

Transcript 115

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. On today's episode, we're going to be continuing what we do on occasion and having a guest on who is either written a book or particularly passionate about an issue or an expert on an issue. I guest today is Brant Hansen, who I've I've been looking forward to this for a while 'cause I've been a big fan of his on the radio show, various networks and continuing with also with his podcast. Also joining me is Beth, one of the Got Questions employees who I don't think I'll embarrass her too much saying that she is having a major fangirl moment right now with having Brant on this show. So Brant, welcome to this show today.

Brant Hansen

Good, I want more people fangirling and fanboying. I think that's only appropriate for me.

Speaker 5

So we should open it up to the rest of the staff.

Brant Hansen

Good yeah thank you.

Shea Houdmann

So for our listeners who may not be very familiar with Brant, Brant Hansen is a radio shock jock, author, and podcast. He's passionate about making life changing medical care available to the least of these through Cure International. But his greatest accomplishment, according to Beth, is probably introducing the world to his producer, Sherry. Brant is an accomplished writer does pieces for CNN, The Washington Post, U.S. news and World Report. His books include Unoffendable, which I have read, and it's it's excellent. The Truth About Us. The very good news of how very bad we are and The Men We Need God's purpose for the manly man. The avid endorsement or any man willing to show up.

Shea Houdmann

So for our conversation, Brant has graciously allowed us to go back to a book he wrote a few years ago called Blessed are the Misfits. Great news for those who are introverts, spiritual strugglers, or just feel like they're missing something. So Brant what led you to write Blessed Are The Misfits.

Brant Hansen

It's just it's it's really personal, but I, I kind of thought I was alone or at least something like alone in Christian circles or church circles in that I don't react emotionally like a lot of people do, and I thought something was wrong with me for the longest time, 'cause I couldn't feel God around. I mean for years. Decades maybe. And when I was in College in particular, I felt like, OK, I must be doing something wrong. Or maybe my sinfulness, like the stuff I do and the thoughts I have, God just kind of tossed me aside. He won't know he doesn't want to deal with me anymore. He's tired of it.

Brant Hansen

And I had some people kind of back that up who were believers like yeah, well, you know you're missing something and you need to do this and that, well, that this and that didn't work. And I tell the story and at the I think at the beginning of the book we talked about being in like a very charismatic Bible study in a church basement and everybody was praying in tongues and everybody was very emotional and I was I wanted whatever they like I was like, OK, I'm 19. Or 18 or whatever. Like, I don't want to be closed off to things of God. I want this. But nothing kicked in that night. Everybody like gathered around me. They're praying over me. I didn't ask him to, but they put me in the middle of the room and they were whispering in my ear like, open up his mind. He's too caught up in his intellectualism. He's too, like. And like God help me, whatever it is I'm supposed to be doing help me. But nothing happen and so they gave up. I walk home in the dark. Like what is this? That's a pretty.

Brant Hansen

I think there's a lot of people just run across a lot of people that they identify with that. Like I want to write a book for them. And for people who are more analytical and less less emotional, maybe. I actually spoke at this big Mega church type thing with with a huge band and the fog lights and lasers and holograms and everything up on the stage. And I asked at the time I said so, just being honest, that band was awesome, but just be honest, how many people would you raise your hand if you you really feel like you were missing something. Like like the other people were having a different experience around you like you, you maybe weren't feeling it like they were? And at least half of the crowd raised their hand. So I was like I hope you see that. And I want you to understand that following Jesus isn't about your emotion primarily at all, like your emotions come and go. So that's kind of a big part of the message of the book, but that's that got me started thinking, you know, I should write about this. There's an awful lot of people that can relate to this.

Beth DeVore

I can certainly relate to not having those emotions in those types of settings and being analytical and slightly analytical.

Brant Hansen

Did it ever cause you questions like I was having?

Beth DeVore

Well, fortunately I do feel God like all the time I either feel God or it's sinus pressure. I'm not quite sure which, but I've gone with God.

Brant Hansen

Go with it, yeah?

Beth DeVore

So I I don't have. And I realize that this could happen you know, at any moment, but I don't have any sense of doubt. I don't have any sense of loss when other people are getting over emotional. I don't understand them, but you know, good for them. But we have a lot of questioners who don't feel God and don't have the feelings they think they're supposed to, like feelings related to being saved or I must not have repented because I don't feel bad enough about my sin, and I'd love it if you'd speak into that.

