



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: What Men Need to Know About Women – Part 2

Guest(s): Jeff and Shaunti Feldhahn

Air Date: July 31, 2025

Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Do you ever feel like you're speaking a completely different language than your spouse? For many of us husbands especially, understanding our wives' deepest needs can make us feel like we're trying to solve an impossible puzzle. I mean, we love our wives deeply, but sometimes it seems like nothing we do is quite right. Well, on today's edition of Family Talk, we're bringing you part two of Dr. James Dobson's insightful conversation with best-selling authors Shaunti and Jeff Feldhahn. Through extensive research and surveys with thousands of women, the Feldhahns have uncovered surprising truths about what wives really want their husbands to know about them and how they communicate.

Now on our last program, we explored how a woman's need for reassurance runs much deeper than most men realize. On today's broadcast, we're going to explore why wives value emotional security over financial stability, and what she really means when she says, "Just listen," and how men and women approach intimacy so differently. The Feldhahns are both Harvard graduates, respected researchers, and sought-after speakers who have dedicated their careers to helping couples understand each other better. Their practical insights from their books, *For Men Only* and *For Women Only*, have transformed countless marriages. Now let's join Dr. James Dobson right now as he continues this important discussion with Jeff and Shaunti Feldhahn right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, what's number three?

Shaunti Feldhahn: Number three is the one that Jeff and most men still have the hardest time believing is true, actually.

Jeff Feldhahn: I actually struggle with it, still to this day.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Still, even though he's seen all the surveys, but it goes against something that guys have had as an assumption for, I guess, pretty much their whole life.

Jeff Feldhahn: And it goes against some of the things, the way that our natural wiring is. And it was the very first topic that we came up with and it was the idea of security. And Shaunti said, "Well what do you think about that?" And I said, "Well, I don't think there's anything novel there, I think every guy knows that a woman needs security." And she said, "Well, what do you think security means?" I said, "Well, that the mortgage gets paid, that there's going to be food on the table, that the kids are going to be taken care of." So she said, "Financial, right?" I said, "What else is there?"

Shaunti Feldhahn: What else kind of security is there? And I said, "Well, all that stuff is important, but it doesn't hold a candle to how important it is that I know that you are always going to be there for me no matter what. And we're always going to be close and emotional security is so much more important to a woman." And he didn't-

Jeff Feldhahn: And by this time guys' eyes glaze over because you go, what does emotional security even mean?

Shaunti Feldhahn: They don't even know what those words mean together and really truly, the thing that we are telling the guys in this chapter and the thing we actually demonstrated on the survey is that, believe it or not, guys, your wife, if she's like most of the women across the country, 70% of married women said that if they had to, they'd actually choose to endure financial insecurity, if they had to, if that's what it took to get more of you as a husband.

Dr. James Dobson: And that is a key point.

Jeff Feldhahn: It's amazing.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the rub because the man assumes that his job is to lift the whole family by his bootstraps.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Which is exhausting.

Dr. James Dobson: And he's out there, he's working 12, 14 hours a day in some cases and he is saying to his wife, "Babe, I'm doing it for you. I'm attempting to be successful so that we can live a good life. I'm doing all these things," and she says, "Not for me you're not."

Shaunti Feldhahn: And that is so hurtful to a guy because he doesn't understand her.

Dr. James Dobson: It is very hurtful because he's been told all his life, this is what his assignment is. This is what he's supposed to do.

Jeff Feldhahn: It's absolutely true and for us guys, it's actually quantifiable. I can look at my paycheck and I can look at the stuff-

Shaunti Feldhahn: How much security I'm providing.

Jeff Feldhahn: -and go, "I'm succeeding here," yet, "I don't know how to necessarily quantify whether she's happy or, that other stuff is kind of soft." So we tend to want to focus on the things that we can measure.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, this is not an easy one to solve because how is a man going to meet this need or this demand? He is not going to quit, he's not going to not try as hard in his work. And yet she seems to be asking something of him that he can't give, because his engine drives him to success. How about it Shaunti? How are you going to deal with it?

