

# Married With Benefits

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## Episode 08: Why Aren't Decisions Ever Final for My Wife?

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**Brian:** From the podcast network at FamilyLife® this is *Married With Benefits*. I'm your host, Brian Goins. We are on a relentless quest to help you love the one you're with and discover all the benefits that came with saying, "I Do."

We have been exploring this whole concept, Shaunti, this season about, "How do I live with my wife in an understanding way?" from 1 Peter 3:7.

**Shaunti:** Very important.

**Brian:** Each one of these has been great questions from real husbands. Shaunti Feldhahn, who I'm with here, Harvard trained researcher, has done a lot of this work, especially in your books, *For Men Only*, *For Women Only*. One of the things I'd recommend, as we've gone through this, it just occurs to me how many men read *For Women Only* and how many women read *For Men Only*.

**Shaunti:** It's actually a really crucial thing that we've seen works really well. A lot of people do. Because for you as a guy, you may not necessarily feel validated all the time. [Laughter] You may feel like, "I'm the one that needs to be fixed." No, you have a God-given way of being and thinking just like your wife does. Understanding some of those things, even about yourself, can be helpful.

**Brian:** Yes, because basically, the books, if you haven't read them or heard of them, it's all about understanding the brain and the heart of the person that you're married to.

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** *For Women Only* is really about how to understand the guy's brain, which is what our season was—the first season: "Questions Every Wife is Asking". *For Men Only*, it's the opposite. If you're not a huge reader, the good news is these are short. That's one thing I loved about them.

**Shaunti:** Yes, they're *small* little books.

**Brian:** But I read *For Women Only*, gave it to my wife and said, "Read this. You'll get me." That's what I—that's exactly what I did.

**Shaunti:** That's awesome! I never—I never heard that before.

**Brian:** Oh, no! I did. Yes, I did that.

This season, what's great about it is, this is a great primer for these books. But we are delving into some big questions so that you can understand your wife a little bit better.

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** Our question today comes from someone *very* familiar to the *FamilyLife* audience. Listen to this.

**Bob:** Hey. My name's Bob. I've been married for four decades now, 40 years. My wife and I will sometimes, we'll talk about a decision that we're facing. Later I'll say, "We decided this."

My wife will go, "Well, we really didn't talk about it."

I'm thinking, "No, we talked about it."

I think what she means is, "But we didn't really *taaaaaaaaalk* about it." You know what I mean? *Why*—what's the deal? *Why* does she always want to talk about it over and over again? Help me with this, okay?

**Shaunti:** [Laughter] I'm sorry. That just—I was laughing so hard when he said that.

**Brian:** Yes. "We didn't really *taaaaaalk* about it."

**Shaunti:** I love Bob.

**Brian:** Yes, he's great. He's our host of *FamilyLife Today*<sup>®</sup>. He's been doing that for over 25 years he's been on the air.

**Shaunti:** That's amazing!

**Brian:** You can never settle every question but after 25 years of radio on marriage and family, they've settled quite a few.

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** You *definitely* want to check out *FamilyLife Today* if you do not subscribe to that podcast. I *highly* recommend it.

His question reminds me a little bit of that game show. Remember that game show, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* with Regis Philbin?

**Shaunti:** Yes, back in the day.

**Brian:** He would ask a question. He would give the contestant time to think about it. He'd let them throw around ideas, all these different possible answers. But he would ask them to "lock in" their answer with the unforgettable line, "Is that your final answer?"

I think what we're trying to get at is, it seems like guys have walked away with, "Oh no, you locked in that answer last time we talked about it."

But now they're coming back going, "No, no! I want to change that answer," or "I want a different answer. That's not what I was thinking." So how can a husband—how can we help "lock in" that final answer?

**Shaunti:** [Laughter] Okay, the first thing, guys, is really question whether or not you actually did "lock it in"; whether you actually "taaaaaalked about it", as Bob said. Because for you, this actually sort of this is what we were talking about in episode four. For you, as a guy, you have probably done a lot of thinking about this.

**Brian:** Sure.

**Shaunti:** You've processed a lot of questions like, "Where should we go for Christmas this year? Well, we went to Christmas at *your* family's last year and Thanksgiving and your dad was sick." There's a lot of back and forth and, "I haven't seen my family, therefore we should go...."

