

Married With Benefits

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Episode 10: My Wife Cries A Lot...Help!

Guest: Jen Goins
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Brian: Welcome to the podcast network of FamilyLife®. I'm Brian Goins, host of *Married With Benefits*, where we're on this relentless pursuit to help you love the one you're with and discover all the benefits that came with saying, "I do."

This season we've been answering questions every husband has probably asked a hundred times but has just never gotten a clear answer.

Shaunti, you're here helping us do that.

Shaunti: Oh, yes. It's awesome. I love helping these husbands.

Brian: I really appreciate it. I'm really glad that you're going to be answering *this question* today because I know this one's near and dear to my heart and I have no idea what to do.

We need some help. Listen to this.

Rodney: Hi, I'm Rodney. Been married for 22 years and you know what: sometimes my wife cries for no apparent reason. Man, what should I do when that happens?

Brian: Do you feel Rodney's pain?

Shaunti: I feel his *pain*. I feel all you husbands' pain. I know that's really confusing.

Brian: Yes, it's unfair, I think. I feel like it's unfair. I feel like it's this—all of a sudden, the game stops—whatever I was doing. It could be an argument. It could be something fun. It could be—I mean it's not just in arguments when crying happens.

Shaunti: No, no, no, no.

Brian: Right?

Shaunti: Not at all.

Brian: Now before we jump in, we dug up a few facts—

Shaunti: Oh, I can't wait to hear these.

Brian: —about women that cry. According to a 2004 research study at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, the average woman cries three to five times a month.

You said that sounded low.

Shaunti: That actually sounds low to me, yes. I don't know if those are maybe European women. They're more stoic.

Brian: I'm loving my wife more and more. She is below average. I have to say.

Shaunti: Oh, good, Jen.

Brian: I think we get this reversal. I think I cry maybe more than Jen does. I can cry at commercials.

Shaunti: Interesting, okay.

Brian: I'm a little more emotional. I'll own that. That's me. That's on me but anyway. But then Jen—

Shaunti: But according to the Netherlands men—

Brian: Yes, these guys are really stoic. They cry at most once a month, at most. Women cry approximately 30 gallons of tears in their lifetimes—30 gallons.

Shaunti: That's a lot.

Brian: That's a lot of tears. Ironically, and this is true, that's about the same amount of beer the average American man drinks every year. And then women actively seek out leisure activities that make them feel sad because of a certain pleasure in the experience of feeling moved to tears.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: Isn't that a little—

Shaunti: Why do you think chick flicks?

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: We talked about in another episode about how the romance movies sort of stir up something. Well, this is another way that it does that.

Brian: Yes, okay, and two-thirds of women—this is what really blew me away—two-thirds of women—that’s 66%—admit to crying for no reason whatsoever. Now if you start crying on this podcast, Shaunti, I—

Shaunti: —we’ll be in trouble.

Brian: —we’ll be in big time trouble.

We need some help and I really want us to answer three questions on this podcast today.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: I want us to know, why do they do this? Why do women do this? What is really happening? And then, how do we as men respond when it happens?

Shaunti: So that you don’t have the deer in the headlights look.

Brian: Because that’s what I feel.

Shaunti: Yes. Okay, so—

James: Hey Shaunti, before you get started, we actually have a special guest to bring in on this one that really has some expertise on this, especially when it comes to Brian.

Brian: Oh, great! I’m wondering if this is my wife or it could be my daughter.

Shaunti: Your mom?

Brian: My mom. Is my mom here? [Laughter] Oh, it is my wife.

Shaunti: So Jen walks into the room. You guys should see the look on Brian’s face right now. It’s awesome.

Brian: I know. Now I’ve got to really watch what I’ve got to say. [Laughter] Before I felt like this is my playground and now, I’ve got to really—

Jen: I’m fact checking.

Brian: This is a fact check. [Laughter]

We just said that the average woman cries three to five times a month.

Jen: Okay.

Brian: I said you were below average.

Jen: I am below average. I'm not a big crier but—

Brian: Would you say that you're more of a crier than I am?

Jen: Yes.

Brian: Okay, see I said—

Shaunti: He said he might be more of a crier.

