

# STAYING MARRIED AND STAYING SANE



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## **A Guide to Self- Improvement For Married People**

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**MARRIED  
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STAYING MARRIED AND STAYING SANE  
A Guide to Self-Improvement For Married People

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# INTRODUCTION

**S**tress and anxiety can play havoc on our relationships. No where is this more apparent than in our marriages.

When we suffer, our spouse suffers. Therefore, we should seek to help one another through times of trouble.

The best gift you can give your spouse is a happy, healthy you. Stay sane and stay married.

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# 10 Ways to Get Rid of Stress While Married

By Casey & Meygan Caston



*Early on in our marriage, we got good at using each other as emotional punching bags, which is very counter productive.*

**S**tress affects every area of our lives. Have you ever been around someone who has hit their limit? They're not a happy camper.

We've had our share of bad days—from overloaded schedules, kids fighting with each other, to finding out I needed a root canal.

Early on in our marriage, we got good at using each other as emotional punching bags, which is very counter productive.

My spouse is my best friend, my teammate, the one person who has my back. And I'm absolutely destroying them with my tone and

choice of words—all because I'm stressed out.

Here's a list of ideas on how to soothe the raging beast inside when stress comes.

## **1. Learn How to Take a Deep Breath**

Breathing exercises are incredibly helpful when you feel stressed or anxious and work immediately.

Controlled breathing not only keeps the mind and body functioning at their best, but it can also lower blood pressure, promote feelings of calm and relaxation, and help you de-stress.

## **2. Get Rid of Unnecessary Spending**

Financial stress can lead to a lot of fear and anxiety, especially when you're married. In fact, it's the number one thing couples fight about. So get on a budget, stop over-spending, and be money wise.

## **3. Create a Bedtime Routine**

One of the time couples can connect and find time for one another is right before bed. Be intentional about that with a routine.

Before you go to bed, stretch, pray, or read a light-hearted book. Turn off technology before going to bed to help the brain settle down for sleep.

## **4. Limit Your Caffeine Intake**

Caffeine has been shown to inhibit levels of serotonin in the brain. When serotonin levels drop, you can feel depressed and irritable.

Some of us need our coffee fix to function properly. But you shouldn't stake the future of your marriage on caffeine. If you still need a pick up in the middle of the day, try switching to green tea.

## 5. Get Rid of Clutter

A messy home or office can make you feel out of control and anxious. When there are messes everywhere, it's difficult to know where to even start cleaning and then you just feel overwhelmed.

Start with one area and move to the next. Small wins are still wins!

## 6. Get Enough Sleep

Sleep deprivation is one of the biggest factors of stress.

For those of you who have a hard time shutting off your brain at night make a rule to turn off your phone after 9 PM. If you're brave enough, leave it outside of your room.

Consider purchasing a sound machine and investing in some earplugs if you're a light sleeper. Sleep is key to better self-care.

## 7. Give Yourself Alone Time

I know most of you are reading thinking, "Yeah right, how is that ever going to happen?" And what I have to say to that—you can't afford NOT to create the time to be by yourself.

Carve out at least 15 minutes of alone time a day for just you to unwind. No exceptions to this rule! Meditate, pray, sleep, read, laugh, or take a walk.

## 8. Think Positive Thoughts

Positive thoughts lead to a more positive attitude. When we start thinking happier thoughts, we often become happier people.

Every time your brain starts thinking of the bad memories, write down five positive things about your life. Think happy thoughts.

## **9. Exercise Regularly**

Aerobic activity lowers your level of stress chemicals and allows you to cope better with negative emotions.

You don't have to join a gym or learn how to Zumba to get active. A hike, a walk, or a swim are all great options.

## **10. Listen to Quiet Music in the Car**

Studies show that listening to classical music is best while driving. It instantly releases fear, doubt, worry and anxiety. Use that time to de-stress from work or chores.

## **Final Thoughts**

In the right context, negative emotions like anger, grief, sadness, or jealousy are perfectly normal. Long lasting bouts of negative emotions can stop you from enjoying life.

Coping strategies can help to curb persistent negative feelings. We encourage you to start implementing all of these to your daily routine. Pick one and see what a difference it can make.

