

Married With Benefits

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Episode 12: Why Does My Wife Expect Me to Read Her Mind?

Guest: Jim Mitchell
Air Date: July 6, 2020

Brian: From the podcast network at FamilyLife®, this is Brian Goins, host of *Married With Benefits*, where we're committed to helping you love the one you're with and discover all the benefits that came with saying, "I do."

This entire season I've been joined by Harvard-trained researcher and best-selling author, Shaunti Feldhahn, as we've been answering questions every husband is asking but they've just never gotten a straight answer for. Shaunti, it has been fun to sit down with you again and do this series.

Shaunti: Yes, I have loved being able to dig into some of these questions, man.

Brian: We've had a verse that's kind of guided us this whole season which is from 1 Peter 3:7, "Live with our wives in an understanding way." [Paraphrase] One translation, I think it's the New American Standard Version, that says, "for [since] she is a woman," [Laughter] which seems obvious, but I guess us guys need to be hit over the head with a two by four just to know that she's different. She's not a man. She doesn't think like us. She doesn't feel like us.

We've been learning—it seems like every time we've gotten together, I feel like I've learned something new about my wife. I've been married for over 20 years; yet I'm going, "Oh yeah, she processes different, feels different, and I need to be a student of her." I think this question *especially* really gets to the heart of this verse.

Bruce: Hi, I'm Bruce. I've been married for seven years and my question is: Why does my wife expect me to read her mind?

Brian: Man!

Shaunti: I understand that was one of the top questions on FamilyLife Local.

Brian: It was. FamilyLife Local is a group of families, of folks that are excited about building in and making impact in their community. They have a Facebook group where they're talking about best practices on how their family can impact other families because at FamilyLife we really believe that *any* family can have major impact in the community around them.

If you want more information about that or to join that group, go to FamilyLife.com/local. There's a lot of guys that were saying, "This is the question for me." As you listen to that question, I want to see if I can guess what's going through your mind right now.

Shaunti: Alright.

Brian: You ready?

Shaunti: Yes, absolutely.

Brian: Are you thinking about sports?

Shaunti: No.

Brian: Are you thinking about Marvel movies?

Shaunti: Maybe, actually because I'm a huge Marvel fan.

Brian: Okay, but just not right now.

Shaunti: Not right this second.

Brian: Mexican food?

Shaunti: No.

Brian: Okay, those are my only categories.

Now we're joined today with Jim Mitchell. Jim is our executive producer here at *Married With Benefits*.

Jim: That's right.

Brian: And a guy that—I understand you're on here because you're an expert mind reader of your own wife. Would Lisa say that?

Jim: I'm—[Laughter]—she would not. But she's not here. I'm an expert at—

Shaunti: Oh, she might. I met Lisa. She's awesome.

Jim: She is awesome. I think I'm an expert in the sense of I have a lot of experience, maybe. I'm the most experienced in the room at asking this question;—

Brian: Yes.

Jim: —maybe not bringing the most knowledge. By the way, it's a lot easier on that side of the glass than it is on this side of the glass. I just want to say that.

Brian: You think so?

Jim: I do. You guys are doing a good job in here.

Brian: Oh, come on. You're a natural. I think about that. Where do you most feel that pressure, Jim, to read your wife's mind? Where do you feel that expectation?

Jim: Let me just say this about my wife. We've been married 25 years. She's incredible. I am realizing more and more every day how much I need to be a student of her. There is so much more to explore, which, Shaunti, I think is a huge discovery just for any man at any stage in marriage.

I'm beginning to really enjoy reading her and trying to understand her. I don't think I've done it well. But I will say this about my wife: she's the only person I know—you know that game that youth groups used to play where you'd line up kids in chairs and you would tell the first kid on the end a sentence, just any sentence, and then they whisper it to the next kid and they whisper it to the next kid and by the time you get to the end, it's a yellow unicorn climbing a rainbow— [Laughter]

Shaunti: That's right.

Jim: —and then eating acorns or something— it's something completely different—I say this about my wife lovingly—she's the only person I know that can play that absolutely by herself. [Laughter] Like she can say something, and I can say, "What'd you say?" because I didn't catch it. She'll repeat it and it's different, and I say "Wait, no that's not—say it again." She can say something completely different. By the time she's said it five times, she's forgotten what she said in the first place. This has been maddening to me as a husband as I've tried to sort of drill into those words.