Brian: I said I might be more of a crier.

Shaunti: He cries at commercials.

Jen: I haven't seen you cry in a while, I don't think.

Brian: Maybe I'm just—just because I'm under too much stress I cry. Maybe I'm just crying in the middle of the night now. [Laughter]

Shaunti: Brian's trying to get his man card back.

Brian: I know! So when was the last time you cried? Have you cried in the last week?

Jen: I'm trying to think. I know there was a time in the last couple of weeks that I did cry. I was overwhelmed with everything in life and feeling sad about something but I can't remember what it was. [Laughter] I don't have a great story for that right now.

Shaunti: That's good news actually—that you don't hold on to that. That's good.

Jen: Yes, it is.

Shaunti: that you don't hold on to that. That's good. It points out something about the brain science of women, too.

Brian: We're answering three questions in this podcast.

Jen: Okay.

Brian: We're answering, why, "Why does this happen? What is really going on inside the mind of a woman or maybe the heart of a woman?"

And then, also, "What do we do as guys? How do we respond?" Because we are talking to husbands so this is "Questions Every Husband's Asking".

Jen: Okay.

Brian: You're going to help us out, hon.

Jen: I will. I will.

Brian: Shaunti, why? Tell me why my wife does this.

Shaunti: Alright, so here's one of the things that's underneath it. Again, I'm going to be *super* simplifying some things so if we have any neuroscientists listening to this please don't write in angry emails.

Brian: I'm sure we do.

Shaunti: I'm sure we do. But I actually had looked into something about this because we had done a study about the workplace where of course tears are even worse than when you feel bad at home. What we actually found is that men's and women's brains handle emotion completely differently.

There's actually a way that for men, when you get signals that pass into your brain, they go straight from your senses, for example, like touch or smell or sight or whatever, and it goes straight to the functional center in the brain that needs to process it.

A woman's brain, often that signal goes from her eyes or ears or whatever and it will actually go through a really powerful emotion-processing part of the brain first and then get funneled out to the functional centers. So it's essentially going through an emotion bath first.

Brian: An emotion bath.

What I heard you saying is that men are more efficient. [Laughter] That's exactly what I heard.

Shaunti: Jen, did we know that he was going to go this direction? Yes.

No, no! This is actually the way that God wired the female brain to work is essentially every signal that passes in a woman's brain has emotion attached to it.

Brian: Man!

Shaunti: That is the way our brains are wired. That is not—we're not defective, [Laughter] although I know some men might be questioning this.

Brian: The men are going, “Wait, I heard the bypass. I like the bypassing of all that and getting right to the logic of it.”

But what does that feel like?

Shaunti: For a woman—and here’s where it sort of—this is where it’s misunderstood by a lot of the husbands is that often when you see someone who’s getting super emotional, you automatically—I think there’s something in your brains that’s like, “Okay, if that was me, emotion would be completely furring up the gears.” Like the presence of emotion, it means the logic is done. There is no thinking going on.

It’s actually kind of helpful for men to know that that’s not actually the case and that for a woman, I can be getting pretty upset and I can still be thinking perfectly clearly. Thank you very much. The presence of emotion doesn’t mean that logic has ceased.

Brian: I think that’s an “aha” moment for most guys because when we see—when I see you cry, not only do I think that her logic’s not present; now we’re just dealing with emotion, but I lose all sense of logic. I don’t know what to do.

Shaunti: Because it’s sort of stimulating your emotion that she’s emotional. Is that what you mean?

Brian: It does!

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: Right now I feel a little bit like we’re in therapy right now; like this is impromptu therapy. I don’t know if Jen is orchestrating all of this for us or if some—

Shaunti: Is this an intervention?

Brian: I feel like it is because she’s sitting across from both of us and we’re sitting really close to each other, so it feels a little bit like therapy.

Jen: One thing I just thought of—and this is a little bit off topic but just thinking about that whole idea of how when you’re first attracted to someone—is that I think a lot of men that’s kind of a thing that they’re attracted about for a woman is that they can have emotion. I just think that’s something like, “That’s a woman and I want to be a part of that.” Because maybe they’re not feeling that as much. It’s one of those things that after a while can turn into, “Ugh!”