Brant Hansen

Totally. I want to give you some great news. God is faithful to us and there's not much about emotion that's mentioned in our response to him or what their response is looking for. There's just not. It's not that emotions are bad. They're like they're like warning lights on a dashboard or like. But they're not the final thing. They don't determine reality.

Brant Hansen

And what's wonderful about this? You know what God is actually looking for from us? It's not emotions. He's looking for loyalty. He's looking for believing loyalty, so we just keep showing up. I keep talking to him. I don't feel him around. But I'm going to keep going to keep praying. Because I believe he's true and he's good. What I do see Scripturally and this is fascinating to me, to whether it comes to anxiety or depression. Either one. You can feel something, but you have to be able to say it's not reality, you have to be able to speak to your emotions.

Brant Hansen

That is in the Bible like in Psalms. David is saying why are you so downcast? Oh my soul, there's a few instances of that. There's other instances, like Jeremiah, does it too, but like he's saying I feel downcast but why am I so downcast? I'm going to put my trust in God, I'm going to refocus on the truth. And I think that's brilliant.

Brant Hansen

If you had a lot of emotions. Here's the thing. If you have a lot of motions and you do think no, it really is about emotions. Like if I feel God around that's it's. I don't know what you're talking about Brant. Like that's crazy, well guess what? Some people lose that, and they're forced to think OK, well, I guess maybe God is not real. Or maybe he walked out on me. He's left the room. But this happens to people. But our culture at large, not just Christian culture, the culture at large is all about feelings. Like it determines reality. And I'm here to tell you it does not. Your feelings are influenced by whether you had a nap or whether you you know you had a candy bar or you didn't, or you exercise, or you didn't, or your team lost or. It's it's a. Whole bunch of factors. Coffee. Like so the idea that God comes and go based on my emotions is is weirdly narcissistic. And it's great news, because it means you may not feel Him around, but he hasn't changed. He still loves you.

Brant Hansen

So that that's a top line description, but there's one other thing I mentioned in the book I thought was so good. If you ever saw the movie A Beautiful Mind, so long story short, it's this brilliant minds based on a true story. But this this guy who won a Nobel for mathematics for game theory. Was he was, he had major illusions going on. Like he was seeing people that didn't exist. They were talking to him. Spoiler alert 'cause it's 20 years old movie I can do this, but he realizes they're not real, but he still sees him and so he now has learned to ignore them and just keep doing his thing.

Brant Hansen

And I think. That's really key for mental health. I think Christians should do this like you may feel bad, or you may feel that you don't have like God's done this, he's all. That has a lot to do maybe with your

childhood. Or with what you did yesterday or today. It doesn't change reality and you may feel nothing and that doesn't change reality either. It's just you're maybe more of an analytical person. Wonderful.

Beth DeVore

In the book you quote Eugene Peterson, you say feelings are great liars. We think if we don't feel something, there can be no authenticity in doing it, but the wisdom of God says something different that we can act ourselves into a new way of feeling much quicker than we can feel ourselves into a new way of acting.

Brant Hansen

Yes, fact, that's so true, if you're not feeling in love with somebody, you'll say you're married or something. Do an active service for like as if you were in love, that those flowers, whatever it is or you serve your special. You will feel differently towards that person at the end of your act. It's bizarre, like our feelings a lot of times follow our actions. Our beliefs a lot of times follow our actions unfortunately, but that's like it's a very powerful thing. The wonderful thing about what he's saying, too, if you think about it, if I'm in love with somebody, let's say I'm feeling these. I was overwhelmed with in love feelings for my wife? And I'm like hey, let me can I get you some tea? That's one thing 'cause I'm thinking I'm I'm getting these great feelings out of it, you know, and maybe she'll return that. We'll have this romantic evening or something. So there's there's something in it for me. I get this. I get this feeling that's a payoff. It's a reward. That's fine. But you know, if you're not feeling something for somebody and you do you serve them anyway, and you're not getting any emotional reward at all. That's love. I mean the only reason you'd be doing something like that if you're not getting a reward is out of love for them. 'cause you you love them.

Brant Hansen

So there's something actually, really beautiful about loyalty and that goes with your relationship with God too. Like maybe you're overwhelmed with spiritual feelings and you get goosebumps during the songs. And now you're you know? And that's fine. But there's something wonderful about when there's no goosebumps and you still show up. I mean, that's that's that's love. I think that's a that's a gift.

