

Married With Benefits

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Episode 9: Every Hallmark Movie Is the Same. Why Does She Still Watch Those?

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Brian: From the Podcast Network at FamilyLife® this is *Married With Benefits* where we're helping couples rediscover the real benefits that come with saying, "I do."

Today's question deals with something that I think that guys have gotten—I've gotten—I've struggled with and I feel cringe-worthy moments with so I'm going to let our husband take it away and ask this question.

Greg: Hi, I'm Greg and I've been married for five years and here's my question: [Laughing] Every Hallmark movie is the same. Why does she still enjoy watching those?

Shaunti: Every guy— [Laughter]

Brian: Yes, tell me.

Shaunti: —wonders.

Brian: There's one channel—there's one channel devoted to the same movie—

Shaunti: —over and over again.

Brian: —over and over and over again.

Shaunti: And there are hundreds of those movies on many different channels and they all have the same plot.

Brian: Oh yes, Netflix has gotten it. In fact, we've got a—one of our producers, Jim, he found this "Hallmark Christmas Movie Plot Generator". [Laughter] Have you seen this?

Shaunti: I hadn't seen this until he found this. This is awesome.

Brian: John Atkinson—and we'll put it in the show notes so you can have fun with your bride, as well, with this—but it's great. It basically has six columns and there's five options in four of the columns. There's two columns that are exactly the same all the time. It doesn't really matter. You just pick a number from one through five.

Shaunti, I'm going to play this with you. Pick a number one through five—

Shaunti: Okay, yes.

Brian: —and do that four times. Then we're going to make a plot.

Shaunti: Okay, ready?

Brian: Yes, go ahead.

Shaunti: Two, five, —

Brian: Okay.

Shaunti: —three, and one.

Brian: Alright, in this Hallmark Christmas movie you are going to, number two, find a career-oriented woman who is also an early 2000's actor that you forgot about who returns to her small town at Christmas time. And then, let's see, it was number three, to stop some corporate closure—

Shaunti: Ooh, that's good.

Brian: —and magically fall in love, and then you said number one—

Shaunti: Right.

Brian: —with a sensitive guy in plaid.

Shaunti: Awesome.

Brian: And one more plot that always happens is also, the only old man in town might actually be the real Santa Claus. [Laughter]

There you go. This is perfect—

Shaunti: —by the numbers.

Brian: You can have a lot of fun with this. We'll have this in the show notes. But it is so true. It'd be one thing if you show Christmas movies at Christmas time but this is all year long.

Shaunti: —all year long, and I'm a little bit different, I have to confess—

Brian: Yes, you've told me this.

Shaunti: —I think I mentioned this to you—yes, and Jeff loves this, that I am not a chick-flick kind of girl. I'm not as into these movies. Our daughter Morgan, this past

Christmas she was like, “You know, Mom, can we just snuggle on the couch and watch *Pride and Prejudice*?” And I’m like there’s not enough car chases and explosions for me.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: I’m not a chick-flick person. But despite saying that, because I am a researcher and because I’ve sort of investigated this, it turns out there’s actually something that’s important running under the surface of this kind of frivolous-seeming question.

Brian: It’s a big question. I am thankful that Jenn—she does like romantic comedies but she doesn’t—I don’t catch her watching Hallmark channel very often. Now my mom, anytime I call, there is a good chance she’s watching a Hallmark movie.

Shaunti: Oh, that’s so good.

Brian: My idea of a great Christmas movie is *Diehard*—

Shaunti: Absolutely!

Brian: —and so I would like to have the “*Diehard* Movie Plot Generator” with the detective and what he’s going to kill and all that kind of stuff. That’s my idea of a great Christmas movie.

Shaunti: Me too, actually.

Brian: But it’s not just Hallmark. I mean you said it’s equal opportunity. You got something from Netflix, some tweet.

Shaunti: Yes, I mean Morgan, my daughter, loves these kinds of movies. There was a movie that came out a few years ago called *The [A] Christmas Prince*. She said, “Please watch this with me.” So I did. I watched it with her probably two or three times.

