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Foreword: The Importance of Stress and Recession-Proofing Your Relationship

When things go wrong in the world and in our lives, we have a tendency to focus only on the bad.

Things are definitely going wrong in the modern world, and the current recession is giving people a lot of added stress and anxiety. Often these negative sentiments and concerns seep into our relationships.

We feel that we simply don't have the time or energy to work on our marriage with so many other problems knocking on our door.

We tell ourselves that our marriage can survive - that we'll deal with those issues later - and, instead of giving our partners the respect, attention, and love necessary to keep things right inside our homes, we put all of those emotions aside and get overwhelmed by the negatives.

We worry instead about losing our jobs, about paying our bills, about putting food on the table.

They're certainly all valid concerns, but our marriages suffer while our full attention is on the problems.

We often fail to realize that we could lessen the stress of these problems and maybe even solve them altogether by talking and working with our partners.

When we first get married, we tell ourselves, our partners and the world that that relationship is going to be our number one priority.

And then life gets in the way.

No part of your life should suffer for investing time and love into your marriage. In fact, the better your marriage is, the better the rest of your life tends to be.

Happily married people are more sociable, sensible, relaxed and confident. These are the same traits necessary for success in nearly all other areas of our lives.

A good marriage offers many long-term benefits, and they go beyond emotional well-being.

When your partner in marriage truly becomes a partner in life, you can divide up all the bad things and multiply the good ones.

Right now, the world at large is focused on stability and money. Every buzzword you hear is finance-oriented.

If you feel that you simply don't have time to worry about anything but paying the bills, then maybe looking at your marriage as a lifetime investment will help you to find the time and energy necessary to keep it thriving.

You can't control the success of your stock portfolio, but you CAN control the success of your marriage.

In this book, we will explore what makes a marriage work, and likewise what makes a marriage fail.

We will focus specifically on the stresses caused by economic concerns. We'll discuss the needs and wants of each partner and how to fulfill them, even when you're short on time and money.

We'll also cover several ways that you can use a strong partnership to improve other

areas of your life.

During these unsure times, the economy is destabilizing many things; don't let it be the downfall of your marriage.

There are many things in this world that you can't change, but there's one valuable thing that a recession can't take from you - your partner.

If you follow our advice and invest wisely in your marriage, then you know you'll always have something wonderful to come home to.

1. Why Recessions Ruin Marriages

Many people wonder how an economic issue could possibly wreak havoc on personal affairs. The damage is often done without our ever realizing it.

We get so caught up in our concerns over material things that we forget about the importance of marital things. At other times, we let our marriage absorb the shock created by ongoing daily stress.

A good marriage can often alleviate stress and anxiety, but it's important to remember that marriages need constant care too. Even after we marry, we tend to think of ourselves as individuals - to focus on our most present and selfish needs.

While a sense of self is important for both partners to feel satisfied in their daily endeavors, we must all learn how to put "us" before "me" to ensure we have a good relationship.

In other words, ask not what your marriage can do for you, but what you can do for your marriage.

During a recession, all we hear about is instability. The stock market is crashing, companies are closing, employers are downsizing, mortgages are being foreclosed on, and new credit is impossible to obtain.

Even those of us with fat savings accounts and excellent security plans start to worry about our futures.

It is understandable that something designed to last a lifetime would suffer when we question our ability to sustain the quality of that life.

When people get really concerned, it affects the way they see the world. It taints our ability to appreciate the good in our lives and we take on a negative perspective instead.

Instead of thinking, "Now I have someone else to take care of me," we think, "Now I have someone else to take care of."

Instead of thinking, "Now I have someone to share the burden," we think, "Now my burden is twice as large."

Sometimes we feel resentful toward our partners, when what we really resent is a

trying and unfair world.

Recessions create large problems for countries, and those problems tend to trickle down into the lives of individual citizens. Because no one person can singlehandedly resolve a recession, most of us are sitting ducks when it comes to how we are affected by it.

But, we can still choose how to deal with our share of the burden. We can also choose how we allow those problems to affect our personal lives and, more specifically, our relationship with our partner.

In this chapter, we'll take a close look at the side effects of recession-related issues.

We'll explore the all-important role of stress and stress management in marriage and will also look at some of the major byproducts of stress; absence of time, absence of money, and absence of desire.

By the end of this chapter, you will have a clear idea of how the recession *could* affect your marriage; it's entirely up to you whether it's for the better or the worse.

1.1 Stress and How It Affects Everything

These days, the common view on stress is that a little bit is normal in your everyday life, and that some kinds of stress can even be good for you, as they are often the source of motivation and can create a sense of purpose.

Unfortunately, too much stress of any kind is *never* a good thing and stress seems to be one of the only things that there is an abundance of in every home during a recession.

While it is important that we all learn how to manage stress, the trial by fire created by unexpected situations (like the sudden recession we've found ourselves in) can be overwhelming.