Brian: So it's not even just reading her mind. It's like I'm not even sure I'm good at translating English from what's coming out of her mouth. [Laughter]

Jim: Yes, I'm not sure the words have a lot of meaning for her and that leads to a lot of conflict for us.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: And she's probably trying to process—like she's trying to think through what she's thinking and explain it at the same time. I can see why a guy would be a little confused by that.

Brian: Shaunti, where have you found this to be an expectation? Do you feel like wives have this same expectation, like, “Yes, my husband should read my mind”?

Shaunti: To some degree, this is really unfair but, yes, kind of, and I know the guys are going, “What?”

Brian: We know that’s not a super power any of us have, right?

Shaunti: No, and we *know* that. I think most women obviously are completely aware that this is not something we should expect. Under the surface though there is a understandable feeling that he should notice, at least if there’s something wrong, and press into it.

He should be able to notice that when, “Are you okay?”

“Yes, fine.”

Like that should be a signal to any thinking person that the answer isn’t, “Okay great! I’ll go turn on the game then.”

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: But there is a signal that is being given that if you care about me enough, you will press in to try figure out what’s wrong.

Brian: Yes. One of my favorite characters in literature is Sherlock Holmes. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, I thought, created one of the best characters that—and he’s stood the test of time—one of the things that I love about him is that he is hyperaware and observant of people, so much so that it surprises the people he’s talking to; where he can learn something about somebody just by totally observing them and then speak into what they felt, what their occupation is—all of that kind of thing.

What I think Peter’s talking about with this verse, “Live with your wives in an understanding way,” is be Sherlock Holmes.

Jim: Yes, I totally agree. One thing that I’ve discovered—Shaunti, I want to ask you about this—is I’ve learned the difference—I think I’m learning the difference between asking questions and being curious. I think I’ve gotten really good at asking questions of my wife.

Shaunti: I see why we wanted Jim in the room.

Brian: Oh, yes. That’s good.

Shaunti: Yes, absolutely.

Jim: I'll drill—my questions are usually pointed at the words which really isn't a demonstration of curiosity—

Shaunti: No.

Jim: —at all. So help me with that.

Shaunti: You're like trying to unpack linguistics and that's not going to help.

Jim: Yes, "Why did you say *this*?"

She's like, "I don't remember saying that."

I said "No, you did say that."

Brian: Yes, "I can play the tape back if you'd like."

Jim: You can't DVR real life. I've wanted to rewind and play it for her and prove it. But help me with that. I really am curious where I'm breaking down when I begin to ask, "Repeat that question for me," and it becomes an interrogation.

Shaunti: Because the thing is you're not realizing that in *that* situation—at least I would love to talk to Lisa and find out if this is what's actually going on—but I would imagine it's some of what we've talked about in previous episodes, which is that your wife is probably a verbal processor.

As you're asking her those questions, she's actually talking it through to try to figure out what she's thinking and to try to figure out how to explain it. That's why it changes is because she's gone further in her thinking. She's not actually just repeating it over and over. Her thinking has progressed. That's an example of "Okay, do you care enough about me to go with me on this journey?" Because it is not, "You said this four minutes ago."

It's like, that's not the point. The point is, "Do you care enough to engage? Do you care enough to go with me on whatever it is that I am trying to explain to you, I'm trying to give to you?" The reality is, guys, if I can just be honest—I feel kind of bad—I'm surrounded by men here—

Brian: Yes, you are. So be careful about what you are about to say here.

Shaunti: —production crew and everything else—but to some degree I think sometimes the answer is, "No, I don't care enough." Like, "I'm just tired. It's been a long day. Can we please just—can I please just take my shoes off and go sit on the couch," as opposed to what your wife needs from you at that moment.

Brian: Robert Lewis in *Rocking the Roles*—great author on guys’ issues and marriage and great pastor—he said, “Most men are not necessarily unwilling to meet their wife’s needs. They’re simply unaware of what those needs really are.”

Then I think to take it one step further: it’s they’re unaware because they may not be curious enough to find out or they might be too tired. They just go into a place where it’s like, “I just got so much else going on.” I bet some husbands right now are going, “One more thing for me to think about now when I get home.”

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: He said, “Now you want me to be hyperaware, hypersensitive, hyper-conscientious and that doesn’t come naturally.”