Brian: In like a week?

Shaunti: Yes, she just wanted to watch it multiple times.

Brian: See, I don’t get that.

Shaunti: I will admit I actually liked a cheesy movie, Netflix—but it’s a decent sort of light holiday movie. It came out around Thanksgiving, which a good Christmas movie would do. There was a tweet from Netflix that says, “To the 53 people who have watched *A Christmas Prince* every day for the past 18 days, who hurt you?” [Laughter]

Brian: Seriously? That's brilliant. I love big data.

Shaunti: Yes, I know. I know.

Brian: That's scary that they're knowing that I'm watching to that level. Seriously, someone's watching what you're watching. I know our guys, our producers in the back, you guys know *A Christmas Prince*, right?

James: Yes, I watched it when it came out.

Brian: Yes, of course.

Shaunti: Okay.

Brian: Ryan is saying no. Jim, he was barbequing some meat of some type. [Laughter] He had some venison that he was cooking. Alright, so guys are sitting here going "Okay, is this a part of my job description. I mean do I need to go to the Hallmark channel and watch these things?"

Shaunti: Your job description isn't actually about what you watch with your wives, although that, of course, is a very sweet thing and makes her feel loved as long as you don't fall asleep too many times. [Laughter]

Brian: Now you keep raising the bar.

Shaunti: Sorry.

Brian: It's like the first bar, I'm turning it on and I'm actually sitting beside you. I've got the popcorn. I've got the coke. But once that runs out, you're saying I can't even go to sleep.

Shaunti: Well, she would understand maybe but try not to. Just try not to.

Brian: Alright.

Shaunti: But that's not *really* your job description, although that's appreciated. Don't get me wrong. Women appreciate that kind of thing. But the real job description is understanding *why* those movies touch a nerve.

Brian: Yes, what is it?

Shaunti: What is it? Exactly.

Brian: What's going on in her heart that would even compel that?

Shaunti: Yes, which is something I'm betting most men have never even thought about. That that question probably hasn't come up too much in the average guys mind. Am I wrong about that?

Brian: No, I think that's probably true. I don't ever question my desire to watch—

Shaunti: —*Diehard*

Brian: —*Diehard*, or any time a Marvel movie is on TNT, it's like suddenly it's like an eye magnet and I've just got to stop. So for me, it makes me think what is it about me?

Shaunti: Testosterone.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: It's stimulating something. It's like making you feel, [grunt] "Yes."

Brian: Yes, it's time for me to accomplish something.

Shaunti: Yes, exactly.

Brian: Since I can't throw a shield like Chris Evans—

Shaunti: Captain America

Brian: —Captain America, I can at least pretend for just a second in my mind.

Shaunti: It's sort of you're vicariously putting yourself in the position of that superhero—

Brian: Right!

Shaunti: —or that guy that can defend the defenseless. He's this great man.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: Yes, you're vicariously in that position. Well, guess what? So is your wife. What is vicariously being stimulated in her? What is it that she's loving? And you know this is not all women. Like me, I'd actually watch the Marvel movie instead of *A Christmas Prince*, if I had the choice.

But there is something very important which is underneath the surface—this actually ties back to something we referenced the very first episode actually of this season, which is there is an underground kind of insecurity or vulnerability, a question in your wife's heart that you probably don't know is there. It's essentially when you say, "I do," *you* think that's the end of the story.

Brian: Exactly.

Shaunti: When she says, “I do,” and then every day after that for the rest of your lives, the question in her heart is, “Do you?”

Brian: Wow!

Shaunti: “Do you really? Do you still?” And it’s because you two—probably if you’re like most men and most women which not everybody will be but most, she has a very different vulnerability than you do.

Your vulnerability which we’ve mentioned before is, “Am I any good at what I do? Am I the superhero?” Right? “Could I be? Am I capable of doing these things that I set myself to do?” whether it’s throwing the shield like that or whether it’s cleaning the kitchen correctly, right? “Can I do this? Can I make my wife happy?”