# Why I Don't Like the Word 'Should'

By Selena Frederick



*Our culture is drowning in the ocean of comparison. The Should-Monster locks weights around our ankles, pulling us down further.*

I don't really like the word 'should'—especially when it comes to marriage. That's probably because I use it regularly. Whenever I get a case of the 'should's, I always feel like I'm not measuring up.

I'm left feeling insecure, frustrated, or overwhelmed. It feels like swimming up a raging waterfall. It's hopeless and exhausting.

As a wife, I often feel like I should be more adventurous in bed. Or I should be better about not spending money.

For a husband, it might be: "I should work harder to support my

family.” Or, “I should be more transparent with my wife, but how?”

Even as I write this, there are thoughts running through my head about what I should be doing right now. I should be cleaning up the house during naptime. Or I should be writing more. Or I should write about other topics. Pressure much?

## The Should-Monster

The Should-Monster shows its face in many ways. Sometimes through conversations with well-meaning, but perhaps not very biblically-minded friends whose own marriages are on the rocks.

Advice like: “You should kick him out!” Or “You shouldn’t have to deal with that!” Or “She should do what you want her to in bed!”

These statements can be detrimental to a marriage.

Let’s face it—social media breeds comparison, which adds to the never-ending list of what you should or should not be doing in your marriage or in life.

Compelling images, fiery statements, and unsolicited opinions let the Should-Monster out of its cage. And it’s never ending.

## The Comparison Trap

Our culture is drowning in the ocean of comparison. The Should-Monster locks weights around our ankles, pulling us down further. This leaves us in desperate need of a Savior.

I know I’m not the only one who deals with the Should-Monster daily. To me, it reflects a weapon of the enemy who seeks to steal our joy, kill our hope, and destroy our marriages.

The word “should” is a yoke of slavery. It is pulling our souls in the wrong direction, turning our ears away from Jesus, and burdening our hearts and minds with earthly things.

## Eliminated By Grace

When I find my marriage struggling, it's time I go back to my Savior. I've strayed too far and have forgotten His Words that eliminate the pressure and burden of what I should be doing.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus' words illuminate grace and destroy the chains that the word 'should' has wrapped our marriage in.

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

How can Jesus say this? Honestly, even following Jesus at times feels like it has its own list of 'shoulds.'

Jesus can say this because His life, death, and resurrection broke these chains! He alone took the burden of what we should be doing to be in right-standing with God. And He replaced it with true freedom only his grace can bring.

Jesus doesn't burden us with the pressures of should; he simply invites us in and says "Come!"

## Now Go, Freedom Is Yours

The message of the gospel is this: yes, there are a thousand things we should be doing. In fact, there's actually a standard of perfection that God requires of those wanting to be in relationship and right standing with Him.

But, thank God! Because God He sent His Son Jesus to pay the price and eliminate the list of things we should be doing.

The gospel says:

- I measure up because of what Jesus has done, not what I do.
- I am fully known and fully accepted because of Jesus, not because I'm perfect.

- I am loved because He first loved me, not because I love Him or I'm lovable all the time.

It's only Christ's unconditional love that frees, compels, and leads us to love and accept our spouse (and ourselves) with grace. Let's eliminate the should-list from our marriages and learn to live in freedom with God.

May you know that you are loved dearly and cherished deeply by our sweet Savior. May every ounce of His goodness overflow and overshadow all of the Should-Monsters in your life and marriage.

# 5 Ways to Love Your Spouse In Times of Transition or Grief

By Trisha Davis



*When your spouse is angry and lashes out at you, the best gift you can give to them is to recognize it for what it is—grief.*

**R**ecently, I've experienced a lot of raw emotion. It began with my husband, Justin, resigning his position at our church. He left after six years on staff so we could plant a church.

This was immediately followed by the tragic death of my four-month-old niece. And shortly after that, we took our oldest son off to college for the first time.

## Deep Breath

In the midst of that time, I searched for words to help make sense of it for myself. In the thick of it, I had lumps in my throat from holding back tears. Which made it hard to speak and even harder to write.

One morning, as I spent time in God's Word, a glimmer of hope finally started to come to mind. These are the lessons I learned about how to love in the raw of transition and loss along the way.

### 1. Understand Grieving is a Gift

God designed us to grieve. Grieving is the process God gave to us to allow us to embrace the reality of what's taking place in our lives.

In order to find healing from the heartaches of life—from sending a child off to college to a tragic death—grief begins when we stop pretending and allow our hearts and minds to fully feel our loss.