Shaunti: That’s brilliant.

Jen: I think that that's something that attracts a lot of men to women is because we might have more emotions or because, like what you just said, we bathe our thoughts sometimes through that emotional sense.

Shaunti: That's really brilliant. What do you think, Brian? I can see that, for a guy who doesn't feel as connected to his feelings, that actually suddenly having this relationship with this woman who is, I wonder if that's actually not necessarily a bad thing for him.

Brian: I feel like it's two on one right now. [Laughter] I'm a little scared of what to say—like if I should disagree with that. No, I think there's probably a protective mechanism—

Jen: That's what I was thinking too.

Brian: —that comes out, too, for men. There's a sense of, "Oh, I see that emotion. I want to care," when we're dating. But then when that emotion comes out when you're married, it feels a little different. It feels more paralyzing than it does protective.

You would think that it would be the opposite. You know, once you're married that, "Oh, I need to protect her more. I need to...." But there is something where a guy can feel—and I guess it depends on the situation because there's a lot of different reasons why women may cry—you know that the protective instinct may come out.

Shaunti: It's all you—if you're the problem. [Laughter]

Brian: Yes, if they're crying when it's clearly something you did or you didn't know that you did, then you're struggling with that. We heard—I heard—in fact, Ryan sent this to me—that a guy spent a month writing down every time his wife cried in a month and she was above average because she was over five times, over three to five times.

Shaunti: Okay, yes.

Brian: These were some of the things she cried about. The fluffy bunny escaped from an arctic fox in a documentary—

Shaunti: —and she cried.

Brian: —and she cried, right.

Shaunti: That's sweet.

Brian: Right.

There were no biscuits in the house. [Laughter] I think this is an English girl. There was no biscuits in the house.

I tried to hold her hand when she wasn't expecting it.

I cooked her dinner after a long day.

Shaunti: She was just overwhelmed. Yes.

Brian: She watched a video about a dog.

Jen: She's an emotional girl. [Laughter]

Shaunti: Yes, but that's only in one month. That's not bad. That's pretty normal.

Jen: Yes, that's true.

Shaunti: Yes, yes, absolutely. That's a good experiment, guys. Write down when you see your wife cry.

Brian: Right, when you see your wife cry. That would be something good to know. Just to take notes of that. What else is going on? What else is happening in these moments?

Shaunti: For most women, one of the pieces of the puzzle is that because she's wired for emotion, this is when it becomes about what's going on in her life, right? Is it an argument with you and is she overwhelmed by this feeling that you don't care and now there's a whole other reason for crying.

Or is it that she saw this cute documentary about the bunny escaping the fox and that's so sweet. Or I love the fact that she had some tears come down out of her eyes when he reached across to take her hand unexpectedly. She just felt so cared for.

The thing is, guys, did you notice that there's all different reasons for that. Some are negative. Some are positive. The presence of tears doesn't necessarily mean negative. So if you can, also look for some of the signals that this is actually your wife feeling very cared for. That's definitely not a reason to escape.

Brian: Right, in *Psychology Today*, it made the statement that one of the biggest mistakes men tend to make in conflict—and so this is when they're crying in conflict—is perceiving a woman's tears as an indication of sadness. Then the man begins to console the woman. She may respond by getting snappy because he has misread the cue. Underneath a woman's tears is seldom sadness but rather anger.

Jen: I would say that's really true for me.

Brian: Really?

Jen: Yes, because I think that if I'm feeling overlooked or feeling underappreciated and—

Brian: Hypothetically.

Jen: Hypothetically—if our communication isn't there, it's like an anger that leads to sadness or maybe a sadness that leads to anger. Probably a sadness that leads to anger.

Shaunti: Yes.

Jen: Then the tears come.

Brian: What do you want in that moment?

Jen: I think first I would want a hug but I want that to be all—I wouldn't want that to be the only thing. But I would like some physical touch and then some communication about where that's coming from. Maybe, "I'm sorry you're feeling this way. Tell me about it. Tell me if you're sad or if you're angry."

Would those be the two pretty much the two emotions that—

Shaunti: If it's a negative thing that's going on, yes.

