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for

A Straightforward Guide to the Inner Lives of Women

men

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REVISED AND UPDATED EDITION

FOR MEN ONLY
PUBLISHED BY MULTNOMAH BOOKS
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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

ISBN 978-1-60142-444-0
ISBN 978-1-60142-209-5 (electronic)

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Cover design by Mark D. Ford

Published in association with the literary agency of Calvin W. Edwards, 1220 Austin Glen Drive, Atlanta, GA 30338.

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Feldhahn, Shaunti Christine.

For men only : a straightforward guide to the inner lives of women / Shaunti and Jeff Feldhahn. — Revised Edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-60142-445-7 — ISBN 978-1-60142-209-5 (electronic)

1. Men (Christian theology) 2. Christian men—Conduct of life. I. Feldhahn, Jeff. II. Title.
BT703.5.F45 2013
248.8'42—dc23

2012044585

Printed in the United States of America
2013—Revised Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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CLUES TO THE CODE

I'm not a literature guy, but I once saw a quote by Oscar Wilde: "Women are meant to be loved, not to be understood." That pretty much sums up our mental default setting ever since Cro-Magnon man proudly brought home a giant sloth for dinner, only to be met with a cold female stare because his hunting party returned two days late. Grunting whatever sounds meant "Fine!" he took refuge with the other bewildered hunters who had been tossed out by the communal fire for the night.

That also sums up the mental default setting most of us learned as teenagers. Nothing prepares you for that moment when

you are thirteen—thrilled to be standing in the hallway with the cute girl you're crazy about—and suddenly something awful happens. Whereas yesterday she smiled at you like you were the middle school's Big Man on Campus, today she won't. She's upset. She's cold. She won't even look at you!

You're desperate to know what happened, what went wrong, but you don't have a clue. So you retreat to the locker room, lick your wounds, and joke that girls are impossible to understand.

We have to sweep up the little pieces of our ego somehow, right? As the years pass, a teen guy's feeling of cluelessness about girls morphs into a generally acceptable view among men that women are impossible. "Good luck trying to figure her out!" we say to each other in those moments of frustration.

Trouble is, we're setting ourselves up for one of the most damaging assumptions we can make in a relationship. Especially because it is totally wrong. It turns out, a huge percentage of men have to unlearn what we think we know about the reasonableness of women. In our research, when a woman seems inscrutable or her attitudes, actions, feelings, or words change in confusing ways, there is almost always a specific, discernible reason—a reason that men would usually see as legitimate if we understood it.

The truth is, we can—if we pay attention.