Beth DeVore

That's true. Let's switch topics a little bit. We have a lot of folks writing in who are neurodivergent. Some Asperger's. A lot of OCD. And a lot of them don't feel like they can be saved. A lot of them have a really hard time with assurance of salvation. You wrote, I tell them I don't know. I don't understand this culture. I don't understand the humans that populate this planet this earth or they don't make sense to me. I told that I'm actually kind of happy about that. As much as I want to fit in sometimes I think normal is acting boring, but I told them because of my faith I have to love people.

Brant Hansen

I like us. I like us non neurodivergent people I kind of prefer us. So tell the other people, but I do I. I remember one I remember reading one book from some doctor, but he said he knew of another doctor that when he made the diagnosis of Aspergers at the time he would say congratulations you have Aspergers. And I've always really liked that. I feel that way now, like if I I meet a lot of kids 'cause they know I'm on the spectrums. I'll talk about it and their parents will bring them to me, and I'm like you're

on the spectrum too? We high five. Like congratulations and we get to commiserate. I think we're interesting. We usually have some some interest area that's amazingly intricate and deep and other people like why are you so interested? Well I like passion about seemingly esoteric subjects to be really, really interesting. So I like it.

Brant Hansen

I wrote a chapter in that book, Blessed Are The Misfits about why I'm attracted to Jesus as a result. I think of my being on the spectrum and I mentioned several things about that, but I do want to connect with what you had said about a lot of the people you're hearing from feeling like they can't be saved or there. It's just not going to work. I have always struggled with feeling like a failure. Always from age 4. I had a breakdown at age 7 with my mom. I was crying like, I've never, I'll never accomplished anything. I've wasted my life. She's like you're 7. Like I've wasted my life what have I accomplished?

Brant Hansen

Again in high school I broke down, like I'm a failure what have I ever done? Somebody described it for people on the spectrum that they're very commonly is what they call a haunting sense of failure. And I think that can interfere with your approach to God 'cause you feel like you, why would he want me? I feel worthless. What am I? I think it's harder. Maybe a little bit harder for us in that area than it is for some people. So I have had to deal with that and I keep going back to the truth.

Brant Hansen

Here's the thing, what you pay attention to. I would tell anybody this on or off the spectrum, but what you pay attention to determines who you're becoming. That's just a fact. That's like gravity. If I put my mind on what's true and what's beautiful, what's pure, what's lovely, what's admirable. I put my mind on those things. I gravitate towards the truth. But I have to start with that.

Brant Hansen

In fact, there's a list in the Bible. Paul is actually writing, and he starts with whatever is true. Whatever is lovely, whatever is you know, pure and admiral. He starts with the truth. Well, the truth is, God loves me. And I, it's hard to believe. But one of the advantages I think we have, we tend to be pretty skeptical people and you're skeptical of the culture at large as well, not just Christianity. So I find a lot of people, especially online. You can go on Reddit or whatnot. People who are on the spectrum are highly skeptical and they call all sorts of Christianity into question. But they don't question their own atheistic precepts that frankly I think fall apart very quickly. So in my case, my skepticism has chased me back around to Jesus because I think his understanding of human nature fits mine. As somebody who views it as somebody on his spectrum. The way he calls out self righteousness, cognitive biases, the way he doesn't allow people to point fingers at others. He always turns it back around and then like see my aspie soul. That is medicinal. I love how he supports the underdog. Good grief, I love it. Like people on the spectrum we're always like, why are you treating that person like they're so important?

Brant Hansen

There's one story where Jesus has the guy who's the head of the synagogue, so he's like the the biggest religious bigshot around who's like OK, Jesus, I need you to heal my kid, and so Jesus is going to do it right, but he's interrupted by this woman in the crowd who isn't even supposed to be there because

she's bleeding. She's unclean, and she's a nobody. She's been mocked and isolated and left out, and he ignores the big shot guy and totally focuses on this woman and the big shot guy and his people were like wait a second. What's going on? We need you. No, he's focused on her now. Like she cut in line. It's she's a nobody and Jesus says this over and over and over. And as somebody who's on the spectrum, I love that. Like if I was designing God, it would look like Jesus. So I think people should give it a shot to look at it that way 'cause Jesus said if you've seen me, you've seen the father, that is it. I can understand the stuff Jesus says. I mean not fully, of course, 'cause it's so deep, but it's so good and I'm telling you if you're if you're not closed off to it if you don't buy into the cartoon idea of Jesus and stuff that gets that gets propagated, you actually look at the biblical Jesus, for somebody who's on the spectrum and is open minded about that. Wow, it's like hero. I get that. So when everything else doesn't make sense.