It comes out a couple days later, after you've processed all of that, it comes out as, "I think we should go to my family's this year for Christmas." Your wife goes, "Yes, yes, that's probably a good—that's a good thing."

**Brian:** Bam! Locked it in! [Laughter] You've locked in the final answer. That's it!

**Shaunti:** That's the problem is that you think that that's kind of it. Don't forget, again back what we were talking about, you're an internal processor.

Your wife statistically is probably a verbal processor. What you just said is the beginning of the conversation for her. It's the *beginning* of her—it's the first thing she's heard about it obviously because it's the first thing you said. Now she has to process it. She has to talk it though. She has to think it through. It is going to take a little bit of time. It cannot be considered final.

**Brian:** But I feel like I've given her the benefit of not having to do all of that [Laughter] because I've processed, I've gotten to a place—

**Shaunti:** You've processed for her.

**Brian:** Yes. I feel like I'm serving her in many ways.

**Shaunti:** Absolutely! I'm sure she feels the same way.

**Brian:** Don't you think so?

**Shaunti:** Absolutely, yes. We women are *totally* okay when our husband just *tells* us what to do. That *never* goes wrong.

**Brian:** That's a sure sign for messing up your marriage. [Laughter] How to mess up your marriage in four easy steps probably.

**Shaunti:** Yes, there you go.

Here's what's happening. Your wife is truly—she starts now processing and some of this is verbal processing with you, some of it is internal because she's not entirely a verbal, 100 percent a verbal processor. Some of it is verbally processing with her girlfriends.

**Brian:** Oh.

**Shaunti:** Some of it is thinking through stuff that *you don't even realize is there*. Some of it is like, "The last time that I was at his house, his sister is still really mad at me about this thing that happened last year. I just don't want to deal with that at Christmas."

The question is now is, "Is he going to be willing to defend me if I mention this? She goes to her girlfriends and goes, "Gosh, I don't know if Brian is going to be willing to really stand up to his sister and tell her to please stop treating me like that."

Now there's all these other issues that are going on in her mind and heart. She is having to process through all of these. So, no, the decision is not only not final, but she's got to go through this whole arch of thinking through all of that and coming out the other end. Sometimes she'll agree with you because of, "Yes, it isn't fair that we've been at my family's so many times. That's really not fair." But she's also probably got a few things that are still yet to be resolved.

**Brian:** Sure.

**Shaunti:** So it's not considered final.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Shaunti:** If there's—this is one of those issues where, if you see a reluctance, like something that, "Wait a minute, I thought we decided that we were going to do this or

that,” and you’re seeing a reluctance, this is you now putting on your investigator’s hat, as a guy—

**Brian:** Sure.

**Shaunti:** —because there is probably an issue that this has triggered. This is a great opportunity for you to be actually a caring, kind of protector husband and go, “Let’s talk about whatever this is,” rather than getting frustrated.

**Brian:** Sure, I think part of the issue for me is that I will tend to take the first positive reception as final because I want to. I mean, I’m just selfish. It’s like, “No, we talked about buying a Tesla. Remember when I mentioned it to you and I said, ‘Hey, I think it would be great to buy a Tesla,’ and you were like, ‘Huh. Yeah.’”

**Shaunti:** [Laughter] And that was it!

**Brian:** That to me—that to me is an assent. Then, when you drive back in with a Tesla, you wonder why she’s mad.

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** She hasn’t processed it is what I hear you saying. It’s like—I think guys—I know for me when I get that affirmation, I’m ready to go. What I hear you saying is, “No, the affirmation may be one of many things she’s processing. She just, in that moment, is happening to ponder the possibility of it.

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** The “yes” of it.

**Shaunti:** Also, guys, this is also a thing for you. If you really have thought that you’ve processed through everything—and I’m going to say this as nicely as I can—

**Brian:** Okay, shoot me straight!

**Shaunti:** —yes, this is actually important for guys to recognize; this is something that drives women a little nuts, to be candid, is that you think you’ve processed though everything and sort of a news flash is, no, you actually probably haven’t. Because you don’t recognize what are the things that are important to her. You recognize the things that are important to you. To you, it’s all about, “Of course, we did Thanksgiving, we did Christmas and we did this and we did that.”

You had no clue that she’s been avoiding your sister for the past three years because your sister’s been mad at her. That hasn’t even risen to the level of something to be processed. This is actually something that for me, as a wife, it is really, really important

that you not, as a husband, that you not, sort of, *assume* that you've got everything or dismiss some of these things that might seem small to you. This is an opportunity for you to dig out some of that that you may not even have thought of.

