# Dive Deep with Jeff and Shaunti Feldhahn

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Mark Savage: Welcome to our Dive Deep interview.

Jill Savage: Today we are talking with Jeff and Shaunti Feldhahn. They're coming to us from Atlanta, Georgia. Welcome, guys.

MS: Yeah, welcome.

Jeff Feldhahn: Thanks, it’s great to be here.

Shaunti Feldhahn: It's always good to be with you guys. [laughter]

SF: Even when we're not in the same place. I always like being in the same place with you, but if we can't, this is good, too.

JS: It's always good to hang with you. Jeff and Shaunti are the authors of around 25 Bible studies and books. You've co-authored a few of those, correct?

JF: Yeah, she's the writer. She's written me in on a few of them. [laughter]

JS: That's so kind of her.

JF: Yeah.

SF: It's really funny. I literally couldn't do it without him because he's like my translator. I do all this social research and listen to what people are saying and I ask, "*I'm confused. What does this guy mean?*" And Jeff tells me, "*Okay, here's what that means*."

JS: I love that. I love how God uses both of your strengths in that way.

MS: Good team.

JS: It's so interesting. Mark and I have only written two books together, and the first book that we wrote was disastrous. Absolutely disastrous.

MS: Right. A little challenging, yeah.

JS: It was, because we didn't understand the concept of mind styles. I don't know if you've ever done anything with mind styles, but...

SF: We haven't done it for ourselves, but I know some of the concepts.

MS: Okay.

JS: What we learned is that I am a sequential and he is random. [chuckle] We were trying to write a book in a sequential way, and finally, with our No More Perfect Marriages, we played into his randomness. We would work on a chapter together, and it was like, "*Alright, this chapter's on grace. Mark, I want you to think of anything about grace, any story, any scripture*."

JS: He just dumped.

**MS:** I would just be basically downloading...

JS: Then, I took his information, made it sequential, and added my own in there. It was like, "*We did it*!" [chuckle]

MS: Yeah. It was actually a great process.

SF: We're more sequential.

JF: Both of us, yeah.

JS: Both of you.

JF: At least, in that area. [laughter]

SF: Yeah, not everything.

JS: Yeah. What areas are you not sequential in?

SF: This is one of those male-female differences that doesn't apply to everybody. One of the things we found in our research that is definitely us, is that I have to process out loud. I have to think things through by talking them through.

MS: That's me.

SF: Interesting.

JS: It is.

SF: I've got that classic verbal processor brain, and Jeff is more like, "*Just don't. Just let me go down deep and think.*"

JF: Yeah, and here is the real challenging part, which she's learned with me: when she is verbally processing, she actually has to tell me that's what she's doing.

MS: I know. That's what we've learned.

JF: When I speak words, I've processed them already, and this is my decision, and this is where I come down on it. So, when I hear her speak words, I'm assuming she's at the same point, so she'll have to tell me, "*Wait, I'm just thinking out loud right now, so don't take this as the end of where I'm going to get to*."

MS: Right. Yeah.

SF: Very common. This is not just us.

SF: In our research, this is very common.

JF: 24 years, and she's still having to translate for me what she's doing.

JS: We did not understand that either. In fact, in our book *No More Perfect Marriages*, we do what we call a “Personal Operating Inventory.” It's some of those temperament things that aren't talked about a lot. One of them is, “*Are you an internal processor or an external processor?*” It was causing conflict for us.

JS: I can remember the first time that I saw it was when we were buying a car.

SF: That'll do it. [laughter]

JS: He announces on Wednesday that we're going to buy a Ford. He's sure that we're going to buy a Ford and that's the direction we're going in. And on Thursday, it's a Honda.

SF: He's thinking things through.

JS: I’m just thinking, "*Would you make up your mind?"*

MS: Make a decision, yeah.

JS: I would have thought all that out and done all the research before I ever said anything. I thought he was doing that, but he wasn't, he was processing. That was the first time that we realized, "*Oh, that's a big difference."*

MS: Yeah, and so I have to continually say to Jill, "*Hey, I'm just talking*."

JS: Thinking aloud.

MS: "*I'm thinking this out loud, and then we'll come to a decision*." But anyway, it's very different.