For her, what’s under the surface is a very, very deep doubt about whether she’s actually lovable, whether she’s actually worthy of your love. And that is a *deep, deep subconscious* question and *that* is what is being triggered by these movies.

Brian: I was thinking about—we talked about in a previous episode about, “Why does she always want to talk at 11:00 at night?” and the whole open-windows concept. Just how as us as guys, we have one window open at a time and there’s something about when we say, “I do”, we close that window.

Shaunti: That’s a good way of putting it. Yes, you do.

Brian: There is that—

Shaunti: Kind of permanently.

Brian: Right. Which is sad but that’s just kind of, we wooed the woman, we came to the finish line, we said, “I do,” and now we always will.

Shaunti: Yes, absolutely.

Women don’t—it’s not only that they don’t believe that because it’s not a logical thing. It is that they absolutely don’t *feel* that because of our own vulnerability, our own question. Like, “I am so not enough to keep this amazing man. I am so not enough. Why would anyone love me? It doesn’t make sense for somebody like this to love me.”

There was a great comment—we put this in the end of *For Men Only* and we were trying to help men understand the inner life of their wife—there was one comment that we got on the survey from a woman who said, “I am convinced that he is going to wake

up one day and jump over the mound of unwashed clothes and run out the door [Laughter] because he's going to wake up and go, "Why am I married to her?"

There is something inside every woman that kind of feels that way. Those movies, those romance movies, the Hallmark movies, *A Christmas Prince*, all of those things, the reason those hit your wife is that they all have that one plot. Here's what the one plot does—it's not about the guy in plaid— [Laughter]

Brian: Right—or he's some lumberjack where he builds—he makes his own rocking chairs.

Shaunti: —or he's a prince.

Brian: —and he has some type of an English, European accent.

Shaunti: Of course, of some sort. It's not about that, which is where guys say, "Well, I'm not a prince. That's never going to happen." Here's the plot and here's what it triggers: all of those plots are boy meets girl.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: Boy and girl fall in love, and then something goes wrong. There's some misunderstanding. There's some miscommunication. Somebody overheard something that someone said. It was a [Crying] "He doesn't love me," and the girl goes weeping away and she never has to turn to him and go, "Come after me!"

Brian: Yes, intuitively he just knows.

Shaunti: Intuitively, this guy, he loves her so much he's not going to let her get away. He pursues her and brings her back. In so doing, as she's running out the door or running on to the airplane or running through the field [Laughter] or whatever the plot is, as she's running away, he is running towards her to pull her back because he cares so much about her. In so doing, proves to her that she is lovable and she is worthy of being loved, that he's not going to let her get away.

That is the feeling that is being triggered in the heart of your wife.

Brian: I mean in one sense—and I hesitate to even say it like this so I'm looking at my producers—they're probably going to say don't even go there.

Shaunti: No, I want to hear what you're going to say.

Brian: Well, it almost feels like wife porn.

Shaunti: Not almost, it absolutely is wife porn. There's no question. This is the reason that erotica and this is the reason that romance novels have arisen as an actual problem for women. I've written some blogs about this because that is the feeling that is being stimulated.

You know we talk in another episode about the fact that—I'm so sorry—it's not like she's visually stimulated the same way you are but she sure is emotionally stimulated. This is an *incredibly* powerful feeling and it can become addictive and it becomes very dangerous.

This is one of the reasons we talked about this in "Questions Every Wife is Asking" season of, "Why doesn't my life look anything like these Hallmark movies? Why doesn't my husband chase after me? Why doesn't he pursue me?" That can become a very dangerous dissatisfaction. Just like it can become a very dangerous thing if you as a husband let yourself expect what you see in those images on the television screen or in pornography. If you expect that, you can become dissatisfied.

Those two things are different in cause because one is visual, one is emotional, but they're each stimulating what is sort of being needed: this deep hole that's needing to be filled. It's just being filled with the wrong things.

Brian: That's why it's so important that you think back to, why did God bring us together as a couple? That there is something that we have a unique opportunity to fill that need. Not that we can't fill the needs of all the heart needs. I mean ultimately God is the one that's going to truly satisfy us.