**Brian:** Yes, in other words, it's not a great opportunity for you to start quoting that verse in Matthew where it says, "Let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no.'" [Laughter] Like, "No, you said 'yes,' right?"

**Shaunti:** That is *not* going to be helpful. No, that is—

**Brian:** She may start quoting that verse in Matthew where it says, "Get behind me, Satan."

**Shaunti:** Yes! Correct.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** Yes, exactly. The reality for—and if there are any female spies listening—

**Brian:** Right. There's a few. We know there's a few.

**Shaunti:** There's just a few. For the women listening to this, okay, ladies, I've got your back on this. Because really, the thing that I'd *really* love to encourage you, as men, to recognize is, don't go through that processing and that decision assuming that you're processing all the factors that matter to her. Instead, go to her and talk about it first. Say, "We probably should think about where are we going for Christmas this year. I'm thinking about we went to your family's. Should we go—is there anything that I—"

It's almost like, "Is there anything I should know before I go into my cave" or what did you call it, the subway? [Laughter]

**Brian:** Right, I call it—yes, I was just thinking about it. It's like, you know when you go into a subway, you always—there's always a destination right before you descend the stairs. It's like in your mind, let's say you're thinking about Christmas at your parent's house. Like, that's the destination. You're about to go down there. I'm about to go down those stairs and I'm going to process that whole decision.

What I hear you saying is, the minute you see the destination sign, in your mind—

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** —bring your wife into the equation.

**Shaunti:** Yes, *exactly*, and be *okay* with the fact that even that might take her a little bit of time and she might be for the next couple days throwing out things for you that you

didn't even think about, like, "If we go to your family, are we going to have to fly, because that's much more expensive. And are we then going to have the money for tuition for college?"

There's going to be all sorts of stuff that you probably are thinking of that would have occurred to you. "Yes, we would have to have saved the money for this." Don't get annoyed.

**Brian:** That's—and that's where I'll—all of a sudden I'm starting to go, that's exactly what I do to Jen is that she starts bringing stuff up and I'm like, "I thought about that." It's almost like she's offending me for actually saying what I'm processing. I get mad by that, as if you're questioning me.

**Shaunti:** Why do you get mad by that? Help all the spies, the women listening in, to understand why you get mad.

**Brian:** I think it's because I feel like it's questioning *me* when she just really bringing up, "These are the categories I'm thinking in." But for whatever reason, I take it personally. I think I heard your husband Jeff say—just on the phone, we were talking about something about a totally different issue and he said, "Just don't bring your ego into it."

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** I think that's where we are. It's like, this decision somehow is a part of me and my identity—

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** —and I feel like when you question that, you're questioning my identity and wanting to question my opinion in some way.

**Shaunti:** Then that's actually probably pretty important for guys to be aware of.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Shaunti:** That that's being triggered—

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** —underneath the surface. No, this is not about that. This is just me, as a wife, needing to kind of pull through what are some of those issues and being safe with my husband to know that I can raise this without having my head snapped off.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Shaunti:** You know? Because, honestly, a lot of women kind of do feel a bit shut down in some of these areas.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Shaunti:** Like, “If I raise this, he’s going to get that grumpy face.”

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** Not that Jeff ever gets a grumpy face. [Laughter] But he’s going to have the black cloud of doom following him around the house for a day or two because I *dared* to question something when I didn’t realize I was doing that. I’m just processing out loud.

**Brian:** Yes. I think it’s just a sense of guys wanting to go, “I’ve got this. No, I’ve got this.” When there’s a question about it, even though it’s a valid question, it’s almost like, “No, just trust me.” I think in order to win trust, it’s like, “Do you care about what I value?”

**Shaunti:** But, do you agree? This is a question for all the guys listening, as well as you, Brian.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Shaunti:** Do you agree there may be things that you actually didn’t think about.

**Brian:** No. [Laughter] No, I—I’m *pretty*—

**Shaunti:** This is *not* how I thought this would go. [Laughter]

**Brian:** I’m pretty sure I see everything. [Laughter]

Anyway, no, I don’t. That’s the truth of the matter. I think there’s a concept that we talk about here at *FamilyLife* a lot, where somebody brings up an idea about something that they want to do. The concept is, hold the idea to the far right of your heart, like keep it away from your body—

**Shaunti:** Huh!

**Brian:** —so that you give people the freedom to go, “This isn’t your identity. This is just where we’ve got to process the idea. We’re not there yet. You might be five years down the road. But in order for us to go with you, we need to process it with you.”