JF: It helps me tremendously, that Shaunti gives me that heads-up.

SF: I think it really has made a big difference.

JF: Honestly, my position on this was when she would say something, in the beginning of her processing, I'd say, "*Fine then, we'll do it your way.*"

JF: And she'd say, "Wait, wait, wait, no. There is no 'my way' yet." [laughter]

SF: I'm only starting.

JS: I don't know about you, Jeff, but I'll tell on myself, as the internal processor. What we like to say is Mark talks about it, talks about it, and talks about it some more, and then I think about it, think about it, and think about it some more. And then I tell him what we've decided. [laughter]

JF: I like that. I like that a lot. [laughter]

JS: I’ve realized I have to adjust and let him know, "*Hey, just so you know, I've been thinking about X.*"

JS: He needs to know, because by the time I tell him something, I've been thinking about it for two weeks. And he didn't even have any idea I was thinking about it.

JS: I've learned that I've had to speak up a little more and let him into my brain a little more, let him know what's going on. He's had to learn to let me know that he's just processing aloud. So yes, definitely places that we can learn from each other.

MS: What are some other differences that you guys are aware of?

SF: Oh, golly, how much time do we have? [laughter]

JS: We have all day here.

MS: We could always do a part two or three.

JF: Here's actually something that we've laughed about. Shaunti's an optimizer, and I am a taking-things-off-the-plate kind of person.

JS: Define optimizer.

JF: Optimizing is, if there are X minutes that we've got that we're going to be starting something…

SF: Like if we're going to go run errands.

JF: …She will fill all of that gap time with something else to try to get things done as quickly or efficiently as possible.

SF: If we're going to be in the car anyway, I have a Costco list, right? It's not just going on this errand, we might as well go to Costco at the same time. That’s very efficient, don't you think?

JF: It doesn't matter if that side trip doesn't take only the 10 minutes that she's allotted, and it takes 15 minutes or 20 minutes. That then starts to make the other one stressed. I am all about removing stress and opportunities for stress in my life. As I like to say, I like to spend my time thinking about puppies and rose petals, or nothing.

SF: Rainbows and unicorns.

JF: She's working toward efficiency. Filling in and getting things accomplished.

SF: Absolutely.

JF: Yes.

JS: That's so funny, you guys.

JF: She's the person in the checkout line who notices all the other checkout lines that she could have been in and how fast all those other ones are.

MS: That's Jill.

JS: It's so me.

JF: I'm competitive so I like to be in the fastest line, but for the most part, I've got nothing to do, so I might as well just shut my brain off and relax for those five minutes.

JS: People like Shaunti and me don't understand what it means to shut your brain off.

SF: In all seriousness, I don't know how much you want us to get into the research that we...

JS: Go for it, please.

MS: Yes, just go for it.

SF: The thing that is different is the open windows. There are some people who are flipped, like you two are flipped on the internal versus external processing. In our research with men and women, we found that most of the time the male brain is like a computer desktop with one window open at a time. Whatever they're thinking about, they think on it, they work on it, and then they click the X and it goes away. [chuckle]

JF: And we may not open another window. We may just kind of sit there.

SF: Sitting in the checkout line for five minutes with no window open. You guys are mutants. Jill and I have no idea what you're talking about, because for us, we have 10 windows open. We're bouncing back and forth. That one worry pops up on our brain and we click the X, but it won't go away. It keeps popping back up.

MS: That's a great picture.

JF: You never get to the place where you've closed all the windows?

SF: No, and it drives me nuts.

JF: Why not just say, "*Okay, this is just the way it is, and I'm not going to worry about all those undone things*."

SF: Because we don't have a neural rest state.

JS: There you go, explain that one.

SF: This was always our thing. I would ask Jeff this question. We'd be driving in the car or something, and I would ask, "*What are you thinking?*" "*Nothing*." I honestly was thinking he was thinking about something he didn't want to share.

SF: He would never really let me in to that part of his life. He actually was thinking nothing, which I can't fathom as a female brain. But according to... There was a group of Israeli neuroscientists who discovered there's a state of being in the male brain that doesn't exist in the female brain-in most cases. There's always an exception. It's called the neural rest state, and it's like a computer with the screen saver. [laughter] The screen saver is up but there's no processing going on. The computer's on.