Shaunti: Would it make a difference to the average husband—and this is an honest question for all the men in the room—would it make a difference for you to know as a man that this need of your wife actually does come from a deep place of *need*, not playing games; not, “She’s testing me,” not, “One more thing I have to do,” but that, no, there’s actually a real vulnerability in her heart, and you’re probably the one she most needs to speak into that vulnerability. Would that make a difference to you as a guy?

Jim: It definitely would. I think I am learning recently just how much my wife would like to be pursued and would like to be understood. The irony is sometimes that means I have to tolerate misunderstanding a lot of words to actually understand her. To live with her in an understanding way means living with her with misunderstanding. I don’t like that. I’m uncomfortable with that.

I would love to reduce the interaction to a definition of terms, a clear grammatical statement, or an understanding where we both agree. It probably has a lot to do with I haven’t carved out enough time for this conversation. Intuitively, “I would like to get back to the game.” I think she hit both of us there on that comment.

Brian: I think she was talking to you but yes go ahead

Jim: I was looking to you for some support, bro. [Laughter]

Shaunti: He just threw him under the bus, and that’s alright.

Brian: I did.

Jim: If that’s going on under the surface, my wife knows that. She knows I haven’t carved out enough time and, “I really would like to the bottom line quickly and I don’t want to have to read your mind to do it.”

What that's really saying to her is, "I don't want to take time for you."

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: When you think about—we had in this season and the other season about Hallmark movies; which we know are—our audio producer, James Youngblood, has got a website, husbandsforhallmark.com. He's going to be starting this as a result of this. There'll be a high demand for that.

When you think about those movies or romance novels or any of that stuff, one thing that attracts women to that—Shaunti, you can back me up on this—is because there is this—they seem to read minds.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: They bring hot chocolate at the perfect time. They come back and restore some conversation or a conflict. They're willing to move into that and know that they're disappointed. They just perfectly do it. Why? Because the script was written that way and us guys don't have our own script.

I think what you're bringing up, Jim, is too often we don't want to take the time to write the script. I don't want to take the time to actually dig in and find out if I was really observant of her body language, not the words that are coming out, but the way it's being said. So much of conversation—we all do that—it's not what's being said but how it's being said.

Shaunti: It's interesting, I actually had a really serious case of bilateral pneumonia and the bottoms of my lungs sort of collapsed. There were a lot of issues there and I was kind of sick for a while.

Brian: That sounds terrible.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: There's a lot of things, that's okay. "What happened? Are you sick?"

"Well no, my lungs just collapsed. It's not a *big* deal."

Jim: "I'll be fine."

Brian: "I'll be okay."

Shaunti: I was not well there for a couple of months. It was really interesting how much I felt cared for by Jeff, who is not normally a hovering type. He's much more a, "Suck it up! You'll be fine."

Brian: “Suck it up, Nancy.”

Shaunti: Exactly, but how I felt cared for by his sort of over-awareness of, “You okay? Do you need to sit down?”

We had some events in Colorado and, hey, the air in Colorado is thinner and it gets less oxygen to my lungs so I needed more rest. I needed more sleep. His awareness of, “You know what? Why don’t we just take an hour and you just chill for a bit,” that awareness made me feel really cared for because he was investigating, he was watching. He could tell there was something wrong with me so he had this level of conscientiousness about it.

I think to some degree that I’m not sure men realize that underneath the surface in us as women, in our hearts, there’s always this vulnerability, there’s always this question that’s very real of, “Does he really care about me?” Like, “Does he care enough to *watch* me?”

That level of conscientiousness, even if it’s at a low level, when it gets triggered by this is a difficult season or whatever, for a guy to enter into that and to be aware that his wife is saying, “Yeah, I’m fine. Yeah, I’m fine.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” Okay, well that’s the equivalent of she’s got pneumonia of the heart—like, hello? Dig into that a little bit.

Brian: Yes.

Jim: Yes, what I just heard you saying—of course I just told you I’ve been married 25 years, but it’s exciting to me to think another 25 years—what I just heard you tell me is that there’s a challenge before me to begin to read my wife and to begin to understand her and be conscientious in the way that you just described.

I’ve been thinking about there’s a verse in Genesis 3, where in the curse of the man he gets defensive. He looks at God and he says, “This woman you gave me, the woman you gave me,” and he wants to blame her and so you start—

Shaunti: —and blame God too.

Brian: Right.

Jim: —and blame God. This is his go-to move is to blame God and point at this woman as a stumbling block for him.

