can go to a great spot. No excuse for you not to go.

I do want to thank our audio producer, CJ3, our entire team that helps pull this off every episode. We do want you to join us next time as we talk to Dr. Michael Sytsma who’s going to help us rebuild trust after it’s been broken pretty significantly. Until then, I’m your host Brian Goins. Thanks for listening.

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