Brant Hansen

Actually this book came out of an article. I should have mentioned to Shea. I wrote an article about this called Mr Spock goes to church and that was for CNN and I got such a huge response to it because I was saying I feel like Doctor Spock, not not Doctor Spock, Mr Spock. At church. Not computing like this is not logical. I don't understand what's going on. But ultimately, you know what I retreat to Jesus, 'cause he's the only guy that makes any sense in the world. I swear, honestly, that's how I feel about it. He makes sense and nothing else in our culture, larger culture makes sense at all.

Shea Houdmann

Brant, one thing I've always enjoyed about listening to you is how you take something that a lot of people would view as a weakness, and yet you turn it into a strength. And this is an example with me. I mean, I'm very, very analytical. Unique personalities were taken analytical and deliberative comes up really, really high and empathy comes up at the very very bottom. And for the longest time, it's like it's not that I don't care is I don't recognize when I should care. It's not like a natural thing, it's not how I'm wired.

Shea Houdmann

But then recently. That a good friend kind of walking me through this is OK say, use your analytical nature to your advantage and I felt sort of like Sheldon on The Big Bang theory. Going through this is like OK, so if someone just experienced this, what what emotion are they likely feeling? I'm like they would be sad like OK so even if you don't feel for them, you can recognize, you can analyze the situation to know that they're sad and then respond accordingly.

Shea Houdmann

And like you said earlier, even me doing that has begun to develop in me and I wouldn't say I'm empathetic, but I'm starting to get some warm, gushy feelings every once in a while when I'm around someone who's hurting. So I what you said earlier really relates to my experience and that I'm very, very analytical and not very emotional and yet I truly do care about people, so using what could be a weakness and turning it into a strength. And that's something I know you've talked a lot about on your show.

Brant Hansen

Yeah, and I love that you're you embrace the weakness not to say, well, that's just who I am so too bad so that's what some people can do. Like I like personality tests Myers Briggs, Enneagram or whatever. I'm OK with that. But you can use it to go, it's just who I am. It's like no, no no. That's who I am and I I need to improve in these areas. I do need to be more empathetic. OK, so how do I do this? I've done the same approach with stuff. I've had to learn how to make eye contact. I've had to learn. And I when I talk to like middle school people on the spectrum, I've done this several times. A lot of them like what is the point of learning all this stuff. Like eye contact or smile or I have to fake it? And like I get it, I don't want to fake anything. I don't want to make eye contact, I don't. Why do we have to do all this?

Brant Hansen

I'm like, well, think of it this way, if you're a believer anyway, a missionary is in another culture, and it's a foreign culture to them. But you learn it. And you do it because you love the people around you. And like make no mistake, I get that it doesn't make any sense and a lot of our social customs and morays or the things that we do make no sense to me whatsoever. Why is it you see somebody down the street, you're walking in the hallway, if it's somebody you don't know you like, nod down. But if it's somebody you know you like kick your head back like it goes up if it's somebody I have no idea. None of this makes any sense. Doesn't compute, but, like if I love the people in this culture that I'm in, I will do the thing that helps put them at ease as best I can. So I can't. It's not enough for me, I have a naturally furrowed brow. I have a very intense look by nature. I have nystagmus which makes my head move back and forth if I'm reading something especially or concentrating. So I'm literally saying no. Every time I'm at a cashier or something I'm looking down with my credit card. They're like what's the matter? I look angry. I'm not. But I've had to learn. Like Brandt, pick your eyebrows up, OK, smile. Huh, OK now. Because because I want to. I want to love people.

Speaker 5

Shea's over stating he has great empathy for dogs.

Brant Hansen

Isn't that interesting, yeah. So I do too. Like extreme empathy for dogs and always have. I bet you. You probably grew up like that like. I I don't know why that is with us, like I've I've always been more. Maybe it's safer, I don't know. I'm I'm a big little animals guy. Like little fluffy animals.

Brant Hansen

Much of the problem with human lack of human happiness is that we listen to ourselves more than we. We've listened to ourselves too much and we should talk to ourselves more or something like that and that gets back to that why are you so downcast? Oh my soul. Why am I anxious? God's good, let me review all the good things he's done. Let's let's look, let's look at his track record here. Like he has been good to me. Why am I anxious about this again? He said I don't need to be. He says I should be like the animals who don't worry, worry about what's going to happen tomorrow and borrow threats from the future.

Brant Hansen

I need to tell myself this. So you talk to yourself rather than listen to your emotion or the thing that just pass through your head and go that must be reality. It's not. We're wrong about a lot of stuff, so speaking to that, can it totally changes your outlook and it's very mentally healthy, I think.