Shaunti Feldhahn: You know what? Honestly, I will acknowledge, and it is very true that sometimes there's a lot of women who put their husbands in a difficult position. Because a lot of guys tell me, "I feel like my wife wants me to be at home all the time and she wants the new house and car" and those two things don't go together. But what we really have found, and truly guys, I know the men out there listening find this so hard to believe, but truly, the vast majority of women really don't want the new house, the car, the total financial security as much as they want the security of knowing that you two are each other's best friend and you're close and you will always be there for her. When you say, "What do you do about it?" One of the first things we tell the guys is be willing to ask your wife if the type of security that you're providing is the type of security she most needs.

And realize that there's some real encouragement out there coming for some men, who, they don't want to be gone so much, they don't want to be working these terrible hours, they feel like they're stuck and they have to and they don't necessarily have to. They can take a more family friendly job and she'll be fine with that.

Jeff Feldhahn: Or a job that they want to take, but it's going to provide less of an income. And the women in the survey said "we'd want him to take the job that makes him happy."

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, it comes down to a formula: intimacy trump's success.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Financial success. Can I borrow that in my next event?

Dr. James Dobson: Interestingly, through the years, you bet, because I've had guys say to their wives, "I've really got a good shot to be CEO of this company." And to his surprise, she says, "I don't want that." And everything within him is reaching for it. But I think a lot of men and women see that success, in that sense, very, very differently.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yeah. One of the things that we were very encouraged by is to find that for most of the women, what trumped a lot was they wanted their husband to be happy and they wanted him to be energized by his job. If he was taking some job to

downsize because she was pestering him into it and it was not challenging and not fulfilling, as one woman said “then I just have a depressed man on my hands and that wouldn't accomplish the purpose either.” And so it is true that most wives know, but the thing that we keep telling the men who are reading this book is that there are so many of you out there who really are feeling trapped and you don't need to be. That your wife, she means it when she says she wants you home more and she would downsize.

We were having dinner just a couple of nights ago with some friends of ours out here and the husband had been working at this terribly stressful job for years and tons of hours away from her and the kids. And she finally said, “Honey, poverty is better than death. I would be much more happy with poverty than losing you to a heart attack from stress. And she said, “And really poverty is better than almost anything else that you could technically provide for us, but causes all this stress in your life.” So I really hope the guys out here hear that there are so many women out there who are so encouraging of them.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, this is one of those issues that really ought to come down to a compromise. Because the guy's got to be happy in what he does.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Fulfilled, absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: He's got to be fulfilled, he has to feel like he's making a contribution, he has to feel successful. Guys desperately need to be successful, or feel that way. And so there ought to be a way to meet his wife's value system and concern without sacrificing that. I believe it can be done.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Well, and on the survey actually, the numbers actually said that, I think it was 80, 85% of the women actually wanted him to take the job that he found most fulfilling. It wasn't that they didn't want him to be happy. They did. They just didn't want him to have that sense of, “I feel like I'm trapped into this.”

Jeff Feldhahn: A rock and a hard place. And there really isn't a rock and there isn't a hard place on either side. She'll work with you.

Dr. James Dobson: Shaunti, what else do women want men to know?

Shaunti Feldhahn: There's so many things that are common understandings that guys have heard their whole life. And there's another one that Jeff tells me he'd heard his whole life and didn't know.

Jeff Feldhahn: And every guy out there has heard this one. “She doesn't want you to fix it, she just wants you to listen.” I have no idea what that means. For the first 43 years of my life, I had no idea what that meant. And what I interpreted it to mean was that Shaunti would talk and I wouldn't interrupt and I would just sit there and when she finished at some point in the future, then I'd offer my solution and we'd move on. And that wasn't it. Back to Monday night football.