JF: Yeah, it's magnificent.

SF: So jealous.

JS: I mean, we can't understand that because we don't have it.

SF: No, we don't.

JS: We just can't even understand that. I love that we just were able to jump right in. I mean, you guys have been married what, 24 years?

SF: Yes.

JS: We've been married 35 years and we still are constantly bumping into these differences.

MS: Absolutely.

JS: They just never go away.

JF: And at some level, I think it's because I hear it, but I can't believe it. You can't be really like that, right?

SF: It's impossible.

JS: We will never be able to understand that because the other literally functions in a different way.

MS: That's the way we're designed.

JS: We've been bantering back and forth, and we've been having fun with the male-female thing, and the differences and all of that. But these things can start to divide couples because they start thinking that because their spouse is different, their spouse is wrong. So that's one way.

SF: Or that they don’t care.

MS: Or that we're not compatible.

JS: Right. Here's my question; what do you do to stay in a good place where you can recognize these differences? You might even banter and hassle each other about them on occasion, but you're still respectful and loving to each other. How do you keep that from drawing you apart?

JF: First off, and I think it was the research for us that helped me actually understand that it wasn't willful on the part of Shaunti, that it wasn't intentional. I mean I might laugh and say that I don't believe it, but I do accept that she really is like this. She is considerably different than me, but it's not willful.

SF: I'm not doing it to drive you nuts.

JF: You're not. And I'm not, at least not most of the time, doing it to drive you nuts. [laughter]

JF: It is kind of what you've said in the Happiest Couples book, it's believing the best.

SF: There are always going to be points where it's like that automatic subconscious feeling, like he doesn't care, or that he is just doing that to drive me nuts or he knew how that would make me feel. Actually no, I know he cares about me. So therefore, he doesn't realize how that makes me feel. He doesn't realize that this really hurts my feelings or drives me nuts. In all seriousness, it’s a matter of the brain, these different types of brain wiring, and me having all these windows open. The thing for us that used to drive me really bananas was when I'd come to him with some big issue, something was really on my heart, and it was bugging me. I'd come back to it multiple times and he'd say, "*Honey, just don't think about it*. *Don't let that bother you.*" What do you mean don't let that bother me? It bothers me. What do you mean don't let it? I was thinking he just didn't care, he was insensitive to how I'm feeling. In his male brain was, he was just saying, "*It's bothering you, so click the X on the window, so it'll go away.*"

JS: Which he literally can do.

SF: Guys can do that. He was saying to take that thought and close it for a while, because it was hurting me. He was being sweet, and I was thinking, "*You don't care*." Now that I know this, and now that he knows this, he's learned that women can't just click the X and make the worry go away, right?

MS: Right.

JS: Right.

SF: We have to take some action. He's learned instead to say, essentially, "*Is this an open window? Is this going to keep bothering you? And if so, is there something that would make you feel better?*" Rather than making me feel stupid for maybe needing to call the kid's teacher, or whatever it is that's going on, he could actually encourage that, rather than me feeling like he thinks I'm silly for that.

JF: Ultimately, each of us has a choice of whether we're going to walk in grace toward the way that someone is or not. An example that Shaunti often shares is about my roommate from law school in New York. He's an African-American, and he was a Princeton undergrad, Harvard Law School. We all hung out together in New York, and there were times when he and Shaunti would join me for dinner, if I was working late up at my law firm. They would go out in middle of Manhattan, and she would say to him, "*Why don't you just grab the cab?*" He said, "*No*." "*Oh, just go ahead*." He would go out there, put his arm up, and the cabs would shoot by. He came back and said, "*Why don't you go do it?*"

SF: And I said, "*What?*" It was just occurring to me what was going on. We'd been friends for years and years and years, and the first time this happened, I was thinking, "*Are you kidding me?*" I was so mad, I walked out, and put my arm up, and I had three cabs fighting. I said, "*How do you deal with this every day?*"

JS: Suddenly you saw racism.

SF: Oh, my gosh!

JF: Absolutely.