Jen: If it's negative, yes.

Shaunti: And the problem is, Brian, I think for a lot of guys, one of the things that we've seen in the research that's been so interesting and is so different for most women is that we tell the women—so any spies listening in—

Brian: Right, we have a few.

Shaunti: —we have some women listening in to this—is that for men seeing a woman's tears seems to trigger a fight or flight response. Because to a guy, his brain has now gotten locked up. The presence of emotion now for him, it's difficult for him to think clearly. So he thinks "Oh, my gosh! I have to escape so I can go outside and think clearly and figure out what's going on and what do I do."

That's the flight response. Or the fight is just to get aggressive or get angry himself.

Brian: Right. Like, "Why are you doing this?" And almost—it's not like, "Why? Because I care." It's maybe because I don't know how to process so I'm just processing out in anger. What's going on in a man's mind where the gears are slowing down? It almost feels like, that's what it feels like in my brain when Jen is crying in that moment and she's feeling—I can't perceive if it's anger, if it's sadness.

Shaunti: But, “I’ve done something.”

Brian: I’ve done something. My gears slow down in my brain.

Shaunti: To some degree it’s because the male brain is wired to do one thing at a time. That means you can process a thought or a feeling but not both so you set the feeling aside to process later. But if the feelings don’t want to wait and that sort of furs up the thoughts like, “How am I going to be able to figure this out?”

If you’re at the office; if you’re in an emotional conflict with another man, that’s one of the reasons why for men, when emotions start rising, if you’re in a room, “Hey let’s cool it down. Let’s just, how about we take a break.”

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: “How about let’s go—I’ll go get some coffee. We can take a bathroom break. We can come back and deal with this in 15-20 minutes,” because you both need to go to your opposite corners, so to speak, and let the emotions dissipate.

And for your wife—

Brian: I was going to say that sounds like a good plan. Can we just do that?

Shaunti: I hate to tell you this: Jen is shaking her head. [Laughter]

Brian: “Can we go get coffee? Let’s take a break. Let’s go in our opposite rooms.”

I really like that.

Shaunti: For your wife, Jen, what does that feel like?

Jen: Yes, I was sitting here listening. I was like, “Is she going to say this is what we should do?” [Laughter]

Shaunti: No.

Jen: No, no. Just like immediate, I think, lets—I would feel really sad if that happened, I think.

Brian: Yes.

Jen: I would feel abandoned.

Shaunti: That was the word we were using earlier. When Brian and I were talking about this. I'm like, we women feel abandoned. It's even worse.

Brian: Let's get into, "What do we do as men?" because I think that's what every guy is asking. Every husband is, "Alright, give me the game plan." Like, "How do I now respond now that I know this?"

Our tendencies are to abandon or to move towards anger, and we're saying both of those don't work in this situation.

Shaunti: What are the reasons, honestly as a guy, that you have a tendency towards flight? Some of it is so that you can think clearly, which is understandable that you might feel that way. But to me, one of the other reasons is the reason there's emotion rising in your brain to begin with—it isn't like it's catching; it's not a virus—but her emotion now has triggered emotion in you because, I think, you see her as a threat. That all of that anger in her, sadness—you're feeling, "I failed."

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: "I'm not doing my job as a husband. She's criticizing me. I didn't do a good job. I've made her feel this way." You're feeling like you failed. Therefore, this emotion is instinctively a threat; where the reality is actually, no, not necessarily. You've actually got an opportunity to be part of the solution.

For a guy, it's probably pretty scary, but if you actually give her a hug, like move towards her instead of moving away, usually for most women and you need to find out—good job—he just reached over and hugged her—I'm very impressed—but if you will, you know you need to find out ahead of time whether for your wife, that she is the type that wants a hug in that situation. Not everybody will, but most will. If you find that out ahead of time and then next time she's upset, take the risk, move towards her, give her a hug, and you'll see her melt.

Brian: You asked a question when we were talking about that story and you were saying, "I almost want you to ask me a question, like are you crying because you're angry or are you crying because you're sad?" I mean have you found that to be helpful for guys in that moment to go—to ask why they're crying?