Beth DeVore

And of course you have to go back to Scripture to know the truth to tell yourself to fight.

Brant Hansen

Yeah. Over and over it gets back to what you put your attention on, so I've been trying to memorize like Psalm 23 lately and the Lord is my shepherd. I lack, nothing is how it starts. Like I have what I need for today. I can feel overwhelmed very easily again. I always feel this haunting sense of failure, five feet behind me. It doesn't even matter what I accomplish. I could I could have a great resume or whatever. It doesn't matter. I'll feel that way, but it's not reality. So there's something about being able to bring Scripture to mind and be able to tell yourself I'd lack nothing. The Lord is my shepherd, so I don't need to be fearful no matter what happens today. I have the resources I need for today. And I ask God for that. It's daily bread. I start the morning like give me the energy I'm going to need for people today 'cause I I drain real fast, like because I'm an introvert. So to me, the resources of the day, it's not just bread, it's Lord give me the energy that I need, the creativity, the patience for today. Not tomorrow. But he's very faithful with that, and I think I've renewed my desire to memorize scripture. You can kind of lose it if you're raised in church and then it seems like it becomes too much of a, I don't know Sunday school thing. I don't know what it is, but I'm way into it now.

Brant Hansen

One thing I got is the Bible memory app and you score points by memorizing scripture and they have a they have a ranking system so you can like see that you know Annalise the 10 year old beating you. But now I'm beating her, you know, just moved up 15 notches. So yeah, that's actually helped me a lot. I watch myself move up the thing. I'm memorizing all sorts of scripture and it comes to mind, and it's something true to put my mind on instead of all the garbage.

Beth DeVore

One last thing is you said that you did feel true religion when I'm sure you have before, but especially working with Cure.

Brant Hansen

Yeah yeah, I do get feelings. Kind of like what Shea was saying about little things get me and for me it's being in the OR it's been in the operating room at these hospitals. These hospitals are in countries like I'm leaving a couple days ago, Zambia and so in Africa, but they're in Africa and the Philippines, and it's for the poorest of the poor kids that have disabilities that we could fix, if they had access to surgery, it would be fixed. So there are some believers who said, well, wait a second, we're surgeons. And we're going. Jesus said to heal, let's do it. So that's what these hospitals are. So I'm in the OR. And it's just one kid after another. It's one little girl. It's one 15 year old boy. It's one 18 year old girl who's been in hiding her entire life. 'cause they make fun of her because of her disability. Never going to school. It's a 3 year old. It's a baby that's gonna die if they don't get this thing treated. One kid after another and they pray over these little kids under the lights and there's asleep and their life is about to change. And I see these

top notch surgeons and these people and, and finally, these legs are gonna be made straight and this guy is going to be able to run for the first time in his life And this little girl's gonna be able to walk and it's done in the name of Jesus and I'm like I get that. There's a lot of stuff up skeptical of or a lot of even a lot of religious things I'm like I don't see the connection to Jesus necessarily, but man, do I see it there, that makes sense to me, so I'm elated, and the hospitals tell the kids and their families about Jesus. It's not just the physical healing, it's it's spiritual. Like they think they're cursed. So we can tell him you're not cursed. You're blessed. God loves you. We charge \$0 and zero cents for the surgeries, and it's a dream come true. They cannot believe. They have no money. They never thought it would ever happen and they're in tears. People are in tears of joy constantly so.

Brant Hansen

That I do get emotional about. I get very excited about. I could go on all day about it, but if people want to know more about it can you can look at this cure.org online. But goodness, it just looks like Jesus to me and I like I like like when you talk about vulnerable little kids and now they're running around. Like that's yeah, that gets me.

Shea Houdmann

Beth and I are huge, for lack of a better term, fans of the work that Cure is doing and firm believers and is listening to you over the years, your passion for Cure and hearing stories of the great work they're doing and Cure is a ministry well worth looking into that God made have you get on board and start supporting their work. So we'll include links so we can learn more about Brant, the books he's written, including Blessed Are the Misfits and of course, Cure in the in the show notes, when the episode goes live, the description on YouTube and at podcast.gotquestions.org link.

Shea Houdmann

So Brant really Beth and I really enjoyed the conversation with you today and keep doing what you're doing. You are, you bring a lot of smiles and a lot of good thoughts to a lot of people minds.

Brant Hansen

Good thank you. Thank you so much. The God bless you. Thanks for what you do too.

Shea Houdmann

This has been the Got Questions podcast with Brant Hansen. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.