It is in this feeling that we are able to begin grieving.

### 2. Don't Take Grieving Personally

There are five stages to grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Just as each of us have unique Love Languages, we all grieve at different paces through each stage.

When your spouse is angry and lashes out at you, or becomes distant and depressed, the best gift you can give to them is to recognize it for what it is—grief.

Before taking our son to college, I had to meet Justin at the high school to drop off a car for our son. When I arrived and saw the senior parking lot empty, I started to sob.

Justin kept asking, "Are you okay? Did something happen?" I finally said "No! I'm just sad. I need you to give me the space to be sad."

At first, I could see his feelings were hurt. But he took a step back and realized I was grieving. He didn't take it personally and gave me the space I needed.

### **3. Pray For Your Spouse**

Transition often means letting go of something in order to embrace something new. Although I felt 100% called to plant a church, the letting go of my friends, church family, and life in Nashville was hard.

Prayer has been our anchor! Prayer has been what has kept God in control and kept us out of the driver seat. Praying for your spouse allows you to find peace and keeps your eyes set on Jesus. He reminds you that your spouse isn't the enemy.

God created us to be fully known by God and by our spouse. And prayer is the pathway to become completely known.

### **4. Encourage Counseling**

Although you may be a supportive spouse through a major transition or loss, your spouse still might need to seek the wisdom of a godly counselor.

Counseling is a safe place to express the unanswered dark parts of grief and transition. Counselors were never designed to fix your problems, but rather set you on a path to find healing from them.

### **5. Have Fun**

Go—have fun. Get out of the house, go for a walk, go see a funny movie, have life-giving friends over. Just do something!

I'd rather not share my heart and stay closed off. But I'm so thankful for a husband who has pushed me to talk and keep me laughing!

As I come to accept all the changes about to take place, I'm forever grateful to know that grieving is a gift.

# 7 Tips To Surviving the Pressure of Marriage

By Carey Nieuwhof



*The busyness of life, pressure of work, and our own issues interfered to the point where we both felt our marriage was broken.*

I've been fortunate to be married to my wife Toni for over 22 years. And we're experiencing more joy and satisfaction in our marriage than we've ever had.

But we almost didn't make it. There's a lot of pressure on marriages and families today. We've felt it. Intensely.

Life and leadership put a lot of strain on a marriage. Add kids and jobs into the mix and the pressure sometimes can get ultra intense.

- I wish I could say I have an ideal marriage, but I can't.
- I wish I could say we never fight, but I can't.
- I wish I could say I've led my family perfectly, but that's not true.

## Feeling the Pressure

As part of a recent sermon series on love, my wife and I talked as openly and transparently as we could about the struggles we faced.

We talked about seasons in which she didn't think our marriage was going to make it. And we discussed seasons when I wasn't sure how we were going to get through.

Like many couples, we started out strong, but the busyness of life, the pressure of work, and our own issues interfered to the point where we both felt our marriage was broken.

## Refusing to Give Up

We weren't sure how to fix it, or whether it was reparable. But we both refused to believe God had given up on us or our family. So we pushed through.

Both Toni and I are at a place where we are so thankful we didn't quit. I hope our story encourages you like it encouraged others.

We went through seasons where our emotions were painful and made us want to escape. But thankfully, our emotions eventually caught up to our obedience.

While we're hesitant to say we've got it figured out, we want to share them in the hopes they might help you like they helped us.

## 1. We Had Dates Nights

We saw evenings with each other as investments, not expenses. Although we sometimes felt guilty for time away from the kids, we knew one of the best gifts you can give kids is a healthy marriage.

When it got really tough, I began to resent date nights because they would turn into date arguments. But I'm so glad we pushed through that. Prioritize your spouse. No matter what.

## **2. We Prayed For Our Marriage**

Again, I wish I was the hero. But I wasn't. Even as a pastor, something inside me resisted praying out loud with my wife.

We did manage to pray together, and we both believe with all our hearts that it is Christ who has kept our marriage together. A cord of three strands is indeed not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

## **3. We Sought Christian Counseling**

You can probably see a pattern developing here. It was easier for Toni to seek help than for me to do so. I'm sure it was pride.

But good, Christian counseling, among other things, helped us to stop the cycle of blame and replace it with responsibility.