SF: I honestly was the ignorant white person who thought, “*It's not that big of a deal anymore,*” and here I saw right in front of me, this is our friend's reality every day. He was wearing this suit, like he's an investment banker.

JF: And she said, "*How do you deal with this every day?*" And what did he say?

SF: He said, "*Either you let it drive you crazy, or you just have to have a permanent mindset of grace.*" It's the same thing with marriage: Either you let it drive you crazy, or you have a permanent mindset of grace.

JS: Oh, I love that, you guys.

MS: Oh, that's great, yeah.

JS: In our book, *No More Perfect Marriages*, we talk about the eight God tools. One of them is forgiveness, and one of them is grace. We teach people how tell the difference between which God tool they need to use. Is it grace or is it forgiveness? We say if the thing that your spouse did hurt you, you probably need to use your God tool of forgiveness. If that thing that your spouse did irritated you, you probably need to use your God tool of grace.

SF: That's really good. I really like that a lot.

JF: I like that a lot.

JS: It's the same as what you're saying, you've got to have that mindset of grace. I think more marriages would be saved if they would just move to a mindset of grace.

MS: Yeah, that permanent grace, I like that.

SF: We have found, in all seriousness, that the vast majority of people really care about each other, even in difficult marriages. Truly, the number overall was around 99.37 percent. We care about each other. I think it was 97 percent even in really struggling marriages. The key is the believing that that is true, that this is actually accurate. Then the next step is--this person cares about me, so I may be different than you, but it's legitimate. It's not an illegitimate thing. You're just wired differently.

JF: Right.

SF: "*Okay, it may drive me crazy, or it just may be a little frustrating, but this is truly how you're wired*." If I want to have a good, peaceful, enjoyable relationship, and want to make you feel cared for, I can apply these things and try to be aware of these things that I just didn't know before and have that permanent attitude of grace. Or, I'm going to constantly let bother me and wish that it was different and wish that God had wired you differently.

MS: I love this conversation about grace. Let's add the whole kindness factor that you wrote about and challenged individuals to. How do those cooperate with each other?

JS: Good question.

SF: Want me to tackle that? Well, I went back and looked at all the studies that we had done over the years, and we're now in the middle of our ninth nationally representative study. We've been doing this for about 16 years now. Wow, 16 years, that's crazy.

MS: Wow.

MS: When you look at all the studies, there's a thread that runs through all of them. What we're most trying to do is to help people thrive, to do the little things that are going to help people thrive. This thread that we've found is that whether you're thriving in your relationship, and really in your life, is far more correlated to how you're treating other people than how you are being treated.

MS: Okay.

JS: Wow!

SF: It's so countercultural, because in your marriage or at work or whatever, it's all about, "*But I need to be treated right. You're not treating me fairly, you're not meeting my needs.*" That's where our brains naturally go. It's not like it's bad to have somebody meet your needs, [chuckle] but if you want to thrive, be far more focused on how you're treating your spouse than how they're treating you. It's basically about being kind. Bottom line, that's really what it is, whether you're being kind to them. We started to look at, what does that mean? What does that look like? Pretty much 100% of us think we already are kind. [chuckle] People hear this, they’re thinking, "*Oh, man, I wish So-and-so was listening.*"

[laughter]

SF: We think we're kind, that it's a high value for us, but that other people need to work on it. I realized as we started doing this research that we're really deluded. We have no idea that we're not as kind as we think we are. There is so much that we need to have our eyes opened to about the ways that we're really being unkind. We're hurting the other person's feelings, we're getting on them without intending to, we're not having grace, and we're blind to it. Having our eyes open to that and what can we do instead is a simple, but huge, relationship changer.

JS: In your book, *The Kindness Challenge*, you talk about many of those things. Can you share one very practical kindness element that we can do in our marriages?

SF: Yeah, I can tell you right now. Honestly, the best thing, and we've actually quantified this, is to do what's called the 30-Day Kindness Challenge.

JS: Okay.

SF: Try this. It's doing three simple things every day for 30 days for your spouse. First: don't say anything negative about them for 30 days, and that's either negative to them or about them to somebody else.

MS: Ah, okay.

