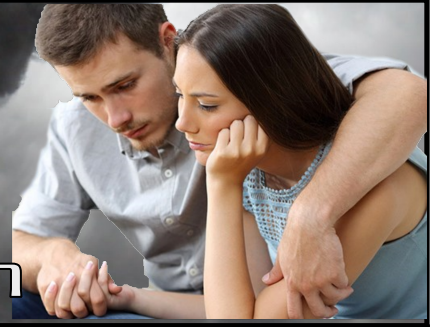


Stress:

A state of mental tension caused by a difficult situation



Stress is a reality of life. The busyness of life, deadlines, children, bills, work, family, friends... *each other's differences*. There are so many things that can bring stress into our marriage relationship. The question isn't whether or not we will have stress, it's how will we deal with the stress that enters our world on a very regular basis. Every person is different and everyone handles stress differently. We are different than our spouse, yet, very often we expect them to handle stress in the same ways we handle it. Often stress will become a wedge in our marriage relationship. This shouldn't be so.

Stress can negatively affect us emotionally *and* physically. Stress causes irritability, moodiness, even depression and often will affect our sleep. How often has one spouse or the other had a particularly stressful day and it has led to misunderstandings and arguments? It has affected Carmen and I in our married life together. Researchers have also found that chronic stress can wear down our body's defenses, lower our immune response, and make us more vulnerable to all sicknesses, including cancer. There are many negative affects to stress, yet just watching the evening news can be stressful!

So what can we do with this stress? First, we must communicate with our spouse. Our transparency with our spouse, will help us deal with the stress better, but also help us to deal with it *together*. Like many people, I tend to bottle up my stress and try to handle it internally. Yet, when I communicate my stress to Carmen, it draws us closer together and helps us avoid miscommunication. One thing *not* to do; tell the stressed person, 'just trust God, you don't need to be stressed,' or something along those lines. We need to validate our spouse; 'I can understand that you would be stressed over this problem' - something to communicate that their thoughts and feeling are *legitimate* for them. I have given my wife permission to say; 'Take a deep breath,' when she sees me stressed. Taking a deep breath calms the mind and can help alleviate stress.

What would work for you? We are all different, but there are things you can do to mitigate the stress in your life. Work together as husband and wife to discover what you each can do to help the other in those stressful times. Yes, seek the Lord; our God *is* the answer, but in stressful times, it can be difficult to pull away from the problem to focus on the Lord. What can you and your spouse do to keep stress from negatively affecting your marriage? What can you do together to help each other better deal with stress in your lives?

Helpful Resources: *Fortified Marriages Resource page:* www.fortifiedmarriages.com

Articles to check out:

How to Handle Stress in Marriage by Kay Yerkovich - www.focusonthefamily.com

10 Ways to Reduce Stress by Sabrina Beasley McDonald - www.familylife.com