## **4. Seek Outside Help At The Right Time**

We realized that when we reached an impasse in our marriage, we needed to seek the help from an impartial third party.

Having a handful of people (and a small group) you love and trust is a God-send, literally. We are grateful for our closest friends who prayed for us and helped us.

## **5. We Took Divorce Off The Table**

Out of obedience, we refused to quit. I believe God wanted us to press through, so I did.

I kept thinking about the story I wanted God to write for my kids, family, and ministry. So we took divorce off the table at an option.

## **6. We Worked To Build A Friendship**

We were great friends when we got married. But many people go through a period where you so focus on the kids and work. You almost have to reintroduce yourself when that season ends.

Just because you're married doesn't mean you're friends. We've become great friends (again) and are really excited about the times ahead, now that our kids are getting older.

## **7. We Put Obedience Before Emotion**

Sometimes you have to do the right thing, even if you don't feel like it. And eventually, our emotions caught up with our obedience.

All the hard work and our trust in Christ paid off. We are in a season now. And I think we're reaping the harvest from the good seed we sowed in a tough seasons. We're both incredibly thankful.

We're at a place where we had always hoped to be, but didn't know how to get to. And our emotions have caught up with our obedience.

**What's helped your marriage? What are you learning?  
What remains as your biggest struggle?**

# How To Help Your Spouse When Anxiety Hits

By Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott



*Most of us know how anxiety feels when it's happening to us, but it's hard to know how to help someone we love when it happens to them.*

**A**nxiety. Most of us have been there. It's an issue that—to the outside world—seems arguably small. Until it balloons into a crushing, suffocating weight.

Our hearts race. Our palms sweat. We descend into a spiraling panic, and find that it's difficult (and even hopeless) to stop the feeling of dread building inside our chests.

Most of us know what anxiety feels like when it's happening to us, but it can be difficult to know how to help someone we love when they are being riddled with it.

It's easy to feel at a loss, not knowing what to do or say. Can't they just get over it, already? Unfortunately, it's easiest to write off a spouse's anxiety and come up short when offering comfort and help.

### **Soothe Your Spouse and Listen to Them**

When your spouse is in the throes of anxiety, it can be difficult to relate to the things that are bothering him or her.

In fact, it may seem impossible to you. But it's critically important to lend an ear and offer comfort to your spouse anyway, regardless of whether you can identify with his/her turmoil.

Encourage your spouse to talk to you about what's upsetting them. Sometimes a person who is in a state of panic can calm down on their own if they talk about their worries.

If you can do anything to alleviate your spouse's most pressing sense of panic, do it. Help find ways to calm their body and mind.

If the anxiety can be lessened, your spouse has a better chance of clearing their mind and approaching the issue from a calmer place.

### **Don't Tell Your Spouse to "Get Over It"**

Panic and anxiety are driven by emotions.

Even though an anxious person's brain might be telling them one thing, their emotions are communicating a sense of urgency. They feel it has to be resolved immediately. It's classic fight-or-flight.

Unfortunately, there's no easy fix for anxiety and panic. Telling your spouse to "get over" whatever is upsetting them. It's just going to make the situation worse.

Instead, show empathy and determine what you can do to help.

- If your spouse is feeling anxious about a decision that needs to be made, help him/her walk through the options, examining the pros and cons as a team.
- If work is making your spouse anxious or panicked, sit down and talk together about why, and explore possible solutions.
- If your spouse's anxiety is rooted in matters at home or with family, see where you can pitch in and help.
- If the anxiety is uncontrollable and has disrupted your spouse's (or your) quality of life, gently encourage him/her to seek professional help.
- If the problem is complex and out of control, don't be afraid to seek help. But if it's something you can find a solution for between the two of you, all the better.

## Destress and Unwind

If anxiety has had a hold on your life, focus on ways the two of you can unwind and find peace. Seeking out pleasurable activities and having fun together will boost your sense of well-being.

The panic monster can be a hard one to beat. But by working together and focusing on ways to alleviate your spouse's anxiety, it can be done.

As you help your spouse deal with his/her feelings of panic, remember that most everyone experiences difficult seasons like this at some point. Armed with understanding, patience, empathy, and love, you can overcome this together.