Large and irresolvable issues create a sense of panic, and we tend to lose sight of common sense. Every day, we worry about what cannot be changed and doubt our ability to change even those things that can be fixed.

Continuous stress can take a huge toll on even the strongest of people. It affects your mental and physical health as well as your outlook on life.

Stress can create: loss of sleep, nightmares, illness, ulcers, digestive problems, depression, exhaustion, frustration, anger. The list goes on and on depending on how each of us deals with or represses our own stress.

It makes patient people temperamental and smart people irrational.

It warps our confidence in ourselves and our faith in the world.

Being the destructive force that it is, it's no surprise that stress also affects our relationships. If our every waking moment is strained by the pressure and angst of ongoing stress, then our partners will certainly absorb some of the backlash.

Even when we seek to protect them from tense situations, we often hurt them by not including them in an important, albeit unpleasant, part of our lives.

If you've been suffering under constant stress, there's a good chance your marriage is suffering too. The feeling is often all-consuming, and those of us in the midst of a stressful situation tend to forget everything but our own woes.

Or, sometimes, we feel too guilty to share the burden with our partners, and ultimately the one-sided stress, unexplained outbursts and lack of communication leads to resentment on both sides.

Here are a few common stress-related marital mistakes you might not even know you're making:

- Being blinded by stress.
- Bringing stress into bed.
- Projecting your stress on your partner.
- Not talking about it.

Nobody is perfect and no relationship can be either.

You went into your marriage knowing and loving your partner's flaws, and now you must know and love the flaws you share (or at least accept and tolerate them).

This is true of both of you. Just as you should be prepared to love, accept and forgive your partner for their faults, you should trust that your partner has the same honorable intentions toward you.

Recessions create a lot of blameless situations. If you got caught in a major layoff, are one of the many that fell victim to a subprime mortgage or have otherwise been unexpectedly affected by the recession, the first impulse is to find someone or something to blame.

Not having an easy target means no immediate relief from the many emotions these scenarios trigger.

You may be wading in anger, frustration, fear, shame, embarrassment or depression for a long time as you struggle to rationalize your situation.

Let your partner help you and, likewise, be prepared to help your partner.

Major stress is never pleasant, but it's easier to work through when the burden is carried on two pairs of shoulders.

Of course, when we say "Let your partner help you," we don't mean "blame your partner." As mentioned above, it's one of the most common mistakes stressed spouses make. All that pent up negativity is going to burst out eventually and the nearest target tends to be our partner when it does.

Sometimes, we are overly eager to smooth rough patches in our marriage, and we take blame that isn't ours.

We see that our partner is stressed, and we take the entire burden off of them and place it on ourselves. This is no healthier than the original scenario, and often it has the same results - resentment on both sides.

Ultimately, regardless of what happened to whom, all stress that enters a relationship should be dealt with equally as partners - not separately as individuals.

Hopefully, at least one of you is capable of being level-headed in trying times, because even a joint effort can't immediately resolve the blameless situations created by a recession.

Even if you can't change the situation, ignoring it will only make it worse.

Likewise, thinking too much about it when you can't change it can be destructive too. The key is moderation in these scenarios.

As the famous saying goes, you must both have the strength to accept the things you cannot change and the courage to change the things you can.

Being proactive wherever possible is empowering, and talking through the irresolvable issues can be surprisingly comforting when you might otherwise resort to a sense of impotent frustration or helplessness.

Everything you can do together to address the overhanging stress - even if the only thing you can do is talk - will help to see you and your marriage through these tough times.

1.2 The Absence of Time

Many of us find activity comforting during uncertain times. We are busy, busy, busy.

Chances are that you're working hard to keep your job, working extra to add to savings or spending all your time looking for a new job and you're also doing your best to find time for your family, to perform necessary household chores, to go to school or to get your kids to school and to attend church or other important community events.

There's always something!

Sometimes, it seems like there's barely enough time to eat and sleep (and some days there's not!). Other times we're just too tired to do anything else - even when it's pleasant after all the rushing around, doing, and worrying.

This is when marriages suffer.

The recession has taken many things from people - their jobs, their homes and their savings.

Don't let it take your marriage.

Stress is the number one reason that marriages fail, and there is certainly a lot of that during these trying times.

Speaking of time, a by-product of stress is the sense that we never have enough of it.

There's always something we think we should be doing (this reaction is a common coping mechanism), but we often we bypass the really important tasks in our lives in our haste to do the less important item we focused on.

Things like saying, "I love you," or even just "thank you" to the people who quietly but steadily make our lives tolerable are very important.

We don't have time to go out anymore.

We don't have time to eat dinner together.

We don't have time to go for a walk. We don't even have time to talk.

We're so obsessed with forging ahead, that we blow right by what's really important.

Many things are in decline during a recession, but it doesn't make your 24-hour day any shorter.