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

**Brian:** The closer you get your idea to your heart and hold it over your heart, that's when you're equating your identity with the idea. Somehow get that idea away. We're not questioning *you*, we're just trying to process the idea.

**Shaunti:** I think you just brought up something that could be a good solution for guys.

**Brian:** What's that?

**Shaunti:** Which is to treat this interaction with your wife around this the same way you would at work. You would never expect that just because you've thought through something at work that your boss or your colleagues salute.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** I mean—

**Brian:** Or you shouldn't, unless you're just egomaniacal leader.

**Shaunti:** Yes, that's a good word. Yes.

**Brian:** Tough one to pull out.

**Shaunti:** But, no, I think it's true. I think that's a really, really good point, Brian. I think to some degree that there is something in a husband's heart, which I completely understand, that he wants his wife to just completely trust him.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Shaunti:** Like, he *wants* to be the hero. He *wants* to have her say, "Oh, thank you, my amazing husband, for having thought through all of this! Of course! Absolutely we're going to go to Christmas at your family's."

**Brian:** Sure.

**Shaunti:** And not recognizing that this is living with your wife in an understanding way. There's *all these things* that matter to her, and you need to *assume* that you have not thought of them all.

**Brian:** Yes, yes. So maybe it's just even writing out the idea, putting it off and going, "Hey, I'm thinking about this. Why don't you think about it and write down what you're thinking about it." Or do that in a text. However you guys end up having those conversations. Almost to where, I know for me, if I write something down and then put it off to the side, I'm not think—I'm opening another window, going back to our window conversation.

**Shaunti:** Oh, interesting. Yes.

**Brian:** Maybe for us as guys to go, the minute we get the destination in mind or the decision we're starting to move towards, is you just write down that idea and give her the freedom to go, "Hey, could you process this? I'm thinking about it too but just however you're thinking. I just—this came into my mind about what we should do for Christmas," or "What we should make this financial decision, buying a car. I'm debating between two things. I'd love your insight on this."

**Shaunti:** Yes—or, "Which—I know we just moved, which church are we going to pick?"

**Brian:** Exactly.

**Shaunti:** "We've been to these ones and there's all this stuff." As long as you are okay—I *love* that idea, sort of set it aside, as long as you're okay with the fact that your wife is not going to be able to set it aside with you.

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** She's going to need to process it with you verbally, if she's like the majority of women. Not all women work that way.

**Brian:** I think now, even as we're talking about it like that, I think *that's* where guys struggle is because we're not as quick verbal processors as you—

**Shaunti:** Yes

**Brian:** —so *when* the objections start coming, it's like, "Wait. I'm not ready to handle objections yet. My mind's not processing right there. I feel—"

**Shaunti:** "I haven't even gotten to that step yet."

**Brian:** "I haven't even gotten to the step," or "I feel like I've already dealt with that and I can't even think back to even how I dealt with that."

That's where the freedom of going, "Why don't you think about it and then bring back those things." Then I'm ready and my mind is already ready to have that conversation versus right when I mention an idea and all of a sudden I'm getting objections. It's like, I'm not ready for those right now because I feel like I've settled that window.

**Shaunti:** Which I know can be very disconcerting. Which is one of the reasons we're going to address that in a later episode.

**Brian:** Yes.

**Shaunti:** About, “Why do I always feel so insecure in these arguments with my wife?”

**Brian:** Right.

**Brian:** Yes, good deal. Alright, sum that up for us, Shaunti, as far as thinking through, “How do I get my final answer?” That’s really what we’re saying is, “I want to get—I want to be able to lock in the answer. It’s not time to phone a friend anymore or poll the audience. Now we want to lock in that final answer.

What I’ve heard us say is, number one, just be aware. Be aware that she needs time to process and be aware that you’re not, you’re not the authority on everything.

**Shaunti:** —that you may not have even thought about twelve things that are important to her.

**Brian:** Exactly, it’s almost allowing—take that idea. Put that idea to the side. Allow *her* to give feedback into it.