### How do you help your spouse deal with stress?

# Managing Financial Strain in Your Marriage

By Ryan Frederick



*Finances are frustrating in marriage. Either circumstances or decisions will cause your money-train to derail or stall out.*

**S**elena and I have seen more than our fair share of financial hardship. We got married during college, made lots of dumb decisions and quit our jobs to start a business.

I've lost count of how many times our checking account has been below \$50 while we were buried in debt, savings-less, and had to pay rent the next day.

What's that snappy phrase people used to say to us? "You're just living on love and sunshine!" So, we're flowers now? Some days I would have happily traded places with a petunia.

## Fighting Over Money

Finances are frustrating in marriage. Either circumstances or decisions will cause your money-train to derail or stall out. It's just a matter of time.

No matter your income level, tension will rise, arguments will happen, and your fortitude will be tested.

Once Selena and I were waiting at the San Francisco Airport for a connecting flight. We overheard a husband arguing on the phone with his wife. What were they arguing about? Money.

"Obviously my idea of budgeting is different than yours," He says. "I don't need your emotional outbursts. So we're going to yell now? What you fail to do is tell me about anything until it's too late. Then we have to pull money out of savings, and you don't seem to care that our savings is gone!"

Everybody deals with this.

## The Source of Money

How you deal with financial stress in your marriage depends entirely on your world view. It depends on how you perceive money—its source, purpose, and availability. I'll focus on its source.

Where is your source of financial security? Does your financial security determine your personal security? If you're like us, you probably want to answer "No," but have to answer "Yes."

Western society trains us to put too much weight in status—what we do, how much we make, and the lifestyle we live.

This training culminates as a pile of expectations that we feel pressured to meet. We're conditioned to view ourselves and measure our worth in the context of everyone else.

This is like looking at your reflection in a fun house mirror—distorted, ugly and inaccurate.

Our worth and purpose must be found in Christ—His hope and salvation. Our marriage depends on it, and everything I write here stems from that perspective.

Seeing our worth through Him is essential to properly perceiving our source of provision on all levels.

### **Relax, You're Not Your Provider**

One cool October evening, I sat on our apartment deck and wrestled with our financial lack. I was sulking in my inability to provide, and devising where I could get food stamps.

It was a “\$50 left and rent is due tomorrow” kind of night. I felt very defeated. After about 30 minutes of agony, God broke me.

He lovingly yet firmly showed me that He alone is our provider, not me. Not my job, not my business. Not my cleverness, not my resourcefulness.

As He washed over me with a completely illogical peace, I took a deep breath and resigned us to His care; which is exactly how He wants it. It was up to Him to get us through.

### **Faith Over Finances**

God is always faithful—not because of anything we do, but simply because He is our loving Father and we are His kids.

As it turned out, everything we needed came in unexpectedly the next day. It probably would have come whether or not I stressed out, but the lesson is the same: God is our provider, not me.

Was this a miracle? I don't know. I doubt it. I do know that God knows I'm going to stress well before I do. He could have easily held those checks in the mail so He could watch me break and gently

minister to us in a deeper way.

This epiphany changed our marriage in an instant. It's not up to us to worry about our finances; it never was.

## **Rely On God, Not Money**

Having God as your financial source and center will release you of pressure and grow your faith in Him.

Of course, we are always called to be good stewards with our resources. He gives and He takes away—it's our job to be worthy stewards over whatever He places in our care (time, energy, money). We just have to live with open hands—giving or receiving in whatever capacity God asks of us.

Selena and I have to constantly remind ourselves of the lesson we learned that night. Whenever stress mounts and we get restless, we realize that we've placed our security in the wrong place.

At that point all we can do is stop, repent, unclench our fists, and give our burdens to God. Sigh of relief. Then, we can rest and know that God is faithful.

**What is one particularly stressful area in your finances?  
How can you place your security and trust in God?**

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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### CAREY NIEUWHOF

Carey Nieuwhof is founding pastor of Connexus Church and is author of several bestselling books. He blogs, podcasts, writes and speaks to church leaders around the world about leadership, change and personal growth.

### DRS. LES AND LESLIE PARROTT

Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott are a husband-and-wife team who not only share the same name, but the same passion for helping others build healthy relationships.

In 1991, the Parrotts founded the Center for Relationship Development on the campus of Seattle Pacific University—a groundbreaking program dedicated to teaching the basics of good relationships.

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