Shaunti: Yes, of course.

Brian: But He put somebody in our life that has a unique opportunity and power. I think that's one thing I've appreciated about how we've talked about this is that you as the husband have the power to fill a significant need in your wife's heart. I don't think it's any mistake that when Paul's writing Ephesians 5, and he sits down and he's talking both to the husbands and to the wives, that to the husbands he uses very unique language that he doesn't use to the wives.

Shaunti: Very much so.

Brian: He says—

Shaunti: He says love your wife.

Brian: —love your wife and to the wife, respect your husband but even more so goes into detail. What does that love look like? Nourishing and cherishing. Both of those verbs are in the what's called the present tense. Which in Greek, it just basically means this is something that is ongoing. There is an ongoing cherishing. There is an ongoing

nourishing. Why does Paul have to say that to a husband? Because she wants to be pursued, cared for constantly.

Shaunti: And it's because she has a constant question. Now you, as a guy, you're like, "What? That just doesn't make any sense." Just remember two different insecurities. You have that insecurity of, "Am I any good? Do I have what it takes? Do I measure up?" That's your question.

For her, just remember, that's not her question. Her question is, "Am I lovable?" And in marriage it's really, "Does he *still* love me? Is he glad he married me?" And the key is she is subconsciously—this isn't necessarily consciously—subconsciously your wife is asking herself that question every single day, and she's looking for the answer to that question which only you can answer really in the way she needs. She's looking for the answer every single day and that is what *pursuit* is.

Brian: Yes. Two things that I'm feeling right now. Number one, I could see some spies, women that are listening to this, going "Are you calling the Hallmark channel like a porn channel? Are you saying it's equivalent to that?" Then Hallmark might just ban our podcast—

Shaunti: I know.

Brian: —or just boycott our podcast. That's not exactly what we're saying.

Shaunti: Let me just chime in here for just a second. No, of course, that's not exactly what we're saying.

However, if you, as a woman who are listening to this, if you recognize that you are using those movies to get something filled in your heart and that it's something that is, if you think about not watching those movies for a while, if you get jittery about that, then maybe you are using it in a way that is something that God is supposed to fill, not that that is supposed to fill. Maybe there's some conversations that you need to have with your husband about why this is such a hold on you.

Brian: Right. That's the first feeling and you answered that great. Second feeling that I'm feeling is the guy going, "Okay, I don't wear plaid and I haven't worked out, great, and I don't wear a lot of product. I don't make a rocking chair with wood that I've just cut down from this cedar that fell down in the back and make hot chocolate at the right time and take my wife ice skating. Like, do I *have* to do all of that for it to equal pursuit?"

Shaunti: No. We tell guys at our marriage conferences, we always tell the men—and this is usually Jeff talking to the guys the same way that I'm talking to the women—everybody hears everything but it helps sometimes for you men to hear this from another dude—

Brian: Absolutely.

Shaunti: —and Jeff always tells the guys, you already know how to do pursuit. It's what you did when you were dating. We get the most hilarious expressions from the men. I mean just recently we were doing an event and a guy came up to Jeff and goes, "That was exhausting. [Laughter] Like, I got married so I could stop doing that stuff."

Brian: Right, that window has shut down.

Shaunti: And I've got a mortgage now. I've got a job.

Brian: I've got a lot of other windows opened up.

Shaunti: How do I do that? Here's what we always tell the men, and I'll share this with you guys, is what you did when you were dating—we're not talking about the activities you arranged—we're not talking about taking her ice skating—okay, that's good; it's not like that's bad, but that's not what we mean.

We're talking about the message of pursuit that you are sending her every day. The message of, "I'm choosing you all over again today. I'm choosing you today and again today." You can send your wife who *needs* that message every day, you can send her that message by reaching across and taking her hand when you're walking across a parking lot. That says, "I'm so glad I married you."