SF: I can be polite to Jeff if we're in a rough season, but if I'm going to my friends and I'm saying, "*Ugh, you would not believe what he did,*" I don't realize it, but I'm actually sabotaging how I feel about him. So that's the first thing, nothing negative. Second, every day for 30 days, find one thing you can sincerely praise and affirm about them. Tell them, and somebody else. I'm telling my girlfriends, "*He did this amazing thing with the kids*," and I tell him, "*Thank you.*" Then I go and tell my girlfriends, "*Guess what he did yesterday*?" It's like Philippians 4:8; I'm thinking on whatever is excellent and lovely and worthy of praise, rather than what's worthy of driving me crazy.

SF: Third, every day for 30 days, is to do a small action of kindness or generosity, some little thing. Maybe I notice that he's been working late, so I'm getting up a little bit early to make him coffee in the morning. He usually makes me coffee, but I'm going to run downstairs and get the coffee started. That's a little thing, but it says, "*I notice what's going on your life.*"

JS: "I'm thinking about you."

SF: There are all sorts of different kinds of generosity. There are multiple things that you can do. Maybe it's a husband listening to this, and when his wife comes home from work, she just needs to unload some of that and you listen for 10 minutes. That's an act of generosity.

JS: Listen and don't try to fix.

MS: Right.

JS: That would be a huge action of generosity.

SF: Exactly. We found out that if they did these three little things for 30 days, 89% of relationships improved. Huge.

JS: Wow, that is huge. It's definitely well worth doing. Wow, that is powerful. You've got a new book that just came out, Shaunti.

SF: Yeah.

JS: And it was a devotional on rest, called *Find Rest*.

SF: Yes, it's my first devotional. Can I show you how pretty the cover looks?

JS: Yes, of course!

MS: Yeah.

SF: I've never had anything like this.

JS: Oh, so pretty!

SF: All of my books are normally these non-fiction...I just love all the flowers. I get to be girly for a minute.

JS: Yes! For our listeners and viewers, Jeff and Shaunti write many of their books out of their research. They research, pull all those facts together, and figure out what the facts tell them. Then they educate us so that we can better understand each other and improve and thrive in our relationships. But this book did not come out of research, it was more of a personal book. Tell us a little bit about that. What did it teach you? I know, as an author, every book I write teaches me something.

SF: This was really interesting because it's called "Find Rest", okay?

[laughter]

JS: Says the woman who can't...

[laughter]

SF: Jill, you had to go to get this, right?

JS: I got it, girl.

[laughter]

SF: Yes. And here's the thing that was so amazing. I started realizing that I needed this really badly. Jill, we were talking about this recently when I saw you here in Atlanta. Sometimes it’s as if your hair is just on fire. There is this amazing verse in the Bible, where Jesus says, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened.* (I raise my hand) *and I will give you rest.*" This is a promise, there has to be a way to do this. What does it look like? So, there was a little bit of research, because it was like looking at what science says and what Scripture says about the main causes of stress for women, the main solutions, and looking at this as a devotion, kind of like a little bit of water every day.

JS: Yes, yes.

SF: Here is something that was so helpful and so encouraging as I was putting this together. I was struck by the fact that when Jesus promises that, "*I will give you rest*", His solution is not what you and I have probably been told. I don't know how many times I've heard somebody say, "*Oh girl, you just need to slow down*." That may actually be true, but it's never felt like an encouraging solution to me. I can slow down for a short time, but a slow life does not seem like a solution for a lifetime to me. We're busy people, we've got kids, like when you've got teenagers running around and you're constantly driving carpool, I look at what Jesus said there, "*I will give you rest*". The next verse is this mind change where He says, "*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I'm gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*.” The word picture that He's giving us is not what we've been told. A yoke is a tool or implement to help a beast of burden work well. You're out in the field in the heat of the day, plowing the field, it's not, "*Here, let me take the yoke off your shoulders and send you back to the barn to find rest.*" That's not what it is. You can be working, but you don't have to be stressed. You can be in the middle of your normal busy life and have rest for your soul. That was such a huge promise. So basically, that's what the devotional was focused at.

MS: Wow.

JS: I love that. Let's tie that into marriage.