From the very first pages of the Bible, this relationship is framed as antagonistic almost. Now I'm realizing in my marriage I can almost redeem that phrase. I can almost say, "Lord, this woman that you gave me," in a very redemptive way and say, "Yes, she's frustrating. Yes, she's very different than me. Yes, she's a mystery and that's exciting. I don't know where this heads but I'm on board for this trip and I want to know her and I want to pursue her," and "this woman you gave me" in a way that I'm claiming that as a joy for me as a husband.

Shaunti: That, for me as a wife, that what you just said, it hits every emotional note that a husband would want to do that; that he would care enough about his wife to do that. I think to some degree, it's maybe that the men don't realize that's actually a need. That is what this verse means, "Live with your wives in an understanding way." I mean we don't even want to go there too far, but because she's the weaker vessel—

Brian: We didn't say it, Shaunti.

Shaunti: I know.

Jim: Tell us about that.

Brian: Tell us about that.

Shaunti: I'm going there.

Brian: You said before this podcast, "I don't know if we want to talk about that."

Shaunti: No, no, no, we don't want to talk about that. No, but I think to a certain degree, certainly from the perspective of a husband, the perception of a husband like, "I don't get this. What?" It's almost more, to some degree, emotionally, there's more of a need there of wanting to know that he understands her. That need, if you call that weaker, okay, but it's a need.

I'm not sure that men really realize, that is the cry of a woman's heart. That is what we've been talking about. This whole season, this whole podcast has really been to try to help men grasp, yes, you have your vulnerabilities as a man. You don't want to think about them but they're—

Brian: —they're there.

Shaunti: —there.

Brian: They're big.

Shaunti: That's what we did in "Questions Every Wife Is Asking". But this season is to help men understand your confident-looking, awesome wife. She has this fragility inside her, this vulnerability that really questions whether she's enough for you.

Brian: Chances are it's what got you to the altar to begin with, is that you were an incredible student of your wife, noticed everything, knew her Starbucks drink even if it took three sentences to put it out there. You did all that you could to get her to the altar. Then unfortunately, because most of us men, we achieved that goal, we climbed that mountain, we did it; that—it's done. Really again, it's the start of, "Okay, how can I continue to seek that need, to pursue that need?"

Shaunti: I liked what Ryan, our strategist said, "The case wasn't closed when you said 'I do.'" If you're Sherlock Holmes, yes, the case didn't like, "Okay, wrap that up; on to the next thing." It's absolutely still open, and every day you have a chance to still read it.

Brian: Someone once defined love—I mean there's a lot of different definitions for love—but they said, "Love really is focus. Whatever you love, you truly focus on, you notice, you look intently towards."

Shaunti: Ooh, I like that.

Brian: Of course, God is described as someone who when, as Tim Keller says, "When we were fully known and fully loved, it's a little bit like being loved by God."

When somebody sees everything that we have, all our vulnerabilities, all our inconsistencies, insecurities, and yet still loves us, that's the way God—God focuses on us. He loved us so much He sent His best to us.

Jim: As I audit myself with this question—I do a little audit—it occurs to me I leave very little energy for this. I've gotten very good at the habit of spending all of my energy at the office pouring myself into the job. I go home exhausted with maybe just a little bit of fumes left for a few priorities of mine. Then I'm confronted, literally as I walk in the door, I'm confronted with this other person that's very different, that needs me, and needs me bad, and I'm just exhausted at the thought of that. I don't want to put the effort or the energy into having that kind of an exchange.

Shaunti: I would say probably it's because in your mind you're thinking it shouldn't be necessary.

Jim: Right.

Shaunti: Because for you, what's your vulnerability and what's your feeling like, "Aw, I've got to be focusing on—it's all about can I provide for the family; am I enough out *there* in the workplace?" Not even thinking about the fact that actually this much more important sphere of my life there is a need there that I didn't realize needed to be

curated, that needed to be attended to. To some degree, I think maybe it's, let's just reset the expectations, guys, now that you know that your wife does have this need.

Brian: As we think about wrapping up, I can feel—I bet there's a lot of guys right now feeling a sense of just heaviness of, "Okay, I've just got to be more aware. I've got to be more observant, conscientious," whatever we want to put there, "to be Sherlock Holmes to my wife again, to keep the mystery."

Which there's a romantic side to that that I like. But there's also a sense of, yes, but when I was dating and pursuing, I didn't have three kids. [Laughter] I didn't have a full-time job. I was in college for goodness sakes. I got all kinds of time in the world. Now I don't.