Or you're sitting together at church and you put your arm around her in church. That says, "You're mine. I still love you." Or you know we talked earlier about, in another episode, about sending your wife a text message. Literally, just two or three lines that says, "I was just thinking about what an incredible wife you are. I'm just so grateful we met 12 years ago."

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: Whatever it is. She will screenshot the text message because it's—there it is— proof—

Brian: —proof of pursuit.

Shaunti: —proof that guy loves me. I am *lovable*. That is pursuit, guys.

Brian: And rather than—and here's something that I'm challenging myself and our producer Jim just sent me this note—when I'm watching Hallmark instead of the eye roll, which is what I typically do because I'm like, "Nobody does that, come on,"—it's more, can I learn from that? Okay, maybe I take one tip from that.

That'd be the challenge. Take one tip from a Hallmark movie and maybe do it. Just like we challenged wives in season one about take your tips from ESPN—like show them the highlights quick and then start getting into your conversation.

Shaunti: Tell them the bottom line quick first.

Brian: Right, give me the bottom line first and then signal to me that the conversation will end soon. Give me the [ESPN Sports Center sound]. Same thing here. As you're watching, as you're roped into watching one of those Hallmark channels and you're going, "Okay, I'm going to do this. I'm going to love my wife well." Then say, "Okay, what are one or two things I'm going to walk away here doing?"

Shaunti: Ask her if you're confused or you have a question, like, "Does this tug on you?" Or if you're a little nervous like, I don't know how to have that conversation, sit there with your wife, put your hand on her knee.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: Just put your hand on her knee as you're sitting there watching.

Brian: It really comes down to nourishing and cherishing. If we love our wives like Christ loves the church, there's a sense of, "How do I meet that deep need?" That's really what you're bringing up is the deep need of, and I love the way you said it, "Does he love me today?"

Shaunti: Yes, and the guys are thinking, "Of course, she knows the answer to that."

No, she *doesn't*.

Brian: She needs to hear it.

Shaunti: She *needs* to hear you say it and to see you signal it with these little things. Again, you do not need to spend the money to go out to a candlelight dinner. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: That's fine. But she *needs*, like her heart and her soul *need* to know the answer to that question, "Am I lovable to him today?"

Brian: Yes, just like you want to hear; just like I want to hear, "Does she think I'm strong? Does she think I still have it? Am I still worth it? Do I have what it takes?"

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: If I just think of that—every time I think of that, I need to think, my wife has the same insecurity. It's just different.

Shaunti: Here's an example. How would you feel if you were—like you had spent the weekend doing honey do projects? You fixed the light fixture and you fix something on your driveway that had been falling apart and you power wash the back deck. You spend—

Brian: Now you're speaking my love language.

Shaunti: —yes, and you did all of this stuff and your wife was out with friends or she was visiting somebody or whatever. She was gone, and she drives into the driveway and just goes about her day. How do you sort of feel a little bit? There's a little bit of a, "She didn't notice."

Brian: Didn't you see that?

Shaunti: "She didn't notice. I guess I didn't do good."

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: As opposed to, imagine she drives in the driveway, she gets out of the car and goes, "Oh, my gosh! You fixed the driveway. That was driving me nuts. Thank you." And then she goes in the kitchen. She's doing stuff. She goes, "The deck looks awesome! Oh, it looks awesome! Thank you so much for doing that."

That feels good to you as a guy. I'm assuming—

Brian: Oh, yes.

Shaunti: —for most men, statistically, "Thank you" is a good thing.

Brian: It's been scientifically proven we need applause.

Shaunti: It has been in our studies too, in our surveys. That is because that's your question, "Did I do good? Am I good at what I do?"

And hers is, "He's not happy with me." It makes this difference. Your sitting together on the couch, maybe you're even sitting together on the couch watching football, right? Maybe that, maybe you're—whatever it is—

Brian: —and you tackle her. [Laughter]

Shaunti: That's a whole nother podcast.

Brian: Oh, okay, that's a different thing.

Shaunti: Yes, that's a different podcast. But you're sitting there on the couch together and you grab the blanket and you put it over both of you and you put your arm around her. That is the equivalent of her saying "You power washed the deck. Thank you!"