**Shaunti:** —process, yes.

**Brian:** Whether that’s verbally, whether that’s written, however you want to do it, get it away from your heart and your identity.

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** Then, how do we actually get it down to like, “Okay, I want to know, are we locked in?”

**Shaunti:** I think that’s where you have to give women credit to also say, “Are we ready to make a final decision?” It’s not *you* that’s saying, “We’ve made a final decision.”

**Brian:** Right.

**Shaunti:** I mean, it’s actually, “Are we—honey, are we ready?”

**Brian:** Are we on a team?

**Shaunti:** Yes, “Are we ready to say this is finally it or do you need a little more time?”

**Brian:** Yes. I think that’s really what living for “better or worse” is about is a sense of, number one, we’re on a team, and as a team, have we come to that decision?

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Brian:** Are we ready? Good stuff.

**Shaunti:** Pretty simple too.

**Brian:** Pretty simple. Very easy—very easy to say right here in a podcast in a studio room. [Laughter]

**Shaunti:** All the guys are rolling their eyes like, “What?” [Laughter]

**Brian:** Yes, like, okay. Well, then just play this the minute you guys have one of those moments go, “Let’s go listen to that podcast on *Married With Benefits*.”

As we close, I just want to let you know that we’ve answered the flip-side question from wives from last season which, “Why can’t he just listen?”

**Shaunti:** There you go, absolutely.

**Brian:** Yes, you can find all that and the other interesting episodes from season one at [FamilyLife.com/MWB](http://FamilyLife.com/MWB), and guys, you can be spies on season one.

**Shaunti:** Oh, I think the guys would enjoy some of those episodes, absolutely.

**Brian:** I think you’ll understand yourself a lot better.

**Shaunti:** Yes, you will.

**Brian:** And why you do what you do. Why you *think* the way that you think.

**Shaunti:** You’ll be able to *explain* those things to your wife, too.

**Brian:** Yes. It will give you a language. It’s great stuff.

Shaunti, I love doing this with you. It’s been fun.

**Shaunti:** Yes, me too, absolutely.

**Brian:** We look forward to more episodes like this because at *FamilyLife* we are passionate about you experiencing oneness in the key relationships of your life. One easy way that you can keep discovering the real benefits of saying “I Do” is to sign up for our daily devotional series called, “I Do Every Day”. You know, Jim Mitchell, he’s a—one of our producers here.

**Shaunti:** He’s awesome.

**Brian:** He’s great—*Married With Benefits*. He wrote an “I Do Every Day”, a devotional called, “Yeah. No. Maybe”.

**Shaunti:** Wow, that's good!

**Brian:** It's a really great. Just that whole thing about the verse of Matthew 5:37, "Let your 'yes' be 'yes,' let your 'no' be 'no,'" does not work as well when it comes to marriage and this very issue that we're talking about. So, "Maybe, yeah" means, "Well, no." It means, "I need more conversation with you."

**Shaunti:** "I need to start talking about it." Yes.

**Brian:** Yes, "I need to start talking." You get great little hits like that, delivered right to your e-mail box—

**Shaunti:** That's great!

**Brian:** —that are short, that are concise, and that just remind you again, "Oh yes, I don't think like my wife," or, for a wife, "I don't think like my husband, and how can I pursue oneness even though we're very different?"

I love those e-mails and you can get that *very easily* by going to [FamilyLife.com/IDo](http://FamilyLife.com/IDo) to sign up, or you can click the link here in our show notes.

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I want to thank our audio producer, CJ3, the entire team of producers for helping make this easy. Shaunti. We've got a great team.

**Shaunti:** Absolutely! They're amazing.

**Brian:** They're wonderful. Well, next time on *Married With Benefits*, we're going to discuss a topic that will make both wives and husbands cry. I think husbands may even more might cringe at it.

**Shaunti:** Maybe just a little bit.

**Brian:** Because it's—it's—we're going to ask, "Why in the world does she have to watch romantic movies, the Hallmark Channel? What's the deal?"

**Shaunti:** There's actually something *very* important and surprising underneath the surface of that.

**Brian:** Okay, I look forward to diving deep, especially if it means I don't have to watch as many of these things.

**Shaunti:** It's only a few minutes that we're going to talk about this.

**Brian:** Okay.

**Shaunti:** But is a *very* important topic.

**Brian:** I'm your host, Brian Goins. We'll see you next time.

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