

# 4 Ways to Stay Positive When Your Spouse Is Negative

Keeping a positive outlook on life brings many benefits—both to your own experience and to your marriage. But choosing good things to think about can seem especially difficult when your spouse is negative.

Understanding your spouse makes a big difference here. If your spouse's heart is evil, or if he or she is engaging in truly destructive behavior, choosing good things to think about will not be enough! If God is calling you to stay in a bad marriage, this is only one thing you will need to do.

But your spouse can be basically a person of good will and still be negative. It does take more energy to be positive when your spouse is always complaining or won't take positive action. But complaining about your spouse's negativity may now qualify *you* as negative. Don't do that.

So practically speaking, here are some important things to embrace in keeping the right attitude and moving forward even when your spouse is negative.

**1. Feed yourself:** If you want your mind to produce the output of positive thoughts and feelings, you must be intentional about providing it with positive input.

That means you must intentionally find nourishing mental/emotional/spiritual input for your mind to feed on. This is even more important if your spouse is more draining than uplifting.

Find what fills you up, and do more of that. You'll need to exert significant energy in spending time around positive people: friends, church acquaintances, people from your community or work environment. Choose these people

intentionally. Find media—books, podcasts, online resources and so on—that uplift and nourish you. Spend time in nature, with music or the arts or in other environments that fill you up.

And invest heavily, daily, in your time with God. You *must* have His wisdom and strength.

**2. Embrace the Truth:** Just because your spouse more naturally points out challenges does not mean those things are not true. Choosing good things to think about does not mean ignoring reality.

Vice Admiral James Stockdale was a prisoner of war in Vietnam. He was instrumental in helping many other POWs survive mentally intact through their terrible experience. He developed what has become known as the Stockdale Paradox: Be brutally honest about your circumstances, *and at the same time*, maintain faith in the outcome.

Your spouse's perspective on reality may be super important for you as a couple to consider. Our world provides serious challenges that you must face squarely: physical illness, financial problems, bad behavior, relationship breakdowns.

Make sure, in your attempt to remain positive, that you respect and honor the truth your spouse is aware of. Seeing real problems provides an opportunity to be prepared, and to come together as a couple in taking action to support each other or find solutions.

**3. Seek to Understand:** Life is difficult. If your spouse is responding negatively to some circumstances, don't discount their internal experience.

Has your husband lost his job? It may be hard for you to fully appreciate the enormous blow to his sense of identity. Has your wife experienced betrayal by a family member or a friend? Don't discount how this may devastate her sense of security.

Might your spouse be responding to your own whining attitude, neediness, abrasive behavior or lack of understanding?

Seek to understand your spouse's emotional perception. That doesn't mean you must agree with their perception. But if you understand the factors affecting their negative outlook, you'll be much more able to be helpful. Understanding will allow you to be more intentional in choosing your own attitude and behavior.

**4. Choose Action:** It's almost always what you do next that counts.

You cannot change your spouse, but you can change you.

So, what do you need to do next?

- Set some boundaries?
- Be more intentional in getting healthy mental/emotional nourishment?
- Work with the Holy Spirit in changing your own character?
- Have some difficult conversations with your spouse?

There are many positive actions you can take. Focusing on what you CAN do something about will significantly improve your own emotional state.

If your spouse is a naturally negative person, it will take more intentionality and effort on your part to move forward. But your own movement may be exactly what your spouse needs to see.

You taking action may provide your spouse an incentive to follow your positive example. Let your behavior and attitude create an invitation for them to join you in taking positive action.

**Your Turn:** Who is more negative in your marriage—you or your spouse? What positive actions can you take in response? Leave

a comment below.

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