Shaunti Feldhahn: What we discovered is, it is not just me, it is most women out there, that, what it turned out to be is that when women say, I want you to listen, there's actually a definition that women have of listening that is completely different than what most men thought it was. Like Jeff said, they thought it was not interrupting and then fix it. And if you are like most men, you guys-

Dr. James Dobson: Problem solving.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Probably when you hear an emotional problem, if your wife or a friend or whatever is coming to you with an emotional problem-

Jeff Feldhahn: And the emotions are flying.

Shaunti Feldhahn: And the emotions are intense, you've trained yourself your whole life, that those emotions are clutter. And so we need to filter them out in order to focus in on this, the problem, so we can find a solution. And what we're telling the guys is, all those things that you're so busy trying to filter out are the things that she most wants you to listen to at the beginning.

Jeff Feldhahn: At the beginning.

Shaunti Feldhahn: At the beginning and so what we're telling guys is, if you will just practice, and this is going to seem a little weird to guys at the first, but if you practice filtering out the problem and setting that aside and instead focusing in on all those feelings and say something like, "Man, I'm sorry honey, that must've been really disappointing to you." There you go, she will feel heard, that's what she means when she says, "You're not hearing me. You're not hearing my feelings." Now she will feel heard and she will be able to say, okay, let's sit down together and work on a solution. But she has to have the feeling that you've acknowledged her feelings.

Dr. James Dobson: I had to learn this principle as a young psychologist, the hard way, and I should have known this, somebody should have told me, but I didn't understand this about women. And there was a woman that I was dealing with who would get very frustrated with life, angry at her husband and very frustrated for a lot of reasons. And she would show up in my office without an appointment and she was agitated and all the staff, everybody knew her. I would talk to her and she would come in, and I would listen and then I would give her four or five things to do to deal with this, that if she had done them, her life would have been a whole lot easier. And she would just get more agitated all the time, I didn't help her at all. She would leave angry at me and everybody else.

And then I began to realize that wasn't what she was there for and so I would invite her in and she would start telling me all the miserable things in her life. And I would say, "That's really tough, I'm sure that it's overwhelming at times. You have any idea of what you're going to do about this." And I would just talk her through it and she would appreciate me and leave with a smile on her face.

It really is true, guys who are out there, believe me, it really is true and yet it's very hard to understand.

Shaunti Feldhahn: The other thing we are telling the guys though is realize, truly, this new definition of listening, listening to the feelings first really is the solution. I mean, you guys don't have to take off your Mister fix-it hat, God has wired you that way. That's great, that's the way you should be. But just realize, apply that analyst sensibility to the right problem and figure out what the feelings are first, and then you can deal with whatever the problem is.

Jeff Feldhahn: It's not natural for us.

Dr. James Dobson: It's a lifelong process.

Jeff Feldhahn: It is.

Dr. James Dobson: But that's the fun of it, is learning to meet each other's needs and that's really what you're talking about.

Shaunti Feldhahn: It is.

Dr. James Dobson: And it's not one sided. There's the problem.

Shaunti Feldhahn: No, exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: It's been my observation that women are pretty good about complaining about these things and men hold them inside, and if you operated on both sides, you can have an absolutely wonderful relationship.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Although the thing that you have often said, and it's been a total help for me as I've gone along, how to do this research and how to talk to people about this, is there's so many people who want, they know what they're supposed to do, but it's like, "Well, I'll do it if he does it," or "I'll do it if she does it." And one of the things that you've often said is you can only change yourself, you can't change that other person. So just start where you can start. And the thing we're telling the guys is, even if your wife, you don't feel like your wife respects you, even if you don't feel like she understands you or she's really complicated, just try some of these simple, practical little things and see what difference it makes. Just try it.