Brian: "I do" really means, "Do you still?"

Shaunti: Yes, it does.

Brian: And it's every day. That's why one of the things we've been talking about during the season, "I Do Every Day," the email that FamilyLife put together is a great—

Shaunti: Yes, which is so good.

Brian: That'd be another way of showing pursuit. It's a different way. It's a spiritual pursuit but it's a sense of, "Hey, I care about your soul. I care about your heart and I want to do this together."

That can be delivered right to your email box. You get it every day. Your wife can get it every day and just have a conversation, "Hey, did you read that? What did you think of that?"

Us, as husbands, we need to get back to the fine art of asking good questions and just, "Do you feel pursued?" and if not, "How can I help you show that?"

Shaunti: A wife isn't going to necessarily know what pursuit means any more than a husband will. But for her it might be, "Honey, am I showing you how much I love you every day?"

Brian: That's good.

Shaunti: "I just—I adore you. I just want to make sure that you feel it."

One of the things we've found is your wife is your best consultant on what those little things are that are going to matter to her.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: Maybe for her it's not snuggling under a blanket watching television together. Maybe for her it is the text message. Maybe for her it's something completely different, but you won't know unless you say, "What are those little things, not necessarily the big ones that you don't do every day, but the little things that matter?"

Brian: And it will change in seasons, right? It's like it could change every six months, maybe more.

Shaunti: Absolutely. Well, yes, but you're never going to go wrong with any of these. Like, it's never a bad thing to put your arm around her in church. That's never going to be a bad thing.

Brian: But it's great to ask those questions and maybe the question is, "Honey, do you feel the depth of my love? Do you sense it? Is it there? If not, how can I show it?"

I like that your wife is your best consultant on helping her fill her emotional needs.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: Shaunti, you talk a lot about this in *For Men Only*.

Shaunti: Yes, Jeff and I did a lot of research on what are these things, yes.

Brian: And so highly recommend that. You can get that "I Do Every Day" at FamilyLife.com/Ido. That can be sent right to your email box. There's great things in our show notes. Anything that we talk about that we reference, even that "Hallmark Christmas Movie Plot Generator", you're going to be able to find in the show notes. That's important. That'd be a great way to even have this conversation. Do that and say, "Hey, let's talk about this."

As I wrap up, I just want to let you know that we actually answered a similar question from wives last season. We talked about that on *Married With Benefits*: "Why doesn't my marriage look like anything like a Hallmark movie?" Be great to listen with your wife. Listen to both of these and have a conversation. Go out on a date night. You can find that episode at FamilyLife.com/MWB to learn why Hallmark movie glitz is not God's design but how it can actually help you love the real spouse you're with.

Thanks to all of those who have been subscribing to our podcast. We really do appreciate your support. And here at FamilyLife we're passionate about drawing couples together in a world that's often pulling you apart. Shaunti, it's great being with you, as always.

Shaunti: Always. I love helping these husbands.

Brian: I do, too, and I love our team. I want to give special thanks to our audio producer, CJ3, who started the group HusbandsforHallmarkmovies.com and you're going to be able to find that out there. No, it doesn't exist, but—

Shaunti: You know you keep saying our producer, CJ3. His name is actually James. Everybody listening to this is probably like, “Who is this person?” James Youngblood, he’s awesome.

Brian: He is, but every guy wants to have a nickname. That’s why I’m—

Shaunti: Okay, yes.

Brian: —throwing his nickname out. But yes, his name is James Youngblood—great guy. And Jim and Ryan, they’re in the back. We appreciate them helping us out and making this as easy as possible.

Shaunti, what are we going to do next time on this podcast?

Shaunti: We are going to help husbands understand what to do when their wife starts crying—

Brian: Yes!

Shaunti: —and they have no idea what to do with all these tears.

Brian: It’s like kryptonite. It totally paralyzes guys.

Shaunti: Oh, we’ve got the answer for you men.

Brian: Okay, I hope you can join us for that. I’m Brian Goins. Thanks for listening.

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