You can certainly spare five seconds of that day to:

- Kiss your spouse goodbye
- To give them a hug when one of you is feeling down
- To tell them you love and appreciate them

When you want and mean these things, they take little more time or effort than breathing and, just as that air sustains your life, these gestures will sustain your marriage.

So, stop making excuses and start making time. If you set aside time to spend with your spouse, you'll no doubt find it far more rewarding than the time you'll spend fighting later if you don't.

We'll cover the subject of time more carefully later in this book. For now, it's important to realize that routine is the foundation of any good relationship.

Surprises are important but grand gestures are less necessary and more touching when you already put plenty of time and love into your relationship every day.

1.3 The Absence of Money

When you're worried that your water may be shut off or that your home may be repossessed, it's hard to think about anything else.

Likewise, when major changes in your life and/or finances have caused an upheaval in your life and the way you live it, it's hard to feel content, even though none of these things have technically changed your marriage.

Money is the number one thing that couples fight about: Your money, my money, our money and the absence of money.

In most cases, these fights do not come from real resentment but out of fear.

Anyone that's taken a basic course on psychology is familiar with Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs. Basically, this pyramid demonstrates the things we need to ensure contentment in our lives.

At the base of the pyramid are necessities: food, water, shelter. In today's world, all of these things cost money.

This leads to the second tier in the pyramid; security.

If you owe money, have lost money or are just plain worried about money then it makes it impossible for you to feel secure.

How will you pay for your next meal?

Where will you sleep if you lose your home?

If you can't feel safe and stable in your daily life, then it's hard to feel safe and stable in your marriage.

In a recession, it's safe to say that your partner is feeling many of the same insecurities as you. The irony is that, in worrying about our ability to provide for our families, we often create unnecessary feelings of shame, guilt, or ineffectiveness.

Both partners may be quietly blaming themselves and, in their efforts not to burden their partner with their concerns, they involuntarily distance themselves from the very person that can help them find peace.

Money has long been the key factor in determining social status and personal success. We even use it to determine quality of life. So, people that feel they do not have enough money also often feel that they are failures.

Again, how can a marriage stay strong in light of such debilitating issues? When we become inverted by self-hate and self-pity, we deprive ourselves and our partner of the comfort of mutual love.

It's also important to note that stress and the absence of money create a vicious circle. The recession may lead to a loss of income or assets which, of course, results in stress.

That stress, may cause us to make impractical or even destructive financial decisions (believe it or not, even in this economy, people are still overspending) which again just leads to more compounding stress and credit card interest.

So, let's be practical.

Really! Now is the time for you and your partner to put your heads together to protect your marriage and all the assets encompassed by it.

We'll give you specific advice on how to do just that in Chapter 5.

Though they say the best things in life are free, it's hard to get all warm and fuzzy about your marriage when the bank is threatening to take your car.

1.5 The Absence of Desire

It's no surprise that the world is currently in the middle of a very serious recession. All you hear every day is bad news.

It can be overwhelming even if it does not affect you personally.

By the time we get home, we're tired, we're frustrated, we're stressed out and distracted. We just want to eat some comfort food/take a hot shower/have a stiff drink/go straight to bed and hide from the world.

It can be very hard to summon romantic feelings in this climate.

Maybe the presence of your partner's warm body beside you is all the comfort you need. Or, maybe you're so exhausted by things you can't control that you don't even care about the things you can.

Either way, you won't be having any sex tonight.

Remember the list of mistakes in 1.1? Don't bring stress into your bed!

A solid relationship offers many positive emotional benefits, and sex is one of those benefits that offers benefits of its own.

In a healthy marriage with lively chemistry, sex can be the antidote to stress and its many symptoms. Sex can fix virtually everything that stress can do to you, your mind and your body. The same goes for your marriage.

Sex offers physical and emotional satisfaction, relaxation, better sleep, better health and a rush of good feelings. It also offers you a wonderful chance to be close - *really* close - to your partner.

In these unsure times, the one thing that so many established couples fail to realize is that sex is not only fun - it's FREE! The singles certainly haven't forgotten it; there's a reason the bars are still so crowded, even during a recession.

You have unlimited access to the world's best stress reliever living in your home with you, and chances are you haven't been taking advantage of it.

When we're feeling frustrated, ashamed, or aimlessly angry we often feel reluctant to get close to someone else. We're not only protecting them from our bad mood, we're protecting ourselves from further rejection.

If your sex life is lacking, don't take it personally.

More often than not, the culprit isn't a personal deficiency. It's our old friend stress again. Feeling bad about not having sex certainly isn't going to make you want it.

Furthermore, feeling bad about anything will instantly kill most people's libidos.

Now, you don't have to have sex every night of the week. Intimacy - even just holding hands or cuddling more regularly - offers many of the same benefits of sex, plus a couple unique ones of its own.

We'll cover important tips on how to restore intimacy to your marriage in Chapter 6.

This ends the free first chapter. If you would like to purchase the entire book, please visit http://www.UpgradeYourLife.net/ebooks/Good_Marriage/