JS: When our souls are at rest, even in the midst of our busy life, how does that affect our relationships? How does that affect this marriage relationship? I think we've got to connect the dots to that because it does. When either our soul is in chaos, or our soul is at rest, how does that affect our marriage?

MS: Do you see the impact of that, Jeff?

JF: For many of the guys we talk with, they're thinking that the information that we share in our books or in the conferences seems like a whole lot of work. It doesn't seem like it's going to lead to rest, but every single person that we know, and see, and talk with, wants peace and rest. If the method to that in marriage is, learning that Scripture verse in Matthew that Shaunti was sharing about learning of Him and we’ll find rest for our souls, I'm all in. I'm all in. That’s because I do want rest. I think I know how to get there, but if it's counter to what Scripture says, I want the right way to get there.

MS: Right.

JS: Yeah, I can totally see that.

JS: I can think of seasons in our life where my soul wasn't at rest, and it affected us, and yours wasn't at rest, and it affected us. We're not isolated, whatever's going on with one affects the other. We like to say, "*When I'm a better me, we're a better we*."

MS: We're a better we, yeah.

SF: That's good, I like that. It's all about oneness, right? If we're really one, then it's going to be like that. Frankly, most women listening to this get this: if there's something at odds in our relationship, it's going to create a lack of rest and peace. When there's something wrong, it's like nothing else is right with the world until this is resolved.

JS: Yes.

MS: Right, so true.

JS: Oh, you guys, this has been such a good conversation.

SF: We loved being with you.

JS: We have one last question for you. I ask this at the end of all of our “No More Perfect Date Night” interviews. Do you have a favorite date night, or maybe date day, activity that you enjoy doing? Do you have something that you really enjoy doing together?

SF: Okay, you're going to laugh, but our favorite date night usually…you're going to think this is horrible.

JS: No! Go for it.

SF: I'm completely serious, and I don't know what Jeff would say. We're gone quite a bit on weekends, and we do a lot of marriage conferences, and we have kids. So honestly, when we're at home, a date night is sitting on the couch with the kids watching a movie together.

SF: It's not us being out at dinner, partly because we are out as a couple sometimes in other cities without the kids.

MS: Right.

JS: Yeah, you're a little backwards.

SF: We are.

JS: We're the same way. We're gone in the fall and the spring, sometimes every weekend for seven or eight weeks, and it's just the two of us, so we're getting time. We're working, but we do have time for relaxed conversations and we're in a hotel.

JS: Jeff, what about you, what would you say?

JF: Oh yeah, that one, watching a movie at home, is absolutely it. But I'm a morning person, so that time on the couch is really great for the first 30 to 35 minutes, and then I fall asleep.

JF: Shaunti's circadian rhythm is a little opposite. She's able to stay up late, and getting up early in the morning is a little more challenging. I can get up at five o'clock in the morning, and I love that time. I love mornings.

JF: I don't know how he does it.

SF: So that's my time. She forces herself to get up early, almost every day.

SF: We have to get up at six anyway, to get the kids off to school.

JF: We sit at the kitchen table and drink coffee and read the news and talk but to us...

SF: That's kind of our date night.

JF: That's it. It sounds funny.

MS: Right, it works, yeah.

JS: I love that because you've illustrated with both of those that you have to find what works for you.

JS: You have to find for what works for the time that you have, the season of life that you're in. All of that plays into it, so I love that. I love that they're non-traditional.

JF: Yeah, I just want her presence around. I was thinking of this just the other day as I was in a coffee shop, watching a bunch of high school kids with their phones and not talking to each other. I've always kind of rolled my eyes at that saying, "*Can you believe what the electronics are doing?*" But honestly, when I was with my friends, we weren't talking all the time, but we were just around one another.

SF: You were playing basketball, not sitting there.

JF: Sometimes not even that. Sometimes we were watching TV together, not saying a word for two hours, and that was good. But it was just their presence. That's what I love. I just love knowing that she's right there.

JS: I love that.

MS: That's cool.

JS: Oh, you guys, thank you so much.

MS: Yeah, this has been great, thank you.

JS: It's been fun to chat with you. This has been Mark and Jill Savage, and we are signing off with a reminder: real marriage is not perfect, but a real marriage is two people being perfected. Thanks for joining us.