Dr. James Dobson: Shaunti, I'm going to look to you again to tell us the next thing that women need to tell their husbands.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Well, we can't do a book for men about understanding their wives without talking about sex, right? Well, in order to explain to men how their wives think about this, we have to harken back to something that, about how men are wired. Because the difference here, what we've realized that there's a

fundamental misunderstanding that guys have about what's going on in their wife's mind when he approaches her and she says, "Oh honey, not tonight, I'm just really tired." In *For Women Only*, I told the women that for men they run everything in their sexual relationship through the grid of, "Am I desirable or not desirable? Does she desire me or not?" And so that's like the only reason you think that you would ever be turned down by your wife. You think that if I'm desirable enough-

Jeff Feldhahn: -she wouldn't say "not tonight."

Shaunti Feldhahn: And instead what we found out from the women is that we actually asked the women on the survey, the women who said they wanted less sex than their husbands tended to, tended to be the issue, what were the reasons? And we give this long list of reasons, and one of them was the one that most guys think is the issue, which is, he's just not attractive or desirable for me, enough. And most guys think that's the only reason, but for the women, it was only 4%. Only 4% of women said it was because he's just not attractive or desirable. And instead there were two main reasons that tended to come up over and over again. And the first one is just that women have physiological differences in this area that most husbands just aren't aware of. It turns out as we were doing the clinical research for the book, that there's actually two completely different types of desire.

Now, for you as a psychologist, this is probably no surprise, but for us as lay people, this was enormously surprising. It turns out that there's something called "assertive desire," which is tied to testosterone and other typically male hormones. And anyone with assertive desire has a desire to pursue sex, to initiate it, to think about it a lot. But there's another type of desire which is called "receptive desire," and that tends to be tied to estrogen and other typically female hormones. And someone with receptive desire, which tends to be the woman, although 25% of cases, apparently it's flipped, but the person with receptive desire enjoys it just as much, is just as interested in it, just as available, but just doesn't think about it all the time. And someone with receptive desire has to be approached differently, they need anticipation time. We always tell the guys, she just needs to know in advance what's on your menu for the evening.

Dr. James Dobson: I think it's also very much related to the romantic relationship. Sex for a woman divorced from a romantic content in the relationship is offensive, and I wrote about that-

Shaunti Feldhahn: You did.

Dr. James Dobson: in *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew about Women*, where sex actually begins hours and hours before, maybe the day before, maybe the week before, in the relationship. And a good sexual relationship is a product of all of those other things that occur, for a woman sex that is requested or demanded in the

absence of that romantic relationship makes her feel like a prostitute. She feels used.

Shaunti Feldhahn: What you just said is the second major reason that we heard over and over again. If the first was the physiological differences, the second was this whole issue of guys tend to want to have that sexual intimacy in order to develop a sense of closeness with their wife. But wives need to feel close first, they need to feel close in order to want it. And I mean, and again Jeff is constantly telling the guys it's so simple, it's such simple stuff.

Jeff Feldhahn: It is and it's many of the things that we've been talking about. It's the emotional closeness, it is the taking your hand when you're walking alongside looking in store windows. Sometimes you just hug her.

Dr. James Dobson: What she's thinking is, what's the motive here?

Jeff Feldhahn: That's exactly right.

Dr. James Dobson: He's doing this for a motive.

Shaunti Feldhahn: But if you think about it, it makes perfect sense that we women would think that if that's the only time it ever happens, you've trained us to think that. So just break that tie in her mind, hug her just to hug her sometimes, do those sweet intimate things and then not ask for sex later and she'll start thinking "he is just being sweet."

Dr. James Dobson: Let's talk about desirability and beauty for a woman. How she sees that.

Jeff Feldhahn: This was actually a real eyeopener for me, in that, I have a six year old daughter and no more than two days go by in any week without me telling her how beautiful she is inside and out. I want her to be built up, I want her to know that, just to know it. And yet in the focus groups, one of the women said, "well, do you tell that to your wife?" And I viewed my wife and I said, "She's confident, she's competent, she can do all these things, surely she doesn't need to hear that as often." And these women said, "We're just little girls inside grownup bodies and we need to hear that every bit as much as your six year old daughter does." And I didn't realize that and I've just always assumed that she knows that. And so now, when Shaunti asks me questions on how does this make me look? I run it through a different grid and it's not that she's asking, do I look presentable to go out and go to dinner? She's looking for the answer. That, "Am I still beautiful?"