Shaunti: I don't know that I would know the answer to that of whether it's sadness or anger at that point because it's probably both.

Jen: But I think a lot of women, when you say, "Why are you crying?" I think that feels like—

Brian: —like an attack.

Jen: —like a little bit of an attack and—

Brian: Yes, especially when you say it like that, “*Why are you crying?*” [Laughter]

Jen: It’s kind of the age-old thing where men are like, “I can’t figure out why she’s crying.” Sometimes we can’t either. We might need to figure it out but I think that might be a good gentle question of like, “Are you angry? Are you sad?” or maybe giving us some options. I don’t know.

Shaunti: I think to some degree it’s helped me understand what’s going on right now and then be okay with—this is one of the things we talked about in one of the other podcasts—be okay with the fact she’s going to actually need to talk about that. She’s going to need to process that verbally because she won’t necessarily know exactly everything.

You’re going to have to be okay with that means she’s like, [vomit sound] all over you about, “Because of this and because of this.” Sticking in there with her, you’re actually helping her process through something pretty important. You’ll see her, hopefully in most cases, feel hurt and start to relax.

Brian: You agree?

Jen: Yes.

Brian: Okay.

Jen: I like that. I like that just a little bit more of a gentle prodding in there and seeing what the background is because, I agree, sometimes it might be—I might be like, “Well, I’m both. I’m angry and I’m sad and I’ve—”

Shaunti: “—and I’ve got 12 others.”

Jen: Right, and I’ve got a lot of stuff going on.

Brian: So a quick report card. How do you think I tend to do when you cry in the middle of conflict?

Jen: I think that you probably get like a A-, B+. I think you’re pretty good.

Shaunti: That’s pretty good.

Brian: You can shoot me straight.

Jen: No, I think—I mean you’re a very—like you’re sensitive and you do cry probably more than some men.

Brian: Okay, let's keep going, keep going. You're right there.

Jen: And you are very thoughtful. You really think through emotions. I think that's really helpful. I think that you do a good job. But I do know that sometimes when you know that I'm really underneath it, I'm angry about something, that you tend to flight—

Brian: Yes, that's what I was going to say.

Jen: —that you want to escape and not really deal with it.

Brian: One of the verses that I think is a great one to add to this is Psalm 56:8, "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" It's just a reminder, it's like God moves towards our tears. That's the psalmist talking about God putting our tears in a bottle.

It's almost like you can even get a picture, I think, of the bottle going right where the tears are. It's like I'm moving towards you. I think that's what I heard you say is that for guys, our instinct is abandonment or anger; whereas God's instinct is to move towards us to engage the tears, engage the emotions. That requires a husband to go, "I need God's spirit in my life to do that because it's not going to come naturally."

Shaunti: It certainly won't—from everything that we've heard from the men, it's not only that it doesn't come naturally but it's actually scary. For any women spies who are listening in to realize that I guess we look scary when we're upset, when we're angry, when we're crying. I had one man yell out from one of our marriage conferences when we were talking about, "She doesn't need space she needs a hug," and one man yelled out from the audience, "You mean hug the porcupine."

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: Because I guess that's what we look like. Again, the key, guys, is it—I mean at some other non-emotional time ask your wife, "If we're in conflict, do you want space or do you want a hug?"

If she says she is the type to want a hug, which is going to be most but not all, if she is that type, then take that step, that courageous step, when you're in the middle of it and you want to flight and give her a hug. Even if it is that you're giving her a hug to say, "I can't even think right now." Like "I hate seeing that I've made you cry. I need to get a little space, but I want you to know we're okay." Give her a big hug and say, "Can we pick this back up at dinner time?"

That is the kind of thing that, for most women, that right there makes her feel so cared for that the reason for the sadness or the anger or whatever has been sort of soothed.

Brian: Yes.

Jen: I think that I would love that. I think that would be something that I would really respond well to.

Brian: I might start doing that then. [Laughter] That's some good advice, some good wisdom. I think the other trap that I think guys can fall into is minimizing the tears and almost going—and not just with anger or with abandonment but just like, “Oh, you'll get over this.” Like “You'll—come on, snap out of it.” It's more of a sense of “Okay, let's keep moving. You'll be okay. You got this.”