Give me a few things I can sit back and go, "Okay, I can achieve that. Where's a great place to start?" I think one of the things we've already said is be far more observant of the body language than the words that are coming out.

Shaunti: Yes, or both—both, yes.

Brian: Or both, yes. But when she says, "I'm fine" but her body's not backing that up, notice that. What's another one or two things that as to Jim's saying, "I'm going to go home, and I want to put energy to this?" Give me a couple of other things that I can go, "I want to put energy to this."

Shaunti: One of the things that we talked about several times in previous episodes is if you will make a habit, make a practice of doing the simple things that do say, "I still do," right, "I still love you; I'm glad I married you." Sending her those signals every day even if it's the little things—you know sending her the text message or putting your arm around her in church or whatever—those things actually build a level of security under her.

She's not likely to be as upset as easily. She's not likely to be as clingy when you come home from work because she's feeling that sense of security. That I think to some degree, if you make that a habit—it's like keeping your car maintained, right—if you make that a habit, then you'll actually notice those times when there is, "Okay, there is actually a problem here." It'll make it easier for you to dig into it, rather than just feeling overwhelmed all the time because there's a lot of rattling.

Brian: Right.

Jim: If I could just contribute one, it would be to rediscover the excitement of learning your wife, to be curious again. That's an exciting thought of the curiosity that I have as a husband is exciting to me. What is underneath there and how can I understand her specifically?

I'm not married generally to a gender. I'm married to a specific woman that is unique and wants to be uniquely loved. That's my challenge in life and that's fun. I don't know where that's going to lead. I'm thinking that there's a verse in the New Testament that—where God says how can you say you love me when you can't love the person that you see right in front of you? I can learn to love God by learning tangibly to love this specific person in front of me.

Shaunti: Oh man, guys, I think that's our top tip. Just put in big letters, write it on your mirror: "Be curious about your wife."

Brian: Yes, be curious and you'll start seeing needs that probably were there but you just haven't been conscientious of. I know for my wife, she would tell you that one of her number one needs is, "I want a husband who prays with me." You'd think after 20 years of ministry that that would have come naturally. It doesn't.

Some of those things that you start noticing are going to require you to do things that don't feel comfortable, don't feel natural. But the more—as Shaunti, is what you're saying which I think is great—is as you're getting curious and you're noticing those needs, "What's the habit? What's the one or two things that I can start creating a habit out of and it becomes a lifestyle?"

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: One of the things that I think Jenn feels love is when the coffee's made for her in the morning and we have time in the chair with the Bible out and say a quick prayer before we start our day. That just sets her up for the day. I know that that gives her fuel. I don't always feel like doing that but it's one of those things where you go, "Okay, Lord give me the strength because it's something I noticed that she needs."

I think being curious, finding one or two things that even right now you probably know one or two needs right now that you go, "You know what? I've been ignoring that. What do I do? Let me do something even today to move into that."

Shaunti: Absolutely.

Brian: To wrap this up I want to say thanks, Jim.

Jim: You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

Brian: Great tip, being curious—

Jim: Yes sir.

Brian: —and rediscovering your wife. That's awesome. Be Sherlock Holmes again to your bride. Next time on *Married With Benefits* we're going to close out season two,

“Questions Every Husband Is Asking”, with our final episode. Shaunti, it’s gone by so quick.

Shaunti: It has been. It’s awesome though.

Brian: But you know what? I decided that we’re going to go ahead and close out by taking a cruise. That’s going to be where we do our last episode.

Shaunti: Because you know every podcast should close out by taking a cruise, absolutely.

Brian: We might as well. We are one of the few podcasts because we’re associated with FamilyLife that gets to experience the *Love Like You Mean It*® cruise. You’re going to be on there, you and Jeff.

Shaunti: We’ll be speaking.

Brian: You’ll be one of the main speakers. Jenn and I will be emceeing and also have a session or two. We’re going to, at one of your sessions, we’re going to go ahead and open it up for questions for husbands and wives to be able to submit their questions and we’re going to do a rapid fire time.

Shaunti: Speed round. It’s going to be, really a chance to sort of grab bag and see what sort of questions have been raised in people’s heads by thinking and talking about this for an hour.

Brian: Yes, I’m excited about that. That should be fun.

Until then, I’m Brian Goins. Thanks for listening.

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