Dr. James Dobson: She's looking for affirmation.

Jeff Feldhahn: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: And acceptance.

Shaunti Feldhahn: This is also the answer that so many guys ask us, when we do Q&A at the end of our events and a guy says, "What do I do when she asks me, 'do these pants make me look fat?'" And every guy has probably been confronted with that situation, deer caught in the headlights, what do you say? And I said, you know what you do, is you realize that is not really the question she's asking you. What she's asking you is after 15, 20 years of marriage and two babies, "Do I still rock your world? Do you still find me beautiful?" That's what she's asking. The example that Jeff used in the book is basically that you as the husband are the most important mirror in the house for your wife. She looks into you every day to say, "do you find me beautiful."

For most men, if they will see the power that it has to say, "You know honey, yeah, okay, you don't look like you did 30 years ago, maybe either of us can't fit into our honeymoon outfits, but I love you and you are beautiful to me inside and out and yes, you still rock my world." That has this ability even in today's modern culture where it's not very politically correct to say this, that has the ability to just make a woman feel so special. And that's the other thing that Jeff also tells the guys is, you also realize there's a flip side to the how important it is that your wife finds you beautiful, is the absolute devastation you can cause your wife if she sees you transferring your attention to that hot babe walking down the street.

Dr. James Dobson: Or humor is very painful.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Humor can be very painful, or looking at those pictures you shouldn't be looking at on the internet. That problem that has become so prevalent and we've talked about it before.

Dr. James Dobson: We need to go to the last item, and there's kind of a bottom line to all this, share it with us.

Jeff Feldhahn: And it's encouraging. At the end of the professional survey we basically ended it with an open ended question to the women. We said, what is the most important thing that you want to get across to your husband? What is it?

Shaunti Feldhahn: And let me tell you, we thought that was a dangerous question to ask hundreds of women because we were expecting a laundry list of things he was doing wrong. And instead we were so blown away. The top answer by far wasn't, "I wish you would do this better or that better." It was, "I wish I could get him to understand that he is my hero."

Jeff Feldhahn: The man I had hoped he would be when we married.

Dr. James Dobson: And that came up over and over again?

Shaunti Feldhahn: Over and over.

Jeff Feldhahn: By far, the majority.

Dr. James Dobson: That's kind of neat, isn't it?

Shaunti Feldhahn: By far the top answer. It was just so powerful because we realized as we said earlier, there are so many husbands who just feel kind of handicapped. "I don't know how to please my wife, I don't know how to make her happy, I don't know if I can ever understand her and am I doing a good job at this?" And all these women are saying, "you know what? Yeah, we both make mistakes but honey, you are my hero." And maybe, and I tell Jeff this all the time, you know what? I as a woman, I make mistakes all the time in how I respond to you, but despite the fact that I may sometimes not say the right things or do the right things, I want him to know that he is the man I'd hoped he'd be when we got married. And that's the way the vast majority of these women answered.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and Dr. Dobson's conversation with Jeff and Shaunti Feldhahn on this most important topic of what men need to know about women. Now if you'd like to revisit the program you heard today or if you'd like to go back and listen to part one of this conversation, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's also where you'll find a link for the book that served as our topic of discussion today. It's titled *For Men Only*, and there's also a counterpart for women as well, it's titled *For Women Only*. Both resources are available at drjamesdobson.org.

Conversations like these are at the heart of what we do here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. In fact, every day we hear from couples who tell us that these broadcasts have helped their marriages. We believe that strong marriages build strong families, and strong families are the foundation of a strong nation, and your financial support makes it possible for us to continue bringing biblical truth and practical wisdom to marriages all across the country. You can make a secure donation through our newly updated website at drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org. You can also give a gift over the phone when you call 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of Dr. James Dobson and all of us here at Family Talk. Thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust, for the family you love.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.