Another verse I think is appropriate here is Proverbs 25:20, “Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.”

Shaunti: [Laughter] Explosion.

Brian: Yes, it's a great image.

Shaunti: It rubs you raw.

Brian: Rubs you raw. So just try to go, “Hey, let's be happy now.” Let's just minimize what's really going on and move towards what a guy feels safe in is when I can tell my wife is enjoying me and when she's not enjoying me I want to get back to that really quickly.

Shaunti: But, guys, just remember you've been given this incredible heart to hold, your wife's heart, and treat it tenderly.

Brian: That's great.

Jen: Yes.

Brian: Anything else you want to add, Jen, my bride? Encourage these guys out there how they can keep loving the one they're with well.

Jen: I was just thinking that when you go against what you might normally want to do, man, what an incredible thing when you reach out to your wife and love her in this way. You won't regret it. I don't think you'll ever regret it. You'll only get a woman who is softer towards you, who is—I mean, when you do things like that for me, I just fall in love with you that little bit more and appreciate it so much.

Brian: Guys, if you ever think about like after a game where the coaches and players all roll tape on the previous game and they find out where they went wrong, there's never a time where you look back and roll tape on your conflict where you think, “You know

what? Running out of the room while she was crying, that really drew her closer to me,” [Laughter] or “Yelling or telling her to get over it, like that really helped us grow closer together.”

Shaunti: Or “Can we stop with the drama? I mean, come on.”

Brian: “Come on. What’s the big deal? I thought this was nothing.” None of that ever works well. What Jen is saying is right. It may not feel natural but you do that a couple of times and you start realizing “Oh, this actually works and brings me together as one.” Which is what we’re all about here at *Married With Benefits* is rediscovering the benefits that come with marriage, with saying, “I do.”

Shaunti, I just want to say thanks again for continuing to give us great wisdom. This is good. This is like a counseling session we got for free.

Jen: I know.

Brian: Isn’t that nice.

Jen: How much do we owe you, Shaunti?

Shaunti: Except for the fact that I’m not a counselor but other than that, thanks. [Laughter]

Brian: Yes, a Harvard-trained researcher turned counselor, right? You’ve counseled many people. I know you say that a little tongue in cheek. But the truth of the matter is I know a ton of psychologists and counselors that recommend your books all the time. We do as speakers. Every *Weekend to Remember*® we’re talking about your books, *For Men Only*, *For Women Only*. They have been tools that have been used by God in great ways.

Shaunti: Appreciate that.

Brian: Just as a reminder, if you’re looking for a simple way to keep loving the one that you’re with, sign up for our daily devotional series called “I Do Every Day”. They are quick read emails. They are—they’re great just to start your day off with in the morning. You’ll receive titles like, “No, No, Bad Rumba”.

Shaunti: [Laughter] I want to see that one.

Brian: I do too. “The Tantrum That Changed Everything” and “Planes, Trains, and Auto Correct”. They’re great little pieces of wisdom written in winsome ways. Sign up at FamilyLife.com/IDo or click on the link provided in our show notes.

I want to give a special shout out to our audio producer, CJ3, and the entire *Married With Benefits* team—

Shaunti: Woo-hoo. They're amazing.

Brian: —for surprising me. This was totally unexpected. I didn't know who was coming in when they said special guest, so good job, Jim and Ryan.

Join us next time, we're going to answer the question, "Why am I so confident in arguments at work but so insecure arguing with my wife at home?" That's right, honey. You're the worst person to argue with for me.

Jen: Why?

Brian: Because I just don't know what to do.

Shaunti: This is why we're having a whole podcast on it next.

Jen: I know. I hear this and I'm thinking—I mean, you have high-powered arguments at work and with big important people and I'm just little ole me.

Brian: I do. I argue everybody under the table at work. [Laughter] I'm awesome at it.

Jen: You're not an arguer but whatever.

Brian: But it is hard at home. We're going to find out why that is. That one should be fun for me personally because you're staying for another one.

Jen: I'll stay for one more.

Brian: Alright. Man, I'm going to be really insecure. [Laughter] Until then, I'm your host Brian Goins. Thanks for listening.

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